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**NATIONAL INTEREST, NATIONAL LEADERSHIP, DECISION MAKING:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FLEXIBLE RESPONSE STRATEGY
IN THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION**

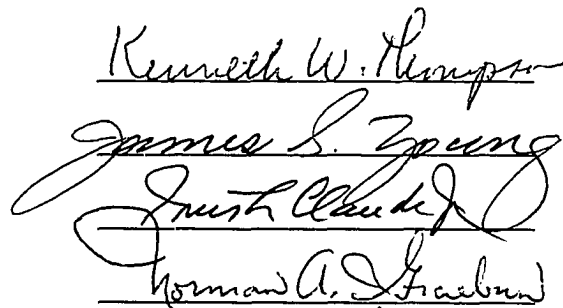
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ABSTRACT

International relations is marked by debate about numerous theoretical issues; the theoretical approach that one takes affects how one approaches the complex problems that face the world today. Because states are the primary actors in the international arena, it is important to consider the interrelationship among three factors--the national interest, the role of national leadership, and the decision making process--as these factors determine how states approach various problems in the system and what solutions they choose.

Specifically, how is the concept of the national interest translated into actual foreign policy, who is responsible for its translation, and what affects the contextual evaluation, interpretation, and implementation of this concept? Moreover, when states negotiate within the international system, should they try to understand the definition and translation of the national interest by their counterparts (allies and enemies)? Cannot varied leadership structures, policy makers, and decision making processes contribute to diverse interpretations of what is in a state's interest? Will comprehension of the interrelationship of these factors help to lay a solid foundation upon which successful foreign policy can be built? Will not an understanding of this interrelationship help one grasp specific foreign policies better, as well as foreign policy in general? These are the questions upon which this dissertation is based.

They are answered in a case study on nuclear strategy and national defense policy: the development of the flexible response strategy during the Kennedy administration. While the premise is that the national interest, national

leadership, and decision making are linked, the most effective way to demonstrate the linkage is to discuss them separately. It, therefore, comprises four primary chapters: one in which flexible response is placed in its historical, political, and theoretical framework, and three subsequent chapters in which Kennedy's flexible response is analyzed individually in terms of each of the three major theoretical themes. These factors are relinked in a reassessment of flexible response in the conclusion. A unique feature of this project is its strong reliance on primary source documentation, particularly the Presidential Papers located at the John F. Kennedy Library.

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As I finish here, I am reminded of John Donne's famous line: that "no man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." I am no different than anyone in this regard, particularly during a Ph.D. program. While I take full responsibility for this research and analysis, there are, nonetheless, many people who have sustained me in the past nine years.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The field of international relations is marked by considerable debate about numerous theoretical issues, such as the nature of man and natural rights, idealism, realism, functionalism, interdependence, and the role of international law and organizations. The theoretical approach that one takes often affects the way one might confront the complex and compelling problems that face the world community today. How does one control the proliferation and traffic of both nuclear and conventional weaponry; supply food, shelter, and health care for the world's poor and underprivileged; work for better education about and more equal distribution of finite natural resources; build economic stability at all levels of the international economic system; and, ensure the recognition of and respect for basic human rights? The answers to these questions vary considerably depending on one's perspective; yet, it seems that no one perspective is inherently right or wrong, nor is any individual solution necessarily the best or only one possible.

There is, however, one consistent, undeniable fact about the international system: the existence and, often, the dominance of the nation state. Because states continue to be the primary actors in the international arena, it is important to consider the interrelationship among three key factors--the national interest, the role of national leadership, and the decision making process--as these three factors often significantly influence how states approach various problems in the

international system and what solutions they choose to promote. More specifically, how is the concept of the national interest translated into actual foreign policy, who is responsible for its translation, and what affects the contextual evaluation, interpretation, and implementation of this concept? Moreover, when states negotiate within the international system, should they try to anticipate or truly understand the definition and translation of the national interest by their counterparts (allies and enemies alike)? Cannot varied leadership structures, policy makers, and decision making processes contribute to diverse interpretations of precisely what is in a state's interest? Will knowledge and comprehension of the interrelationship of these factors help to lay a solid foundation upon which successful foreign policy can be built? If nothing else, will not an understanding of this interrelationship help one grasp specific foreign policies better, as well as the very nature of foreign policy in general? These are the questions upon which this dissertation is based.

The literature of international relations--and political science and history in general--is full of both specific and theoretical discussions of the national interest, of leadership, and of decision making. Very little has been written, however, that studies the interrelationship among the three. This is surprising because it seems natural and logical that the three would be inextricably linked. The concept of the national interest is particularly difficult to understand without putting it into the context of a particular policy or decision. More specifically, the national interest can have only a broad, fairly vague definition when it is examined in

theoretical terms; in both theoretical and practical circles it can be only approximated at best. Such things as sovereignty, legitimacy, national security, and economic health and well-being have all been used to describe the national interest in theory, and, in fact, such a loose definition rarely spurs much controversy. Discord mounts, however, when the national interest is specifically itemized, often in absolute terms, as being nationally accepted, rationally and reasonably attainable foreign policy goals or decisions. For example, consider the flames that are sparked when students or politicians discuss whether the following scenarios are in the U.S. national interest: containment of communism in Southeast Asia; foreign aid to Israel (or any foreign nation); liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi control; military and/or humanitarian intervention in Somalia or Bosnia; and, the possible overthrow of a military dictatorship in Haiti. Because of the contention and substantive differences that such debates can produce, the national interest often loses its effectiveness as a theoretical construct for analyzing policy. Furthermore, such debates rarely forge consensus definitions of the national interest in practical terms. It is striking, however, that despite this discord the term "national interest" and the phrase "in the national interest" have not disappeared from our vocabulary. One can reasonably conclude that students of international relations must continue to confront the concept of the national interest.

If one's goal is to examine the foreign policy decision making process in order to understand the process more fully and the policy more deeply, or possibly

to develop new approaches to problem solving and conflict resolution, one is forced to consider the national interest contextually. The national interest is, more often than not, cited as the primary reason for a certain policy or decision, particularly when a major issue is at stake. Thus, one cannot legitimately ignore those actors who are responsible for making the actual decision-- and, therefore, determining the national interest--or the factors and elements that influenced their decision making process. It also seems necessary to understand who those actors are, what their roles are supposed to be, and what allows them to lead a state on such vital issues. Furthermore, what ultimately does one mean by leadership?

Such a study does not propose to define precisely what the national interest is; instead, it looks to understand how and why the national interest is evaluated, interpreted, and implemented in certain ways at certain times depending on the actors and factors that are involved in the decision making process. In other words, the national interest actually evolves because a leader--or someone--articulates and implements it within the confines of a particular policy or decision. Therefore, the concept of the national interest, national leadership, and decision making are clearly intertwined; in turn, the examination of states as international actors takes on a new and, perhaps, more useful perspective upon which more effective foreign policy might possibly be built. At the very least, this kind of study will provide a much clearer picture of particular policies and the processes in which they were developed.

It may seem that linking these three factors would inevitably open up a Pandora's box. After all, to study each of these concepts individually could be a daunting and extraordinarily complex project in and of itself--and, perhaps, a lifelong endeavor. The concept of "interest" or the "pursuit of interests" in a political system (whether it be in ancient Greece or in the modern international system) is not new to political or historical literature. From Thucydides to Machiavelli, from the great European monarchs to the American founders, from the 19th century European diplomats to American and Soviet Cold War leaders, and the post-Cold War leaders today, political actors have been evaluating, interpreting, and implementing their perceptions of what is good and right for their states. In his classic work, The Idea of National Interest, Charles Beard examined this pursuit in economic terms, while Hans J. Morgenthau and the Realist School of international relations defined the national interest within the struggle for power. Further, the criticism of the national interest, from such theorists as Raymond Aron, Arnold Wolfers, and Hedley Bull, has been as broad and varied as the efforts that have tried to define it.

Similarly, the concept and role of leadership--whether it be national or parochial, political and/or historical or intellectual, public or private--also ignite considerable debate. For example, a president may be able to lead because, as Edward Corwin argues in The President: Office and Powers, that person has the constitutional authority to do so. Having Constitutional power also connotes issues of responsibility and accountability. In a representative democracy, the

public's perceptions of responsibility and accountability are key elements of national leadership. Yet, is authority necessarily equivalent to ability to exercise that authority or success at doing so? In Leadership, James MacGregor Burns emphasizes the psychological, social, and political factors that underlie productive leadership, while Richard Neustadt has stressed, in Presidential Power, the persuasive and management skills that are essential for effective leadership-- particularly in times of crisis. Moreover, does not one necessarily need followers in order to be considered to be a leader, as Aaron Wildavsky, James Sterling Young, and Burns have suggested? In turn, a concept of followership must become central to one's analysis of leadership.

Lastly, the decision making process has been studied in numerous fields and from various angles: the political, the economic, the sociological, the psychological, the historical, and the religious, to name just a few. One realizes quite quickly that the reconstruction of a specific decision making process is extremely difficult and many times inexact, at best. Perhaps Graham Allison's rational actor, organizational process, and governmental politics models, in his now classic The Essence of Decision, most clearly illustrate how complex a decision making process often is and, more importantly, how uncertain one still can be about a particular process even after the most thorough and precise examination. One can never know for sure why and how a particular decision was made, unless you consciously made that decision yourself, and even then there could have been unknown subconscious factors that affected that decision.

Yet, when one considers the plethora of theory and analysis about each of these concepts--and the lack of consensus about these issues among scholars and practitioners alike--it is striking how useful and necessary a formal study of the interrelationship of national interest, leadership, and decision making would be in the field, precisely because of the overlap that is discovered when studying each of these individually. In some sense, the separation of these factors naturally lends itself to this contention and debate; it is not surprising, therefore, that foreign policy decision makers tend toward short-term crisis management rather than long-term conflict resolution. A study that integrates these issues could bring greater theoretical understanding and some practical sense to each of these concepts. Furthermore, if one can answer more completely these questions about the contextual definition, evaluation, and implementation of the national interest, then, perhaps, a more effective foundation could be laid for foreign policy decision making. In turn, new solutions may be found to help resolve some of the perplexing problems in today's world.

In considering such a project, this writer is reminded of one of Hans J. Morgenthau's major conclusions about a prudent statesman in Politics Among Nations: that effective diplomacy and negotiation demand constant evaluation and understanding of one's own national interest as well as that of one's counterpart--both adversary and ally alike. While Morgenthau's theoretical conclusion will not be the primary focus of this particular dissertation, it remains as one of several underlying questions that propel this study. Given the extent of the problems in

the international arena today and its seeming inability to find adequate and acceptable solutions, one cannot help but wonder whether today's international decision makers should take Morgenthau's suggestion seriously. Even when decision makers cite the national interest, it is unclear whether they have a firm understanding of it, why it is interpreted differently depending on the circumstances, or what the long-term effects are of elevating a certain issue or policy to the level of being a fundamental question of the national interest. Moreover, it is questionable whether they thoroughly comprehend--or are even capable of comprehending--that of their counterparts. Under such circumstances, problem solving and conflict resolution appear difficult, at best.

Nuclear strategy is an area of international relations in which a useful and effective case study can be performed about the interrelationship among the national interest, national leadership, and the decision making process.¹ Since World War II, the world has faced the frightening possibility of nuclear destruction, yet states with nuclear power have been forced to design strategies and policies concerning their nuclear arsenals. There is, perhaps, no policy area that demands a greater understanding of the contextual formulation and implementation of the national interest than nuclear strategy, precisely because a

¹ Such a study would fall under what Alexander George calls a "heuristic case", in which new relationships can be discovered about general problems and new solutions be offered for future cases. See "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison," in Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy, ed. Paul Gordon Lauren (New York: The Free Press, 1979), p. 51-2.

misunderstanding or miscalculation by anyone could have grave consequences for national, and possibly world, survival.

The late 1950s and early 1960s were a period of change for nuclear strategy. In fact, questions about nuclear strategy underpinned Congressional debates on the alleged missile gap and American nuclear preparedness, particularly after the 1957 Sputnik launching; these discussions spilled into the 1960 presidential election. Different perceptions of what was in the American national interest and who could most effectively lead the United States on this crucial issue were at the center of these debates--the answers to which seemingly influenced American voters in the 1960 election. The Kennedy administration (1961-1963), which was operating with at least minimal electoral confirmation of Kennedy's leadership ability, revised American nuclear strategy according to its perception of the American national interest. Moreover, the Kennedy administration sought to make its new strategy official for NATO as well. This new approach was the flexible response, and it differed significantly from Eisenhower's massive retaliation approach, which had been in place since the early 1950s.

Defining a specific policy in terms of the national interest is a formidable task, at best, particularly in a representative democracy where separate but equal branches have shared and blended powers. Subsequent questions about responsibility and accountability are not always easily resolved; constitutional jurisdictions invariably are debated. Determining who will lead and who will

follow in such a system only adds to the complex nature of interpreting and implementing the national interest. Dealing with a matter as serious as nuclear strategy often serves to heighten these tensions and conflicts even further. John Kennedy and his advisors were almost immediately, and necessarily, confronted with these issues in their quest to implement a flexible response, precisely because of the seriousness and complexity of this strategy--and nuclear strategy in general.

Achieving a flexible response demanded making difficult choices about various defense issues, including: general and limited war (nuclear and conventional); the proper balance between strategic nuclear and conventional force; specific nuclear, conventional, and unconventional force structures and weapons systems; defense organization, management, and budgeting; targeting doctrines; and, civil defense. The sheer breadth of these issues ensured that other actors and factors in the legislature and the NATO alliance would affect the implementation of flexible response. Tangential matters, such as national nuclear forces, a possible multilateral force, and the management of the crisis in Berlin in the summer of 1961, were also inevitably intertwined in this policy process. Moreover, serious questions about the Constitution's separation of powers and the American role in and commitment to NATO were raised as well.

Understanding the complexity of flexible response necessarily demands comprehension and discernment of different perceptions of what was in the American national interest, of who was responsible for defining and implementing national security policy--both theoretically and practically, and of what was

involved in that policy making process. Flexible response is a story about the contextual evaluation and implementation of the national interest, about leadership and followership in a representative democracy, and about the intricate nature of policy making--all operating simultaneously and overlapping at nearly every turn. Interesting and valuable insights can be gained by looking at flexible response in terms of each of these theoretical perspectives; yet, flexible response is best understood when national interest, leadership, and decision making are meshed together instead of separated.

While the nuclear strategy literature tends to focus specifically on the formulation and implementation of military strategy, it often avoids any broader theoretical discussion or analysis of the contextual definition and translation of the national interest, of national leadership, and of decision making. Jane Stomseth's The Origins of the Flexible Response effectively addresses some of the internal factors that influenced Kennedy, Harold Macmillan, and Charles de Gaulle in the early 1960s on specific alliance issues, such as the national nuclear force controversy, and Stomseth does uncover some of the difficulties that alliances must confront when implementing alliance policy. Yet, Stomseth clearly is not looking to draw conclusions about the larger theoretical questions in the international arena. In The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy, Lawrence Freedman provides a fine historical account of the numerous efforts to develop nuclear strategy, but he readily admits in his introduction that he never intended to offer broader political analysis for strategists or international theorists in general.

Numerous other works, such as John Lewis Gaddis' Strategies of Containment and McGeorge Bundy's Danger and Survival, furnish excellent overviews of Kennedy's flexible response. Bundy's discussion of particular aspects of nuclear strategic decision making in the Kennedy administration is especially enlightening. Gaddis' chapter on the Kennedy and Johnson administration's application of flexible response in Vietnam continues to be one of the best and most useful. Yet, like Stromseth's and Freedman's studies, these books do not have the broad theoretical issues of international relations as their primary focus.

This is not to say that none of the nuclear strategy literature incorporates questions of the national interest, of leadership, or of decision making; the integration of these issues, however, is rare. Henry Kissinger's Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy clearly underlines the importance of the national interest in the formulation of nuclear strategy (in fact, Hans Morgenthau gave Kissinger a favorable review in The American Political Science Review), but Kissinger takes a rational actor approach and, thus, never comes close to analyzing the internal factors or specific actors that influence strategy. Fred Kaplan, in his provocative study, The Wizards of Armageddon, gives a fascinating account of the individuals who have been central in nuclear strategic decision making since 1945, but, again, his purposes are limited to just that. Several works, including Samuel Huntington's A Common Defense, Morton Halperin's National Security Policy-Making, and Desmond Ball's Politics and Force Levels, analyze the development of defense strategies from the decision making process perspective, yet in each

case the reader is left to pose the broader questions about the national interest and leadership. Two other works, Richard Aliano's American Defense Policy From Eisenhower to Kennedy and Richard Neustadt's Alliance Politics, examine the actors that are responsible for decisions and variables that influence those decisions; Neustadt, in particular, urges greater understanding of one's counterpart in the decision making process. Yet, again, there is no comprehensive analysis of the fundamental, theoretical questions being raised in this dissertation.

This is not to suggest that the nuclear strategy literature is not interesting, probing, or useful, because it is, and it has helped this student immeasurably in understanding the fundamental issues and problems that continue to exist in this area of international relations. Moreover, this brief outline of the strategy literature is by no means complete; in fact, the theory and analysis of nuclear strategy is extensive and broad based. This profile is, however, representative of the various approaches that have been taken, and it certainly highlights what this individual generally finds lacking in this policy area.

That is why this case study, which will explore the development of the flexible response strategy by the Kennedy administration, has been chosen as a means to examine the interrelationship among the national interest, national leadership, and the decision making process. This study will uncover many of the general questions concerning the contextual evaluation, definition, and implementation of the national interest, the nature of leadership and followership, and the complexity of decision making that have been raised above, and the

meshing of these issues in a policy process. It will attempt as well to bring greater theoretical understanding to the national interest, leadership, and decision making process in general, and, specifically, to the flexible response. Perhaps a deeper understanding of this relationship, as well as the flexible response case itself, will provide a framework in which practitioners of political science can search for new solutions to ongoing nuclear strategy questions, the limitation and control of nuclear weaponry, and other equally serious international issues as well.

Chapter Organization, Research, and Methodology

As is the case with any project, the design, organization, and methodology are essential for creating a valid and useful final product. The fundamental premise of this dissertation is that the national interest, national leadership, and decision making are necessarily linked. Perhaps the most effective way to demonstrate the need for this linkage, however, is actually to discuss them separately. Thus, the importance of each can be explored in depth; yet, the limits of each, particularly in terms of understanding a specific policy, can also be clearly seen. This dissertation, therefore, comprises four primary chapters: one in which flexible response as a theory is placed within its political and historical framework, and three subsequent chapters in which Kennedy's flexible response is analyzed individually in terms of each of this project's three major theoretical themes. The following is an outline of what is highlighted in Chapters II-V:

Chapter II. It investigates the theoretical and historical foundations for, and basic premises of, the flexible response. Several crucial issues, such as the 1957 Sputnik launching, the subsequent missile gap allegations, a confusing late

1950s intelligence puzzle, and the intellectual context of John Kennedy's strategic thinking are analyzed within the framework of partisan Congressional and political party discussions about American nuclear preparedness and the broader 1960 presidential campaign debate about American power, prestige, and leadership. The groundwork is thus laid for an analysis of the Kennedy administration's effort to implement a flexible response in the early 1960s.

Chapter III. It presents the flexible response as a study of the national interest. It examines the Kennedy administration's perspective on national sovereignty and legitimacy, American national security, American economic and fiscal concerns, national foreign policy goals, and the structure of the international order. The flexible response, and thus this chapter, involves a discussion of defense management and budgeting, nuclear and conventional force considerations, civil defense, and various aspects of NATO relations. The contention that surrounded some phases of Kennedy's flexible response clearly illustrates the extreme difficulty that is necessarily involved with interpreting the national interest.

Chapter IV. It presents the flexible response as a study of national leadership. The constitutional boundaries under which nuclear strategy and national defense policy fall are examined to try to determine who will lead and follow in this particular policy area. Moreover, who is responsible for defining national defense policy (in this case, the flexible response)--both theoretically and practically--and, more importantly, whom does the public hold accountable? A discussion of defense organization, management, and budgeting and of the determination of the nuclear-conventional force balance underline the importance of negotiation and administration of a policy system in one's quest to lead that system.

Chapter V. It presents the flexible response as a study of decision making. One is reminded that national policy, particularly one as serious and complex as nuclear strategy, is not formulated and implemented in a vacuum. Instead, a wide variety of actors and circumstances can and do significantly influence a policy making process. Those actors, their backgrounds, and their personal stances and approaches are assessed, as well as their positions in the White House decision making structure, to try to determine their influence on the process. This chapter concentrates on McGeorge Bundy and his national security staff, other key non-administration advisors, and non-governmental influences (such as the political and historical context) as a mini-case study on the national decision making process.

The national interest, national leadership, and decision making are relinked in a reassessment of the flexible response strategy in the final chapter, the dissertation's conclusion.

This dissertation's primary focus is the policy making level--the specific actors and other variables that shape the contextual evaluation of the national interest, national leadership, and the national decision making process. One of the unique features of this project is its strong reliance, whenever possible, on primary source documentation and, particularly, the Presidential Papers that are located at the John F. Kennedy Library. A series of specific questions was formulated to structure this primary source research. These questions centered on the roles of particular actors in the Kennedy White House, the State and Defense Departments, and Congress (and others who were identified as the research progressed) who possibly influenced the development and implementation of the flexible response during the Kennedy administration. These questions included not only identifying these actors, but also investigating their backgrounds, identifying their specific positions on various aspects of the flexible response (and other defense-related issues), uncovering the chain of command within and among various departments, and addressing the organizational/bureaucratic structures and traditions and the generational differences that could have affected them. The final question centered on the actual decisions that were made under the guise of the flexible response and the various related issues that surrounded its implementation. In turn, the broader questions about the interpretation of the

national interest, about national leadership, and about decision making could then be addressed as well.

Nearly 200 boxes of material in the National Security Files, the Presidential Office Files, the White House Staff Files, and the Pre-Presidential Papers were scoured for pertinent data, over the course of three research trips to the Kennedy Library in 1992 and 1993. That data has been supplemented with Congressional documents, public speeches, and various newspaper and other secondary source materials whenever it has been appropriate and necessary. While the breadth of this investigation may seem extraordinary, broader analysis of this dissertation's theoretical concepts could not be performed credibly without such careful, extensive, and thorough research. This writer knows of nothing in the international political theory, nuclear strategy, or American presidency literature that employs the Kennedy Library's holdings in the way that is done in this dissertation. While one hopes that this project is seen as a contribution to the academic field of international relations, it is also hoped that it will be recognized as a valuable utilization of the Kennedy Library's vast resources.

CHAPTER II

Flexible Response: An Historical, Political & Theoretical Overview

It is common in the United States for presidential candidates and opposition parties to criticize intensely the policies of the incumbent president and party. Such a tactic is often used to garner support for the challenger and opposition party; moreover, it provides a basis on which the party can formulate its platform and a foundation on which the individual, if elected, can develop and implement new policies. This is precisely what the Democratic Party--and its prospective presidential candidates--did in the late 1950s in preparation for the 1960 presidential election. One of the major issues the Democrats and their candidates used to distance themselves from the Eisenhower administration and the Republican Party was the question of U.S. national security and American power, prestige, and leadership in the international system. In fact, the 1960 election became one about national leadership and who could best define and implement the national interest.

Specifically, the Democrats argued consistently in the late 1950s that Eisenhower defense policies had allowed a missile gap to develop that favored the Soviet Union, which perhaps might induce the Soviets to initiate a surprise nuclear strike on the United States or its allies. The Sputnik launching in 1957 seemed to confirm the Democrats' argument as well as a supposed decline in American power, prestige, and leadership in the international arena. President Eisenhower, however, continuously and vehemently denied that such a gap existed

or that the United States was anything less than the predominant power and leader in the world; yet, the Democrats refused to let go of the issue. Their 1960 presidential candidate, John F. Kennedy, actually had gained national recognition in the late 1950s by sharply criticizing the Eisenhower administration for allegedly causing the missile gap, and he repeatedly hammered Republican candidate Richard Nixon throughout the 1960 election season precisely on this query concerning American power and prestige.

The question, however, was not just whether the Eisenhower national defense strategy was in the national interest but whether Republican leadership--as represented by Eisenhower and Nixon--was best for the nation. Yet, shortly after Inauguration Day, 1961, the new Kennedy administration also agreed that there was not, nor had there ever been, a missile gap. Moreover, it maintained that the United States was still the world's preeminent power, even though the Soviets were considered to be nearing parity. Nonetheless, the new Administration had received an election mandate to define and implement what it had argued was in the nation's interest, and it subsequently undertook a complete overhaul of American nuclear strategy and national defense policy.

This chapter will examine how and why the Democratic Party in the late 1950s was able to develop the missile gap, and the broader question of American power and prestige, into legitimate questions about the national interest and leadership for the 1960 presidential campaign, particularly since the missile gap allegation was untrue. More generally, it will address how an individual candidate

can lay the foundation during a national campaign upon which to base a new administration's approach to nuclear strategy and national defense--and, in turn, its perception of the national interest. The chapter is divided into four major sections: a) a brief overview of the missile gap myth and why it emerged as a volatile political issue in the late 1950s; b) an investigation of the Democratic Party's efforts--including those of individual Party members within and outside of Congress--to articulate a reinterpretation of the national interest on national security with the expressed purpose of regaining the White House in 1960; c) an analysis of the intelligence data puzzle that plagued the defense policy process in the late 1950s and directly fueled the Democrats' and John Kennedy's allegations; and, d) an assessment of the 1960 presidential campaign in terms of the merging of the missile gap and American power and prestige into questions about the national interest and effective national leadership. In turn, it argues that three primary factors played important roles in helping Kennedy and the Democrats to transform concerns about American national security and power into legitimate campaign questions about the definition and implementation of the national interest.

The first factor was the development of a national party council to formulate a national party agenda--outside of Congress--around which the party and individuals could rally to raise national attention for the Democrats' interpretation of the national interest. The national party's efforts were supplemented by the party's Congressional membership, who effectively used the

Congressional budgeting and oversight responsibilities as a stage to promote the Democrats' version of national security and defense. The second factor was the plethora of often conflicting intelligence data, which was reported differently by various sectors of the Eisenhower administration as well as members of Congress, that naturally raised comparative military strength questions, debate about the United States' position vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, and questions about the national interest. A major part of this intelligence puzzle was the secrecy that was demanded by the very nature of the U-2 reconnaissance program, which kept Eisenhower and the Republican Party's candidate, Richard Nixon, from releasing definitive data to counteract effectively Kennedy's and the Democrats' allegations in the late 1950s as well as during the 1960 campaign. Finally, there apparently was a lack of in depth briefing on national security issues for John Kennedy during the campaign, which allowed him to promote unknowingly what would turn out to be a falsehood and which only helped to feed his own and his party's predisposition toward national security. Therefore, Kennedy was able to mount an effective attack against his counterpart's interpretation of the national interest once he had established his own legitimacy as a potential national leader. As a result, John Kennedy had laid the foundation and received an electoral mandate for implementing his definition of the national interest in terms of national security and defense.

The Missile Gap Myth Emerges

Before one can understand how John F. Kennedy and the Democrats were able to turn the alleged missile gap into a question about defining and implementing the national interest, one must first comprehend what the missile gap supposedly was and what precipitated its emergence as a volatile issue in the late 1950s.

As the Cold War intensified in the post-World War II era, American nuclear superiority became the primary means for deterring aggression by the United States' chief ideological and military adversary--the Soviet Union. Containment of Soviet expansionism had emerged as the paramount goal of the United States in the late 1940s and truly had become synonymous with the national interest. In turn, the Eisenhower administration had adapted its particular defense policies to this overriding U.S. national security goal. The Eisenhower strategy--sometimes called the "New Look" or the "Long Pull"--was a form of containment that combined massive retaliation (any Soviet aggression would be met with a swift, massive nuclear retaliatory strike on Soviet territory) with fiscal conservatism (the emphasis of the limited military budget would be placed primarily on nuclear weaponry needed for a credible nuclear deterrent).¹ This particular strategy gradually lost credibility in the 1950s as nuclear force was not used in limited non-nuclear conflicts, such as, in Korea, Indochina, and

¹ John Lewis Gaddis, Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 147.

Hungary. Furthermore, the viability of the massive retaliatory threat was lessened further as Soviet strategic nuclear capabilities continued to progress during this period, symbolized by the Sputnik launching in October 1957.²

Sputnik was crucial for initiating and promulgating the missile gap issue for several reasons. First and foremost, it precipitated an hysterical public reaction in the United States because Sputnik was interpreted as the United States for the first time falling behind the Soviets in the nuclear missile and space races. In his memoirs, Dwight Eisenhower clearly acknowledged the grave concern that rippled through the country and the world because of Sputnik:

Newspaper, magazine, radio, and television commentators joined the man in the street in expressions of dismay over this proof that the Russians could no longer be regarded as "backward," and had even "beaten" the United States in a spectacular scientific competition....The Soviet scientific achievement was impressive. The size of the thrust required to propel a satellite of this weight came as a distinct surprise to us. There was no point in trying to minimize the accomplishment or warning it gave that we must take added efforts to ensure maximum progress.³

Kennedy and the Democratic Party were able to play off of this public fear to promote their perception of what was in the national interest in terms of national security and defense.

Second, the Sputnik launching confirmed the fears and reports of some scientists (Edward Teller, for example) and private analysts (particularly those at

² Richard D. Challener, "The National Security Policy from Truman to Eisenhower," in The National Security: Its Theory and Practice, 1945-1960, ed. Norman A. Graebner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 64-5.

³ Dwight D. Eisenhower, Waging Peace: 1956-1961 (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), p. 205.

the RAND Corporation) who had been warning the administration that it had not been doing enough for the American strategic defense program. In the spring of 1957, Eisenhower had appointed an ad hoc commission--better known as the Gaither Committee--to investigate a Federal Civil Defense Administration proposal for a \$30-\$40 billion civil defense program. The Gaither Committee Report, submitted to Eisenhower on 7 November 1957--barely a month after Sputnik, recommended that "a massive civil defense program...should take a back seat to what they saw as the much more pressing need of building up a much larger offensive missile force and protecting it from an attack through dispersal and hardened shelters, so that SAC [Strategic Air Command] might survive an attack."⁴ It maintained that the Soviets had "probably surpassed the U.S. in ICBM [intercontinental ballistic missile] development" and it clearly underlined the existence and danger of the missile gap.⁵ The Gaither Committee Report was followed by a January 1958 publication of a private study that had been commissioned by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. The Rockefeller Brothers Report, titled International Security: the Military Aspect, provided an assessment of the American strategic defense position vis-a-vis the Soviets similar to that of the Gaither Committee, and it, too, recommended an increase in allocations for

⁴ Fred Kaplan, The Wizard of Armageddon, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1983), pp. 134-5. Also see the Gaither Committee Report itself: U.S., Congress, Joint Committee on Defense Production, Deterrence and Survival in the Nuclear Age (The "Gaither Report" of 1957), Joint Committee Print, 94 Cong., 2nd ses., 1976, pp. 12-19. Hereafter cited as the "Gaither Committee Report."

⁵ Gaither Committee Report, p. 15 & p. 25.

strategic forces and SAC's protection.⁶ Both the Gaither Committee Report and the Rockefeller Brothers Report seemed to verify public and private fears about the state of American defense, and while Eisenhower did participate in several briefings, particularly on the Gaither Report, he refused to increase his budget with allocations necessary for implementing the report's conclusions because of his commitment to fiscal conservatism.⁷ Thus, the Democrats were left an opening to offer a new interpretation about what was in the national interest.

On Capitol Hill in November 1957, Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson's military preparedness subcommittee initiated an eight-month series of hearings in direct response to Sputnik, investigating every facet of American defense. Moderate increases in allocations for defense programs resulted from these hearings as well as intense competition for those funds.⁸ During the 86th Congress (1959-60), Johnson continued to be at the forefront of the Democratic criticism that was aimed at the Republican administration, serving as the chairman of joint hearings on the defense budget of the Senate military preparedness subcommittee and the Senate Aeronautical and Space Science Committee. Moreover, the Sputnik launching precipitated an intense debate-- within the Eisenhower administration (particularly in the Defense Department),

⁶ Rockefeller Brothers Fund, International Security: The Military Aspect, American at Mid-Century Series-Special Studies Report II (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1958), p. 56. Hereafter cited as the "Rockefeller Brothers Report."

⁷ Kaplan, pp 149-52; and, Gaddis, p. 185.

⁸ Richard A. Aliano, American Defense Policy from Eisenhower to Kennedy: The Politics of Changing Military Requirements, 1957-1961 (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1975), pp. 102-115.

on Capitol Hill, in the press, and in the private sector--about whether Eisenhower's finite (minimum) deterrent strategy was being adequately provided for by the administration's budgeting strategy.⁹ Administration critics (some for very different reasons) argued that inadequacies in current defense policies, particularly for ICBMs, were allowing the Soviets to develop a credible ICBM counterforce capability. Furthermore, they argued that by the early 1960s the United States would face a 'gap' "...in which the balance between Soviet offensive and defensive forces, on the one hand, and the American strategic forces, on the other, would be such that the Soviets might conclude that a surprise attack would reduce their losses to acceptable limits."¹⁰ Subsequently, questions about a missile gap, and, in turn, American power and prestige in general, were common sources of debate both within and outside of governmental circles. In essence, however, the real concern was whether the Eisenhower administration was correctly defining and implementing the national interest.

The Sputnik launching also confirmed for the public the intense interservice rivalry that was plaguing the Pentagon and the squabbling and competition over possible new appropriations that were anticipated because of the missile gap allegations. The Army, in particular, had faced drastic budget cuts under Eisenhower's "New Look," and its Chiefs of Staff, Matthew Ridgway and Maxwell Taylor, had been extremely critical of the administration's defense

⁹ Ibid., p. 52-59; and, Gaddis, p. 182-88.

¹⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, A Common Defense: Strategic Programs in National Politics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 104.

budgeting strategy. Lt. General James M. Gavin, who had served under Ridgway on the Army staff, exposed Army concerns about the administration's missile and satellite programs in his 1958 book, War and Peace in the Space Age. After his retirement in 1959, Taylor published his much heralded work, The Uncertain Trumpet, in which he, too, suggested the imminent danger of a missile gap; more importantly, he introduced a new flexible response strategy that promoted a gradual--and primarily conventional--response to enemy aggression.¹¹

The Army's criticism, however, was not new. Both the Army and the Navy had consistently opposed the attention and funding that were given to the Air Force in the 1950s. Eisenhower's massive retaliation strategy, which emphasized the deterrent value of nuclear weapons, had depended on the Air Force's manned bomber as the sole means for carrying out an actual strategic nuclear strike; further, the Air Force's budgeting needs were always met at the expense of the Army's and Navy's. A flexible response strategy would spread appropriations out across the services and, furthermore, address the problem of the missile gap. Moreover, the Air Force, which had tended to support Executive Branch budgets during the early and mid-1950s precisely because of the Air Force's high level of funding, also became an Administration opponent as the missile gap issue emerged in the late 1950s; it believed it could play off the issue on Capitol Hill and, in turn, gain further appropriations for its missile and long-range bomber

¹¹ Taylor's flexible response and the impact of The Uncertain Trumpet will be discussed in more detail later on in this study. See Gaddis, pp. 198-236, for an excellent overview of the flexible response strategy.

programs.¹² Again, the missile gap was used by various sectors to further parochial interests, to undermine rhetorically the Administration's defense strategy, and to further a different perception about what was actually in the national interest and who should be defining it for the American public.

It is clear, therefore, that several factors operating together precipitated and heightened the attention surrounding the alleged missile gap, the questions about the Eisenhower administration's massive retaliation strategy, and, ultimately, what was in the national interest. The Sputnik launching ignited a public outcry that could only help to bolster the arguments being made in government circles and by experts in the private sector to implement supposedly necessary changes in American nuclear strategy and defense budgeting priorities. Such changes were deemed necessary by Administration critics to ensure American superiority in nuclear weaponry and, in turn, American power and prestige in the international arena. Only then could the vital interests of the United States be protected. It is clear that the Democrats and their allies were promoting a much different perception of what was in the best interest of the United States and what was necessary for continued American effectiveness in the international system. Criticism of Republican leadership and its means for implementing the American national interest naturally was part and parcel of this ongoing debate as well. Unfortunately for the Eisenhower administration and the Republican Party, the intensity of this debate and their inability to counter

¹² See Challener, pp. 39-75, for a good discussion of the Air Force's role in the massive retaliation strategy during the Eisenhower administration.

effectively the Administration's critics helped to turn national defense strategy into an electoral liability by the close of the decade.

The Democratic Party's Response

The National Party and the Democratic Advisory Council

A year before Sputnik, the Democratic National Party began working on a more effective overall counterforce to the policies being implemented by a Republican White House. Smarting from the 1956 presidential loss, national party activists attempted to organize the Democratic Advisory Council (DAC) to act as the formal opposition policy developer--or the "presidential wing" of the party, as James MacGregor Burns once called it.¹³ This new policy development would serve national party purposes as well as Democratic members of Congress, particularly the vocal, activist, liberal wing that was emerging on the Hill at the time. DAC proponents argued that the Democrats had lost the 1956 presidential race for two primary reasons; they maintained, however, that there was a way to correct past errors:

[T]he Democrats had not undermined the Eisenhower prestige by forcefully pointing out to the country the mistakes and folly of his policies, and they had not developed and presented to the country a distinct and liberal party program that would have given the voters a clear and attractive alternative to Eisenhower. And, as [Adlai] Stevenson insisted, neither of these objectives could be served by the speeches of a presidential candidate during a single autumn each four years. The attacks on the Republicans had to be made, and the program had to be assembled and presented, day by day and

¹³ James MacGregor Burns, The Deadlock of Democracy: Four-Party Politics in America (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), pp. 195-203 and pp. 253-254.

week by week in the long years between presidential elections--and the only place where that could be done was on Capitol Hill.¹⁴

These presidential Democrats--as James Sundquist has called them--essentially blamed the party leadership on Capitol Hill (House Speaker Sam Rayburn and Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson) for "blurring the image of the Democratic Party" through legislative compromises, which had often forced the party "to try to share the middle of the road in a bipartisan embrace with the conservative Republican President."¹⁵ To presidential Democrats, history clearly illustrated that the bipartisan compromise approach was a no-win situation for the Democratic Party, particularly if it had any intention of regaining control of the White House in 1960. It was paramount, therefore, that the Democrats find some way to present their view of what was in the nation's interest well before the 1960 election season.

Originally, the DAC was to be composed of the Congressional leadership, recognized party leaders (former presidential and vice presidential candidates, for example), and other party officials and activists; they would, in turn, formulate a party agenda to guide policy makers in Congress and to counteract the Republican White House. National Party Chairman Paul Butler presented the plan for DAC to the party's executive committee in November 1957 and it was approved immediately. Butler had gained Lyndon Johnson's support, who also

¹⁴ James L. Sundquist, Politics and Policy: The Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Years (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1968), p. 406.

¹⁵ Ibid.

recommended other potential participants--such as Senator John F. Kennedy. Yet, the plan's implementation was stymied by Sam Rayburn, who perceived national party agenda-setting as an infringement on his leadership territory in the House. The effect of Rayburn's rejection of the DAC was quite profound: as a consequence, Johnson also withdrew his support, as did nearly all of the other Congressional invitees. The only exceptions were Hubert Humphrey and Estes Kefauver, who agreed to serve not as a Senate representative but as a former vice presidential nominee. Moreover, Butler also failed to persuade a Southern governor to join the council. In the end, the composition of the council was quite different than Butler had originally anticipated; yet, the final result--an all northern-western, liberal council--*would* provide a distinct Party vision, in direct contrast to both the Republican White House *and* Democratic Party leaders in Congress.¹⁶ It was unclear, however, if that perception of the national interest would prove to be acceptable to all Party members--both within and outside of Congress.

While the DAC did not directly influence or control party affairs on Capitol Hill, it did work with the liberal activist blocs in both the House and Senate to formulate a national party agenda and promote liberal legislative measures in Congress. It also came to represent those party members who were not in Congress but who had interests in national party and legislative issues. As Sundquist has suggested, "[t]he Senate activist bloc, the corresponding House bloc

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 406-7.

(organized as the Democratic Study Group), and the national committee and advisory council came to comprise a triangle of communication and mutual enforcement that bypassed the party's leadership in Congress. By 1960 it had come close to isolating that leadership."¹⁷ The DAC did essentially become the presidential wing of the party, consistently criticizing administration policies and obtaining national press attention for the party and party-supported legislation. Most importantly, the DAC laid out a Democratic Party program, on which it could build a party platform, by using issues that actually had been translated into legislation in Congress as well as those problems--such as civil rights--that had been kept bottlenecked in the legislative process by conservatives in both parties. Furthermore, the DAC produced a series of reports and pamphlets on a wide variety of national problems and questions that, in turn, emphasized and promoted the party's version of what was in the national interest. By June 1960, those various publications numbered well over sixty.¹⁸

While much of the DAC's work focused on the domestic agenda (unemployment, civil rights, and education, for example), it undertook national defense and American power and prestige in the international arena--particularly after the Sputnik launching and ensuing national debate about these issues in the late 1950s. Sensing that the Eisenhower administration's national security policy did not truly serve the national interest, the DAC enlisted former Secretary of

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 395-96.

¹⁸ Cornelius P. Cotter and Bernard C. Hennessy, Politics Without Power: The National Party Committees (New York: Atherton Press, 1964), p. 220.

State Dean Acheson and Paul Nitze, whose role in NSC-68 and the Gaither Committee was well known, to write a party pamphlet on national defense. That publication, "The Military Forces We Need and How to Get Them," was released on the anniversary of Pearl Harbor in 1959 and would, in turn, serve as a blueprint for the 1960 party platform position on national security.¹⁹ It accused the Eisenhower administration for "first, failing to take adequate precaution to ensure the invulnerability of American strategic weapons; second, for treating the tactical atomic weapons as a cheap substitute for strong conventional forces; and third, for failing to build strong mobile forces for brush fire wars."²⁰ Moreover, the Acheson-Nitze pamphlet estimated that it would take \$7.3 billion to fill the current holes in U.S. national security policy if all American vital interests were to be protected.²¹ As Richard Aliano has noted, the pamphlet clearly stated the Democratic *Party's* position--that Eisenhower defense policies had put American national security in grave danger; the alleged missile gap was its prime target:

Charging that the administration was pursuing a "second-best" defense policy which would give the Soviets a 3 to 1 ICBM advantage until well into 1963 and preclude the possibility of the United States fighting limited wars, the DAC called for the repudiation of a party which believe[d] money to be more important than the military security of our country.²²

¹⁹ Aliano, p. 220.

²⁰ Alastair Buchan, "Defense on the New Frontier," The Political Science Quarterly 33 (April-June 1962), p. 130.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Aliano, p. 220.

Again, the Democratic Party was well on its way to articulating its perception of the national interest and setting a definitive tone for the upcoming presidential election in 1960.

One might argue that the DAC pamphlet came rather late in the ongoing national debate about the missile gap, and what was in the national interest in terms of national security policy. After all, Lyndon Johnson had conducted extensive military preparedness hearings during the second session of the 85th Congress in 1958 and continued those hearings during the 86th Congress. Other Democratic Senators, including John Kennedy and Stuart Symington--both of whom would become candidates for the presidency in 1960 along with Johnson--had begun to criticize openly administration defense policies in Senate debates, particularly in matters concerning defense budgeting. While the DAC's position was not unlike that being articulated by some of the Congressional Democrats, it did represent a *national party* position for those non-Congressional Democrats who were attracted to the council's agenda precisely because it was not controlled by the party's Congressional leadership. The ongoing mission of the DAC had emerged from "a conviction that the national party need[ed] to articulate a policy and a program that [could] form some basis for future campaigns and for uniting the party around it."²³ This was the exact purpose of the DAC's defense pamphlet. In fact, the DAC would have been irresponsible to its broader constituency if it had not issued such a strong statement on Eisenhower defense

²³ Hugh A. Bone, Party Committees and National Politics (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), p. 277.

policies around which the national party membership could rally in 1960.

National security and defense was one of the prime national issues of the day; there really was no way to ignore it, particularly in the aftermath of Sputnik. It was imperative that the Democrats articulate a strong stance on national defense if they truly wanted to challenge the Republicans' leadership on this aspect of the national interest. As far as the timing of the statement was concerned, the chosen day (Pearl Harbor Day 1959) and its close proximity to the 1960 election brought the party's position prominent media attention and the ultimate unifying effect.²⁴ In many respects, the national party's pronouncement would work as the centripetal force for both its broad national membership as well as the individual candidacies that emerged in early 1960.

The Congressional Democrats and the Missile Gap

The Democratic Advisory Council was not the only vehicle in the late 1950s for Democratic attacks on Eisenhower defense policies, debate about the missile gap myth, and a reinterpretation about what was in the national interest. As suggested above, Democratic members of Congress continuously vocalized personal dismay with the approach that the Republican White House had taken on national security, particularly after the Sputnik launching; these attacks most often occurred within the confines of Congress' appropriations and oversight

²⁴ Cotter and Hennessy pointed out that the Acheson-Nitze pamphlet was not the first or only DAC statement on national defense; it was just the most prominent. The DAC also released several statements concerning national defense and the space race in the years in between Sputnik and the Acheson-Nitze pamphlet. See Cotter and Hennessy, p. 220.

authority. The Senate military preparedness subcommittee hearings from late 1957 to mid-1958 prompted an intense debate in the national media about national defense, the alleged missile gap, and American power and prestige in the international system.²⁵ Not surprisingly, the defense budgeting process in the 86th Congress (1959-1960) also involved these themes, particularly the possibility of a missile gap; in fact, the Democrats' questioning would become quite fervent.

The 16 January 1959 Congressional Quarterly Weekly reported that Stuart Symington had criticized openly and harshly a Richard Nixon assertion--and, in turn, the Republican administration--that the United States was ahead of the Soviet Union in ballistic missile development and was catching up rapidly in other phases of the space program (Nixon had reiterated the Administration's position concerning the alleged missile gap in an interview with some newsmen). Symington "told the Senate that if Nixon had made such a statement, it is not correct, and I do not know a single impartial expert in the missile field who could support it." Symington further argued that "there seems to be a continuing effort on the part of high officials in this Administration to lull the people into a state of complacency not justified by the facts."²⁶ In a 29 January 1959 Joint Senate Preparedness Subcommittee and Senate Aeronautical and Space Committee

²⁵ In a 17 June 1963 memorandum to McGeorge Bundy, Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze discussed the extensive public debate about the missile gap in the late 1950s. In turn, he attached a seven-page appendix that listed 76 articles, which had appeared in various newspapers around the country between 1958 and 1960, as a sample of the national debate. See: Memorandum, Paul Nitze to McGeorge Bundy, 17 June 1963, National Security Files (NSF): Subjects: Missile Gap, 6/63-7/63, Box 298, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library (JFKL).

²⁶ Congressional Quarterly Weekly, 19 January 1959, p.73.

hearing, Lyndon Johnson suggested in his opening statement that there should be a clear understanding of where the United States stood in relation to Soviet ICBM development. Johnson pointed out that in a secret background briefing earlier that month, Defense Secretary Neil McElroy had allegedly stated that the Soviet Union would have a three to one advantage by 1961-1962. Yet, in his defense budget testimony before the Johnson committee, McElroy maintained that the Soviets were not ahead but could conceivably catch up and pass the United States if their ICBM production program was implemented at full capacity. To say the least, Johnson was not pleased with McElroy's, and thus the administration's, apparent contradiction.²⁷ It is hardly surprising that the tension between the Republican executive and the Democratic legislature continued throughout the Johnson hearings and the FY 1960 budget debate in 1959; the sides had been clearly drawn very early on in the process and the public outcry after Sputnik seemed to drive Congress into this attack mode.

The FY 1961 budget process in 1960 ignited even more intense criticism about Republican defense policies than had been witnessed the previous year--precisely because of confusing and often conflicting testimony on the part of Administration witnesses. Yet, considering the very nature of election year politics, controversy could hardly have been unexpected. The 5 February 1960 Congressional Quarterly Weekly reported that "Democrats, digging diligently for soft spots in the Eisenhower Administration's defense and space programs,

²⁷ Johnson's irritation with McElroy and the administration was deftly reported in Congressional Quarterly Weekly, 5 February 1959, p. 215.

maintained a drumfire of criticism as a series of Congressional inquiries continued for a third week.²⁸ The missile gap allegations, the deterrent power of existing U.S. forces, and the pace of the American space program were vehicles for the Congressional Democrats' attacks.

The testimony of Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on January 13, in which he maintained that the missile gap would be smaller than expected over the succeeding two to three years if one based that estimate on Soviet intentions and capabilities, precipitated a terse reply from Johnson. "[To] rely upon hunches concerning the thoughts that skip through the Kremlin minds is incredibly dangerous," argued Johnson on January 23.²⁹ In an attempt to defend himself, Gates told the House Science and Astronautic Committee on January 25 that "our intelligence information has improved" and that "we have never been relying on what their intentions will be in reference to specific actions." He continued: "[i]f our best estimates prove wrong and the Soviet Union builds far more (missiles) than we expect, there will still be no 'deterrent gap'. Our total defense will still give a margin of safety."³⁰ As Congressional Quarterly Weekly suggested, Gates received further support from

²⁸ Congressional Quarterly Weekly, 5 February 1960, p. 212.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

the President, who maintained at a January 26 press conference that Gates had been totally misinterpreted on Capitol Hill.³¹

Gates' retort and Eisenhower's defense did little, however, to quell the debate in Congress, particularly because its members continued to receive testimony that seemed quite to the contrary--from other executive branch officials, for that matter. A January 26 Senate Armed Services Committee meeting, at which Air Force Secretary Dudley C. Sharp and Air Force Chief of Staff Thomas D. White testified, prompted Chairman Richard Russell to comment how "woefully behind [we are] in this missile program." The following day Russell's fellow committee member, Stuart Symington, released a 2000 word statement accusing the Administration of balancing the budget at the expense of American defense.³² The February 5 edition of Congressional Quarterly Weekly also reported Senator Henry Jackson as saying that CIA Director Allen Dulles had testified before the Joint Senate Preparedness Subcommittee and Aeronautical and Space Sciences Committee that the Soviets had both a qualitative and quantitative lead in missile development. Furthermore, Air Force General Thomas Powers, Commander of SAC, apparently had painted an even grimmer picture by testifying that the Soviets would soon have such a lead that SAC would

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

be destroyed with one single blow.³³ Once again the White House tried its best at damage control, realizing the potential power of the alleged missile gap as a *political* issue: on February 1, Secretary Gates told a Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee that Powers was wrong; and, during a February 3 press conference, the President accused Powers of being "parochial." Lyndon Johnson did call Powers back to the Senate on February 2, but Powers continued to stand behind his earlier assertion.³⁴ The administration's efforts were to no avail; they were continuously undermined by its own membership.

The second week of February proved to be an even more volatile one on Capitol Hill, and the partisan rhetoric on this issue was clearly more dramatic. During a February 5 House Space Committee meeting, Pennsylvania Republican James G. Fulton charged that "the missile issue had been made a political football by Democratic presidential aspirants"--a charge that Congressional Quarterly Weekly mentioned was aimed at both Johnson and Symington.³⁵ Fulton's accusation induced an ardent rejoinder from House Majority Leader John McCormack: "Anytime we Democrats don't agree with the Administration on defense we're accused of talking politics. I think you're getting on dangerous

³³ Ibid. One should also remember that the Gaither Committee report had also stressed the potential danger of Soviet ICBM capability for the survival of SAC, although it had did not provide precise figures about what it would take actually to destroy SAC. In a sense, therefore, Senators were not receiving totally new information but just that which was more alarming. See the Gaither Committee Report, pp. 16-18.

³⁴ Congressional Quarterly Weekly, 5 February 1960, p. 212.

³⁵ Congressional Quarterly Weekly, 12 February 1960, p. 240.

ground when you impugn the motives of anyone who questions defense policies."³⁶ What McCormack was implying was that national security was the central aspect of the national interest and that Congress had as much responsibility for its proper definition and implementation as the White House. Symington also continued to push the Administration further in a February 8 statement. He reported "that the [CIA] had estimated the Soviets would have a greater, not smaller, edge in long-range missiles over the next two years than had been estimated in 1959," and "threatened to reveal the true percentage figures unless the Administration admitted the outlook had worsened."³⁷

Symington's statement sparked a counterattack by the Republican National Committee on February 9. In its publication, "Battle Lines", The RNC claimed that Symington would be committing "an act of total reckless irresponsibility" by releasing any such data, and that "it [was] the responsibility of the Democratic leadership to see that no such information reache[d] his hands."³⁸ Yet, as Congressional Quarterly Weekly reported, Symington apparently had gained his inside information independently and directly from the Air Force, and not from Senate hearings. As a result, there was very little the Democratic leadership--or anyone else, for that matter--could do to control what Symington actually did with

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

that data.³⁹ There is no evidence, moreover, that the leadership was ever truly upset with Symington's tactics anyway, no matter what his political motives were at that point. The Democratic leadership would have had to have been frustrated with Symington in its own right even to begin thinking about the punitive measures that were being deemed necessary by the Republicans, and that just was not the case. Again, did not the Democrats have as much responsibility concerning the protection of the national interest as the Republicans?

Both sides of this partisan debate were frustrated further when the Republicans' party leader, President Eisenhower, declared in a February 11 press conference that he refused to participate in this partisan battle; he cited his unrivaled military service and his impending retirement from public office as elements that necessarily demanded his staying above the fray. In fact, he argued that he already had made the Administration's position clear, and if the Democrats did not respect his record and current position as ample qualifications for following his leadership on this issue (that there was no missile gap), then essentially that was their problem. He, however, was not going to be swayed from his stance.⁴⁰ Eisenhower's inability and unwillingness to substantiate the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ The public record of the Eisenhower press conference on 11 February 1960 can be found in the Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1960-1961 (Washington, DC: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Record Services, 1961), pp. 167-8, & pp. 170-1. The 12 February 1960 addition of the Congressional Quarterly Weekly, p. 240, provided a good summary of Eisenhower's remarks. As will be discussed later in this study, Eisenhower's position was based on data being collected under the heavily guarded U-2 reconnaissance program. Obviously, he could not reveal his source publicly because of national security considerations and the safety of the U-2 program.

administration's position more specifically essentially cost the Republicans their biggest, most qualified, and most reputable advocate; yet, he also had couched his refusal to participate in terms that were nearly impossible for the Democrats to surmount.⁴¹ Basically, while the Republicans did lose in a certain sense, the Democratic gains were also limited. The debate as a whole did lose, however, the one person who could have definitively laid to rest the missile gap allegations, and because of that loss the partisan rhetoric and accusations continued for yet another week.

Stuart Symington declared publicly on February 14 that the Administration had deliberately misled the American public on national defense issues and, thus, the national interest; this, in turn, raised the ire of the supposedly apolitical President, who charged in a February 17 press conference that Symington's accusation was "despicable."⁴² Yet Symington repeated the same allegation on the Senate floor on February 19. On February 21, newly announced Democratic presidential candidate, John Kennedy, entered the rhetorical debate, but he seemingly tried to find a balance between Symington's harshness and stridency and Eisenhower's ostensible non-involvement. According to the Congressional Quarterly Weekly, Kennedy maintained "that the President's reports were made in

⁴¹ Congressional Quarterly Weekly, 12 February 1960, p. 240. Also, McGeorge Bundy, in Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years (New York: Random House, Inc., 1988), pp. 339-340, discussed Eisenhower's rejection of partisanship during the missile gap controversy. Bundy strongly suggested, moreover, that Eisenhower's relative silence actually lent itself to the almost self-perpetuating nature of the debate and, therefore, the issue as well.

⁴² Congressional Quarterly Weekly, 26 February 1960, p. 305.

good faith but that it was difficult to make accurate estimates of Soviet strength." He continued by arguing that "in these dangerous times we should err on the side of safety" and mentioned that he personally advocated a "greater effort than this Administration seems willing to undertake."⁴³ Kennedy was yet another Democrat who was publicly pressing a Republican administration on an issue that, because of national security concerns, it could not adequately defend. Yet those same national security considerations also necessarily caused it to be a powerful political issue for the American electorate and, in turn, a useful rhetorical tool for the Democratic party in its attempt to challenge successfully the incumbent Republican White House.

What is particularly interesting about the missile gap controversy is that the issue was used by the Democrats when it could garner the most public attention. When Congress was heavily involved in investigating military preparedness, particularly for budgeting purposes, the issue was at the forefront of the debate in the media. Cold War tensions naturally made it a very sellable issue for the media as well. Yet once the Congressional hearings were completed in March 1960, the missile gap issue, as part of the larger debate about American power and prestige in the international system, died down until the presidential campaign heated up in the summer and fall of 1960--another period when the American public and the national media would indeed focus on national issues.

⁴³ Ibid.

What is even more surprising, however, is that despite the volatile rhetoric on Capitol Hill (not only in 1960, but from Sputnik forward) Congress never added drastically to the defense budgets during this period, although there were moderate funding increases in the Administration's requests.⁴⁴ The lack of major increases leaves one questioning how committed the Democrats actually were to correcting the alleged problem that had them in such a frenzy--although correcting the problem certainly would have been much more complicated than articulating the problem, especially considering Eisenhower's profound resistance to major budget increases. It is hard to deny, however, that the Democrats seemed very interested in using the issue for the greatest political gains, at the most appropriate times, in a far broader political game. That game would undoubtedly involve other equally or perhaps more important domestic questions, such as education, civil rights, unemployment, and health care. Yet defense issues could be mixed in as well so that a well-rounded national party agenda could be shaped and, ultimately, a national challenge be mounted to overcome their Republican counterparts. While it is nearly impossible to recreate exactly any decision making process, the realm of political motives is especially difficult because it is so easy to hide political motives behind legitimate institutional responsibilities and procedures. The evidence provided here certainly suggests that pure politics played at least a partial role in the Congressional Democrats' approach to the missile gap controversy in the late 1950s, even if that issue was most often

⁴⁴ Aliano, pp. 59-60; and, Gaddis, pp. 184-86.

addressed within the confines of the appropriations and oversight authority that is vested in the institution by the Constitution. As a result, the Congressional Democrats were very much in line with national party headquarters--a very interesting standpoint when one remembers the position that the Congressional leadership had taken in 1957 concerning the national party's influence in agenda setting and defining and implementing the national interest at the national level.

The Intelligence Data Puzzle

The Comparative Military Strength Question on Capitol Hill

It is eminently fair to question and criticize the Democratic Party, the various military sectors (particularly the Air Force), and Democratic members of Congress (especially Johnson, Symington, and Kennedy), for pursuing an issue for parochial, political gains. However, their assertions concerning the missile gap and the broader question about American power and prestige were based on information that was, in many respects, very much beyond their control--that is, the confusing and contradictory intelligence data that dominated this period. Inaccurate and ill-defined intelligence on operational Soviet missile systems and Soviet production capability and progress--often articulated by various sectors of the executive branch itself--necessarily allowed the Democratic Party and Congressional Democrats to question legitimately the Eisenhower administration's national defense strategy, and, thus, its interpretation of the national interest. Even when the Administration began to downsize previous estimates, which in

turn provide a more positive view of the United States' position vis-a-vis the Soviet Union, the multiplicity of data essentially allowed various actors to pick and choose among data depending upon what they believed--or wanted to believe--was true.

The seeds for this intelligence data puzzle were planted during Defense Secretary McElroy's testimony before Lyndon Johnson's military preparedness subcommittee in late 1957 and early 1958. McElroy presented a very strong and sound picture of the overall American military position at that time and clear evidence of American superiority in long-range bombers, the chief strategic weapons system of the day.⁴⁵ Yet when McElroy was questioned in subsequent hearings about the specifics of the missile race, he was unwilling to concede American superiority. Instead, he maintained that he had no position concerning United States' missile development relative to the Soviet Union's, but that the United States "must accelerate our programs in order to stay ahead if we are ahead, and to get ahead if we are not ahead."⁴⁶ McElroy seemed to suggest that intelligence was not providing a clear answer on this particular issue, and it is hardly surprising that Lyndon Johnson and Stuart Symington took this opportunity to initiate a debate about American-Soviet comparative military strength, which

⁴⁵ Desmond Ball, Politics and Force Levels: The Strategic Missile Program of the Kennedy Administration (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p.6. Also see Edgar M. Bottome, The Missile Gap: A Study of the Formulation of Military and Political Policy (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971), pp. 51-61, for a good overview of the preparedness subcommittee hearings.

⁴⁶ Bottome, p. 56.

also incorporated the missile gap question and a rather intense numbers game. It is somewhat ironic that the Republican administration provided that opening itself and would, in turn, be forced to spend the succeeding two years trying to close the debate.

Newspaper columnist Joseph Alsop brought the comparative military strength question into the public realm with a series of articles in the summer of 1958. In an August article, Alsop predicted that the Soviets would hold a 2000 to 130 advantage in ICBMS by 1963, numbers which were believed to be quite close to the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) at that time.⁴⁷ Alsop's article precipitated some intense rhetoric in the Senate, including a strong floor speech by Senator John Kennedy on 14 August 1958.⁴⁸ But the picture would become even more confusing in early 1959, and it was Administration actors who precipitated the confusion.

Secretary McElroy's January 1959 secret background briefing for the Senate, in which he supposedly predicted a three to one Soviet ICBM advantage by the early 1960s, was apparently based on early 1959 CIA estimates. Those estimates, which were much lower than the 1958 NIE, suggested that the ICBM

⁴⁷ Ball, p. 7. It is interesting that Alsop's estimate was given so much weight or that it was believed that Alsop was approximating the NIE. In a memorandum to President Kennedy in early 1963, Robert McNamara suggested that the 1958 NIE projected Soviet ICBMs at 1000--that is, 1000 less than Alsop's prediction.

See: Memorandum, Robert McNamara to the President, 4 March 1963, NSF: Subjects: Missile Gap, 2/63-5/63, Box 298, JFKL.

⁴⁸ Kennedy speech was entirely devoted to the missile gap issue, and it was later reprinted in a book published by his 1960 presidential campaign committee: John F. Kennedy, *The Strategy of Peace*, ed. Allan Nevins, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), pp. 33-45. This particular speech will be discussed in more detail later in this study.

score by 1961 would still favor the Soviets: USSR-100 to 300, U.S.-80 to 100; by 1962: USSR-500, U.S.-100 to 300.⁴⁹ What complicated intelligence matters further in 1959 was that two NIE were prepared under two different premises: one based on an "orderly" Soviet ICBM production program (a low prediction); another based on the Soviets pursuing a "crash" program (a high prediction).⁵⁰ Later in 1964, then-Defense Secretary Robert McNamara confirmed that in 1959 the "orderly" prediction for Soviet ICBMs was 350 and the "crash" prediction was 640; those projections were for mid-1963.⁵¹ The primary problem with two sets of estimates was that it seemed to imply that both were equally legitimate and that a policy maker, in turn, could justifiably use either one of them. This little twist naturally added to the existing confusion in the intelligence puzzle.

In his scholarly analysis of the Kennedy administration's strategic missile program, Desmond Ball has argued that despite the rather grave intelligence projections in 1959, most observers at that time still concluded that American military security was sound. The real concern for many analysts, according to Ball, was the security of the Strategic Air Command and the fact that even very limited Soviet ICBM production--combined with limited American production--could quickly negate SAC's effectiveness in the case of a Soviet surprise attack:

⁴⁹ Bottome, p. 103.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 127, 184.

⁵¹ McNamara's confirmation of these figures occurred in his February 1964 testimony before a Joint Session of the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense. As cited by Ball, p. 9.

Neither side as yet [in early 1959] had an operational ICBM, but the United States had about 1,800 long-range and medium-range nuclear-armed bombers stationed within range of Russia, while Russia had only 150 long-range bombers capable of reaching the United States. These bombers would, however, be vulnerable to a surprise attack. At this time [SAC] had only about 44 major bases, with 29 overseas, and since it was assumed that it would take two to six Soviet ICBMs to destroy the effectiveness of an air base, it looked as though SAC could be negated by a surprise Soviet missile attack in the period of maximum danger, 1962-63.⁵²

Even the most conservative estimates gave the Soviets a quantitative advantage, and both the Gaither Committee Report and the Rockefeller Brothers Report had previously expressed grave doubts about SAC's vulnerability.⁵³ Again, the real concern for the Administration's critics--and especially the Air Force, which controlled SAC--was not the fact that the Soviets would actually have ICBMs in their arsenal; rather, it was the damage those ICBMs could do to the American counterforce capability if the comparative ratio was in the Soviet's favor and if action was not taken to protect that capability more effectively. One can, therefore, understand why intelligence data, which were the only real predictors of Soviet capability, were such a crucial aspect in this debate--and such a volatile one as well.

In mid- to late 1959, unconfirmed reports were apparently implying difficulties in the Soviet ICBM testing and development programs; furthermore, suggestions were being made that the Soviet economy was struggling under the

⁵² Ibid., p. 9. Also see Bottome, pp. 103-5.

⁵³ Gaither Committee Report, pp. 16-18, and, Rockefeller Brothers Report, pp. 21-2.

economic demands of its missile program.⁵⁴ In January 1960, new Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates subsequently testified before the House Appropriations Committee that the Soviets had undertaken an "orderly" production program, and he indicated that earlier projections of even this "low" estimate had been too high. He, in turn, reduced the low estimate for mid-1963 Soviet ICBMs, and the new NIE released in February 1960 (it was actually the annual NIE for 1959) apparently reflected this downward revision.⁵⁵ What is particularly interesting about the February 1960 NIE was that for the first time intelligence concerning Soviet ICBMs was broken down into two categories: ICBMs for inventory--which would come to mean "capabilities"; and, ICBMs on launchers--which would come to mean "intentions".⁵⁶ Gates testimony was based on the "on launchers" category, as was Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Nathan Twining's 13 January 1960 testimony before the same committee. In a memorandum to President Kennedy in March 1963, Robert McNamara explained the reasoning behind this important modification:

⁵⁴ Edgar M. Bottome, The Balance of Terror: Nuclear Weapons and the Illusion of Security, 1945-1985 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 52.

⁵⁵ See Gates testimony before the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee: U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, Department of Defense Appropriations for 1961. Hearings before the Subcommittee on Defense Appropriations, 86th Cong., 2nd ses., 1960, pp. 22-25. Also, Bottome, The Balance of Terror, p. 52.

Gates reconfirmed this position in March 1960 during the Joint hearings of the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee and the Senate Aeronautical and Space Sciences Committee. See: U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services and Aeronautical and Space Sciences, Missiles, Space, and other Major Defense Matters. Hearings before the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee in Conjunction with the Committee on Aeronautical and Space Sciences, 86th Cong., 2nd ses., 1960, pp. 441-43.

⁵⁶ In his 4 March 1963 memorandum to Kennedy, Robert McNamara suggested that the NIE released in February 1960 estimated the number of Soviet ICBM operational launchers as 250-350.

Change to include "on launcher" data was based on the belief of the intelligence community that by early 1960 the Soviets had acquired an initial operational capability [launchers] and that the development program was a useful estimative target....[It was also based] on recognition of the fact that the construction of operational launchers, rather than the buildup of missile inventories, was the pacesetter factor in any deployment program, as well as the best measure of salvo capability.⁵⁷

While this alteration in the reporting of data was designed to clarify further the comparative missile strength question, it actually precipitated the exact opposite.

As was discussed earlier, Lyndon Johnson's reaction to Gates' testimony was that it was dangerous and incredibly difficult to try to decipher the intentions of the Kremlin, and other members of Congress--as well as critics outside of the government--thought it was safer to think in terms of theoretical capabilities rather than intentions. Yet, even more significantly, the presentation of two data categories had a similar effect as the preparation of the high and low estimates in early 1959; it seemed to imply that one could choose between the two, and the "renewed intensive controversy...was described in the press as the 'missile gap'" and the "new method of working intelligence estimates--intentions VERSUS [emphasis added] capabilities."⁵⁸ Even though the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Arleigh Burke, tried to clarify the Administration's position before the joint hearings of the Senate Armed Services and Aeronautical Sciences Committees, saying that intelligence data "were based on Soviet missile

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

production rather than on the maximum capacity of the Soviet Union to produce missiles," his efforts had little effect.⁵⁹

Why, even after two well-respected, high-level administration officials presented a much less threatening view of Soviet missile strength that was seemingly evaluated on much more legitimate intelligence data, did the Administration's critics remain unconvinced--and, as a result, continue to promote the alleged missile gap? Many scholars place most of the blame on the intelligence situation itself and on those who were responsible for collecting, interpreting, and disseminating that information.⁶⁰ There clearly was a plethora of data and little consensus on what it meant. Within the Eisenhower administration in 1960 the Air Force and SAC officials refused to accept the new intelligence figures and continuously stressed the strategic vulnerability of the American retaliatory forces. In a January 1960 speech in New York, SAC's commanding officer, General Thomas S. Power, "claimed that the 100 U.S. nuclear launching bases [in the United States and Europe]...could be virtually destroyed by a force of only 300 ballistic missiles [IRBMs (intermediate range ballistic missile) and ICBMs]...and that the Soviet Union could accumulate this number before the United States had developed an adequate warning system against missile attacks."⁶¹ In a 31 May 1963 memorandum to the then-Assistant

⁵⁹ Ball, p. 10.

⁶⁰ For instance, see Ball, p. 10; Bottome, The Balance of Terror, p. 52-3; and Bundy, 342-354.

⁶¹ Ball, p. 11.

Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Paul Nitze, Defense Special Assistant Lawrence McQuade maintained that despite the fact that the NIE released in February 1960 reduced the estimates of actual Soviet missiles on launchers, there was still little room for comfort. Those estimates, said McQuade, "left open the possibility of an effective Soviet missile attack destroying our vulnerable SAC bases, particularly since we believed that improvements in the accuracy, reliability and CEP [Circular Error Probability] of Soviet ICBMs had sharply reduced the number required to attack our target system effectively."⁶² McQuade argued further that another NIE released in August 1960 clearly indicated that "the judgements of the intelligence community on the Soviet ICBM capability were still based on insufficient direct evidence."⁶³ It is perfectly understandable, therefore, why the intelligence picture remained rather ambiguous.

There continued to be, moreover, a range of estimates about when the Soviets would have the ICBM capability for destroying SAC, each of which garnered the advocacy of various sectors of the executive branch. The worst case scenario (called Program B), which "was adjudged to provide the Soviet Union with high assurance of being able to damage severely most of the SAC operational bases in an initial salvo by about mid-1961," was supported by the Air Force. Program A predicted that damage point to be late 1961--a judgement

⁶² Memorandum, Lawrence McQuade to Paul Nitze, 31 May 1963, NSF: Missile Gap, 2/63-5/63, Box 298, JFKL.

⁶³ Ibid.

advanced by the CIA. Between Program A and B, but on the high side closer to Program B, stood the State Department, the Defense Department, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The best case scenario--Program C-- estimated mid-1963 as the critical point, a position maintained by the Army and Navy.⁶⁴ Even though the intelligence community had judged in both the "intentions" and "capabilities" estimates that the Soviets probably had not undertaken a crash program and that Soviet motives were probably based on the deterrent value of ICBMs, the fact that the community "did not have [precise] evidence of Soviet plans for production and operational deployment of ICBMs" allowed the missile gap myth to remain in the air until the early 1960s.⁶⁵ The fact that the intelligence community and different governmental agencies provided ranges of estimates only helped to exacerbate an already murky picture.

According to McQuade, it was not until mid-1961--the middle of what had been thought of in 1957 as the 'critical period'--that more precise information concerning Soviet ICBM production and operational deployment, combined with important information on Soviet IRBM and MRBM (medium range ballistic missile) programs, became available:

Though we were still uncertain about the number of Soviet ICBMs [in the NIE released in June 1961], it was clear (a) that the Soviets had not made the choices and taken the actions since 1957 which would have produced for them the best possible strategic relationship vis-a-vis the United States for the critical period, and

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid. Eisenhower's CIA Director, Allen Dulles, made this same assertion. See Dulles' The Craft of Intelligence (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 165.

(b)...the U.S. retaliatory forces had achieved a greater degree of survivability than it seemed to expect in 1957.⁶⁶

What made the problem even more difficult was that several administration officials--specifically, Eisenhower and Nixon--seemed to be basing their statements on sources other than those outlined above.⁶⁷ In light of this incredibly confusing intelligence picture, it is hardly surprising that the missile gap persisted as a legitimate question of the national interest (legitimate, that is, in the eyes of the American public) until the early 1960s.

The Importance of the U-2 Intelligence Data

Probably the only means for effectively counteracting the missile gap proponents would have been to release the sensitive data that the Eisenhower administration had collected from the U-2 reconnaissance overflights in the late 1950s and 1960. In his memoirs of the White House years, President Eisenhower emphasized the value of the U-2 program, particularly with regard to the missile gap issue:

During the four years of its operation, the U-2 program produced intelligence of critical importance to the United States. Perhaps as important as the positive information--what the Soviets DID--was the negative information it produced--what the Soviets DID NOT. Intelligence gained from this source provided proof that the horrors of the alleged "bomber gap" and the later "missile gap" were nothing more than imaginative creations of irresponsibility. U-2 information deprived Khrushchev of the most powerful weapon of the Communist conspiracy--international blackmail--usable only as long

⁶⁶ Memorandum, Lawrence McQuade to Paul Nitze, 31 May 1963.

⁶⁷ Ball, p. 11.

as the Soviets could exploit the ignorance and resulting fears of the free world.⁶⁸

While Eisenhower's memoirs may be looked upon as a grand defense of his administration's actions, others have also confirmed the vital nature of U-2 intelligence in shaping Eisenhower's official position on the missile gap controversy.⁶⁹ Yet the success of the U-2 program necessarily demanded secrecy; there was no way that U-2 data could be accurately reported to the public in any sort of specific detail because of the very nature of the program. In a rather ironic twist, however, it was in the very name of national security that the Republican administration essentially found itself incapable of convincing the rest of the American government, as well as the American public, that American national security was safely intact. In turn, the Administration's opponents were able to make effective use of the other varied intelligence data to uphold the alleged missile gap as a political issue and to question the Administration's handling of the national interest. Even after the U-2 flights became public knowledge in May 1960, when the Soviet Union actually shot down Gary Powers' plane,⁷⁰ the partisan politics of a general election season essentially allowed the

⁶⁸ Eisenhower, p. 547.

⁶⁹ See: Bottome, The Missile Gap, pp. 135-6; Bundy, pp. 338-9; Gaddis, pp. 186-8; Theodore C. Sorensen, Kennedy (New York: Harper & Row, Inc., 1965), pp. 610-13; and, Ball, p. 15. Ball based his analysis of the importance of the U-2 data on a January 1973 interview with Dr. James R. Killian, who had been president of MIT and then appointed to be Eisenhower's Special Assistant for Science and Technology.

⁷⁰ Desmond Ball has argued that the administration's intelligence estimates and defense policies should have gained considerable credibility because of the May 1960 revelation, but they just did not. See Ball, p. 15.

missile gap controversy to remain in the forefront because, again, specificity was necessarily ruled out in the name of national security.

The National Interest & Leadership, and the 1960 Campaign

The Democratic Party and Its 1960 Platform

The 1960 presidential election was one of the most closely contested elections in American history. In the popular vote, the winner and loser were separated by a mere three-tenths of one percent--an actual margin of less than 115,000 votes out of about 69 million cast.⁷¹ While John F. Kennedy's victory margin in the Electoral College was far more commanding (303-219), many of those who have studied this particular election have suggested consistently that the switching of a small number of votes in the College or the switching of a minute percentage of popular votes to Richard Nixon in a few vital areas could have drastically changed the election's outcome. While not a professional election analyst, Theodore Sorensen did neatly summarize this widely accepted analysis in 1965:

If the Electoral College members from Louisiana, Georgia, South Carolina and the rest of Alabama had decided to join their six Alabama and eight Mississippi colleagues in voting for [Senator] Harry Byrd [of Virginia] (and this had been a real threat in each of these states, defeated in Louisiana, for example, by only one vote on the hundred-member state committee)--or if fewer than 7,000 people in Illinois, Nevada, New Mexico, and Hawaii had voted for Nixon instead of Kennedy--neither one of them would have received a majority of the electoral vote, [and] the election would have been thrown into the House of Representatives....If fewer than 12,000

⁷¹ The total voter turnout was 64.5 percent of eligible voters--one of the largest in recent history.

people strategically located in the above four states plus Missouri had voted for Nixon instead of Kennedy, Nixon would have received an electoral vote majority and become the next President.⁷²

No educated scholar would suggest that the Democrats--and John Kennedy--won the 1960 presidential election because of their position on national security and defense. Yet one can safely argue that by keeping the national security and defense issues (the missile gap, for example, although not it exclusively) in the public arena--particularly in more general terms such as, American power, prestige, and leadership in the international sphere--John F. Kennedy and the Democrats also raised and underlined existing doubts about Richard Nixon's ability to define and implement effectively what was in the American national interest.

The Democratic Party (both in its presidential wing and in Congress) had set itself up perfectly for the 1960 presidential campaign, particularly on defining national security and defense in terms of the national interest. After the October 1957 Sputnik launching, annual hearings on the defense budget and the ongoing hearings on national defense preparedness and the space programs had afforded the Congressional leadership and key Congressional party members a stage for voicing opposition to the Republican approach to national defense. Interestingly, some of the Democrats who were most outspoken on Capitol Hill about defense issues--such as Lyndon Johnson, Stuart Symington, and John Kennedy--turned out to be the leading contenders for the Democratic Party's 1960 presidential

⁷² Sorensen, p. 219.

nomination. Because of the public's seemingly keen sensitivity to the national defense debate, the Congressional discussions also offered fertile ground for media attention, which could only help to accentuate the issue in the public arena.

As previously discussed, the Democratic National Party, under the direction of Chairman Paul Butler, reorganized itself after the 1956 election to provide the party with a formal, non-Congressional voice (the DAC) to oppose the Republican White House. As Cornelius Cotter and Bernard Hennessy pointed out in their 1964 study of the national party committee, "[t]he intent of the Advisory Council's managers was to keep in the forefront the political issues which they thought would produce the best pro-Democrat and anti-Republican impressions."⁷³ Moreover, between January 1957 and June 1960 a plethora of party position pamphlets and statements were published under DAC auspices, including the Nitze-Acheson pamphlet on national security and defense policy that was issued on Pearl Harbor Day, 1959. Several scholars have noted that a 1950 American Political Science Report had recommended that a national party council, such as the DAC, should "...propose a preliminary draft of the party platform to the National Convention [and] interpret the platform in relation to current problems."⁷⁴ The DAC's publication of position papers and pamphlets

⁷³ Cotter and Hennessy, p. 220.

⁷⁴ Committee on Political Parties, American Political Science Association, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System," American Political Science Review 44, Supplement (September 1950), p. 43.

It is generally accepted that the APSA's report served as the modus operandi for the DAC. Cotter and Hennessy noted that Charles Tyroler, the DAC's executive director, admitted in a letter to Hennessy that the report is "generally believed to have furnished the framework" for the DAC. Moreover, Paul Butler apparently referred to the report's recommendations on numerous occasions in

had, by early 1960, helped the party to meet those two goals, and this was especially true in the case of national security and defense policy.⁷⁵ In February 1960, Chester Bowles was chosen to chair the Democratic Party's Platform Committee, and he spent the next several months working with DNC staff members on developing the party's platform based on Advisory Council documents and testimony gathered at pre-convention hearings, which had been conducted around the country.⁷⁶ It is significant to this particular study that the first substantive item in the Democratic Party's 1960 platform was national security and defense policy.

The foundation for the Democrats' platform position on national security and defense was that the United States had lost its superiority in defense vis-a-vis its chief adversary--the Soviet Union--and, in turn, the respect of the international community as well. The alleged missile gap, the primary symbol of that fall from dominance, was blamed directly on the apathetic Republican policies of the mid- and late 1950s. The beginning of the Democrats' statement on national defense was, indeed, dramatic, urgent, and far-reaching in its tone:

When the Democratic Administration left office in 1953, the United States was the pre-eminent power in the world. Most free nations

his effort to enhance the DAC's effectiveness. See Cotter and Hennessy, pp. 214-15. See James Sundquist, p. 391, who also recognized the influence of the APSA's report on the emergence of the Democratic Party's activism in the 1950s. Leon D. Epstein, in Political Parties in the American Mold (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), pp. 33-5, provides one of the best and most succinct discussions of the particulars of the APSA report.

⁷⁵ Aliano, p. 220.

⁷⁶ Chester Bowles, Promises To Keep: My Years in Public Life 1941-1969 (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 289-91.

had confidence in our will and our ability to carry out our commitments to the common defense. The Republican Administration has lost that position of pre-eminence. Over the past 7 1/2 years, our military power has steadily declined relative to that of the Russians and the Chinese and their satellites. This is not a partisan election-year charge [however]. It has been persistently made by high officials of the Republican Administration itself. Before Congressional committees they have testified that the Communists will have a dangerous lead in intercontinental missiles through 1963 [the missile gap]--and that the Republican Administration has no plans to catch up.⁷⁷

Furthermore, the Democrats argued that the United States was losing the race in space research and in limited, conventional war tactics; again, the Republicans had been readily admitting their losses and yet seemed unwilling to do anything about it.⁷⁸

Not surprisingly, the Democratic platform projected major changes in national defense under a new *Democratic* administration to ensure American national security and the vital interests of American allies; subsequently, the United States' position of dominance would once again be restored. According to the platform, a Democratic administration would "recast our military capacity" and provide diversified, balanced and mobile forces "to deter both general and limited war."⁷⁹ In order "[t]o recover from the errors of the past 7 1/2 years," the Democrats specifically pledged to re-build American nuclear power so that a strong counterforce capability was in place; such a capability was generally

⁷⁷ Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson, ed., National Party Platforms: 1840-1964 (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1966), pp. 574-75.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 574.

considered to be essential to effective deterrence. Moreover, nuclear strength would be balanced by upgraded and more flexible conventional forces, as well as intensified research and development in both the nuclear and conventional fields, to ensure the ability of the United States to respond to all kinds of aggression and at all levels of intensity.⁸⁰ Clearly the lessons of Korea, Indochina, Hungary, the Suez, Berlin, and Laos had not gone unnoticed by the Democrats. The Democrats' platform also promised a reexamination of the American military organization and a review of American treaties and alliances to insure further that both could meet the defense challenges of the 1960s.⁸¹ All of these measures combined allowed the Democrats to "pledge [their] will, energies and resources to oppose Communist aggression."⁸² Ultimately, the American national interest would be protected. By nominating John F. Kennedy as their presidential candidate in July 1960, the Democrats chose a candidate who not only was willing to endorse the Party's platform, but one who had continuously demonstrated his affinity with the Party's national security and defense position. As a result, Kennedy and the Democrats could work in conjunction to promote their perception of the nation's interest and who should be in the authoritative position to define and implement that interest.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 575.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

John F. Kennedy's Nuclear Strategy: The Rhetoric and the Intellectual Context

As was alluded to earlier, Senator John Kennedy was one of the numerous members of Congress involved in the heated debate about the Eisenhower administration's defense policies in the latter half of the 1950s. As early as 1956, he had warned that "the United States might well be behind the Soviet Union" in missile capability, and "[a] year later, he stated that if present trends were not reversed by 1960" that "this nation will have lost its superiority in strategic air power."⁸³ On 14 August 1958, Kennedy gave an explosive and highly critical speech on the Senate floor concerning the missile gap; it was in direct response to an August 1958 article by Joseph Alsop in which Alsop predicted the supposed huge advantage the Soviets would have in operational ICBMs in the missile gap years. Fred Kaplan noted that the speech's "impact was so potent that Republican Senator Homer Capehart of Indiana threatened to clear the galleries [of the Senate] on the grounds that Kennedy was disclosing information harmful to the national security."⁸⁴

In that speech, which was later included in a book that was published by his 1960 campaign committee, Kennedy proclaimed that the United States was on the edge of "losing the power foundation that has long stood behind our basic military and diplomatic strategy"--that is, nuclear power.⁸⁵ He argued forcefully

⁸³ Kaplan, p. 248.

⁸⁴ Ibid. Also see Kennedy, The Strategy of Peace, p. 33.

⁸⁵ Kennedy, p. 33.

that the United States eventually would be without a credible retaliatory capability and, therefore, the door would be open for further Soviet aggression, tilting the world balance of power in favor of the Soviets. He cited other experts who shared his concern about the missile gap and American national power and prestige:

We are rapidly approaching that dangerous period which General [James] Gavin and others have called the "gap" or the "missile-lag period"-- a period, in the words of General Gavin, "in which our own offensive and defensive missile capabilities will lag so far behind those of the Soviets as to place us in a position of great peril."⁸⁶

Kennedy called for immediate action to ensure a credible deterrent to a Soviet first-strike, and he strongly urged a reevaluation of the American military position in relation to its commitments around the world. "Unfortunately, our past reliance upon massive retaliation has stultified the development of new policy," he said.⁸⁷ He sharply criticized the Eisenhower administration for apparently placing fiscal interests ahead of national security by fitting military requirements and strategy *into* the budget instead of shaping the budget *around* those requirements. Kennedy further noted that Eisenhower's emphasis on economic strength had allowed the United States to lose "the decisive years when we could

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 34. What is meant by "a position of great peril" is a surprise, first-strike attack by the Soviets. Kennedy was citing Army Lt. General James Gavin's book, War and Peace in the Space Age, which had been published in 1958. Gavin had been a vocal Eisenhower administration critic during his tenure on the Army Staff in the mid-1950s, and he retired rather dramatically shortly after the Sputnik launching.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 37-8.

have maintained a lead against the Soviet Union in our missile capability."⁸⁸ He declared that not only was a credible second-strike capability essential, but that vast improvements in the conventional force structure were paramount to the American ability to deter and fight limited war. In essence, he concluded that these efforts would "not provide all the answers for the future but [might] help to assure that there would be a future."⁸⁹ The similarities between this particular Kennedy speech in 1958 and the Democrats' 1960 platform are rather obvious and, perhaps, somewhat uncanny. More importantly, it is clear that both Kennedy and the party agreed that the Republicans had mishandled the implementation of the national interest. Kennedy had set himself up perfectly for the line he would toe as the Democrats' presidential candidate in 1960.

Both Kennedy and the Party were arguing that Eisenhower's "New Look" had directly caused significant cutbacks in conventional manpower and weaponry, had limited research and development funding for both nuclear and conventional weapons systems, and, of course, had precipitated the emergence of the missile gap. The United States, as a result, was faced with an 'all-or-nothing' approach to adversarial aggression. This meant that the United States essentially was left with two equally detestable choices: it would respond to aggression by using or threatening to use nuclear weapons and, thus, face the horrible consequences of a nuclear exchange; or, on the other hand, it could choose not to take any action

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 40-1.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

because it lacked the conventional means--and, in some minds, the nuclear means--and face the embarrassment and humiliation of not meeting previously negotiated commitments. The bottom line for both Kennedy and the Democratic Party was that American defense lacked the flexibility and the resources necessary for protecting the vital interests of the United States and its allies. Without those capabilities, American power and prestige, as well as its leadership position, would continue to be questioned in the international system. Very simply, in their view, the American national interest was at stake.

What Kennedy and the Democrats advocated instead was the maintenance of both strategic nuclear superiority--to ensure a credible retaliatory deterrent--and a strong conventional force capability. This new approach, which was in direct contrast to the Eisenhower-Republican massive retaliation strategy, was better known as "flexible response"; it involved increasing both the conventional and nuclear means needed to respond to any form of aggression at the appropriate level, in any location, and at any time--while raising the nuclear threshold as well. The flexible response strategy is most often attributed to General Maxwell D. Taylor, who would become President Kennedy's chief military advisor and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In his 1960 book, The Uncertain Trumpet, Taylor articulated the importance of the flexible response strategy as follows:

The name suggests the need for a capability to react across the spectrum of possible challenges, for coping with anything from general atomic war to infiltrations and aggressions such as Laos and Berlin in 1959. The new strategy would recognize that it is just as

necessary to deter or win quickly a limited war as to deter a general war. Otherwise, the limited war which we cannot win quickly may result in our piecemeal attrition or involvement in an expanding conflict which may grow into a general war we cannot avoid.⁹⁰

By maintaining a large and strong conventional force, the United States would not have to rely on nuclear force to deter non-nuclear aggression. Yet a Soviet nuclear first-strike would also be deterred by more reliable and invulnerable American missiles; furthermore, the missile gap would be closed by proper defense budgeting and accelerated research and development of state-of-the-art nuclear weapons and warning systems.⁹¹

In his seminal work on American containment strategies in the post-World War II era, John Lewis Gaddis identified what flexible response advocates saw as two crucial benefits of this strategy in terms of American power and prestige in the international arena: a) the United States, as leader of the free world, would have the means to help maintain the balance of power in the international system while decreasing American and world dependency on the deterrent value of nuclear weapons; and, b) the American economy would be bolstered by the increased, more cost-effective military production and research and development.⁹² These were, of course, considered to be theoretical benefits; whether they would actually be realized is a quite different and debatable

⁹⁰ Maxwell D. Taylor, The Uncertain Trumpet (New York: Harper Brothers, 1960), p. 6-7.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63; also, see pp. 130-164 for an extensive examination of the programs that Taylor thought should be implemented under flexible response auspices.

⁹² Gaddis, pp. 203-4.

question. Nonetheless, the most fundamental and basic anticipation of the flexible response strategy was that it would finally free the United States from the 'all-or-nothing' approach of massive retaliation, and this was, in and of itself, a good enough justification for implementing a flexible response.

Bernard Brodie, often recognized as the first formal nuclear strategist,⁹³ clearly attributed John Kennedy's basic strategic ideas to the numerous strategists who were writing during Kennedy's tenure in the Senate (1952-1960), especially those who espoused limited nuclear and non-nuclear war.⁹⁴ Kennedy's understanding and use of James Gavin's War and Peace in the Space Age (1958) has already been addressed, yet there certainly was a plethora of writings on this subject. Brodie himself published an article in The Reporter in late 1954 about the limits of tactical nuclear weapons and the need for better conventional forces. In 1956, Professor William W. Kaufmann of Princeton's Center of International Studies (a former student and colleague of Brodie's at Yale and a classmate and friend of John Kennedy's at Choate) edited an anthology for Princeton; that volume, Military Policy and National Security, included numerous articles criticizing massive retaliation and a couple of his own essays on the limits of nuclear weapons and the importance of preparing for non-nuclear conflicts. Both

⁹³ Brodie wrote two chapters for and edited a 1946 Yale Institute of International Studies volume, called The Absolute Weapon, a scholarly anthology produced in direct response to the atomic explosions in August 1945. Fred Kaplan, p. 31, identified Brodie's chapters as "a pair of essays that would be heralded for many years as the first fully developed, sophisticated treatise on the subject of an appropriate military policy for the nuclear age, the first conception of nuclear deterrence." The first three chapters of Kaplan's The Wizards of Armageddon provide an enlightening account of Brodie's early years in the strategy field.

⁹⁴ Bernard Brodie, "The McNamara Phenomenon," World Politics 27 (July 1965), p. 677.

Robert Osgood's Limited War: A Challenge to American Strategy and Henry Kissinger's Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy were published in 1957 and both stressed the need to study and understand the various dimensions of limited war, which was to Osgood and Kissinger the military challenge of the future. In January 1959, Foreign Affairs printed Albert Wohlsetter's seminal piece, "The Delicate Balance of Terror," which discussed rather bluntly what he saw as troubling inadequacies in the West's approach to deterrence and the need to take proper action to lessen the possibility of general as well as limited war. The 1960 campaign year would include the publication of Herman Kahn's On Thermonuclear War, in which the public was introduced to Kahn's thought on controlled warfare and graduated responses to adversarial aggression, as well as Taylor's Uncertain Trumpet, which Brodie noted that Kennedy had read and endorsed.⁹⁵ Moreover, in 1960, B.H. Liddell Hart, a British soldier-statesman who defense scholar Lawrence Freedman has identified as "the intellectual father of contemporary theories of limited war,"⁹⁶ published Deterrence or Defense, his major work on limited non-nuclear war which John Kennedy reviewed favorably for Saturday Review in September 1960.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Lawrence Freedman, The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p. 97.

⁹⁷ John F. Kennedy, Review of Deterrence or Defense, by B.H. Liddell Hart, Saturday Review (3 September 1960), pp. 17-8.

Not only was Kennedy undoubtedly familiar with the scholarly dialogue about limited war and flexible response; it has been noted, moreover, that some of the academics--and others--who were advising his campaign (such as, Arthur Schlesinger, John Kenneth Galbraith, Paul Samuelson, Carl Kaysen, Jerome Wiesner, Paul Nitze, Gavin, and Kissinger) were themselves familiar with these discussions. More importantly, many of them had associations with RAND Corporation strategists, who were some of the most prominent proponents of this new approach to national security and defense.⁹⁸ In his provocative study on nuclear strategy, Fred Kaplan suggested that RAND was quite happy with the Democrats' 1960 choice for the presidency, even though RAND never had any direct contact with Kennedy himself:

John Kennedy was RAND's nearly ideal candidate--energetic, urbane, active and genuinely interested in bolstering national security. From his articles and speeches, he seemed familiar with the issues, and like the men of RAND, he opposed massive retaliation, favored the build-up of "limited war" forces, recognized the dangers of SAC vulnerability and the accompanying missile gap--or "deterrent gap."
Beginning late in 1959, on the firm condition that their involvement not be revealed to anyone outside the campaign, some RAND strategists...regularly passed along ideas and helped draft speeches for the Kennedy brigade.⁹⁹

While it is relatively simple to establish the intellectual context of Kennedy's national security position, it is nearly impossible to document the various

⁹⁸ Kaplan, p. 249-50; Sorensen, p. 118-19.

⁹⁹ Kaplan specifically mentioned Daniel Ellsberg, Alain Enthoven, and Harry Rowen (among others)--all of whom would become top civilian advisors on Robert McNamara's staff after the election. See Kaplan, p. 250.

influences on the Democratic Party's stance. Yet, because some of the same people who affected Kennedy also had strong ties to the Democratic Advisory Council--most notably Nitze and Galbraith--one can reasonably assume that they influenced the Party as well.

Merging the Missile Gap with the Question of National Power & Prestige

The alleged missile gap was the issue of the hour in the early part of 1960 as Congress prepared the FY 1961 defense budget. On the campaign trail, however, the issue tended to fall within the context of American power and prestige, which Candidate Kennedy consistently argued was on the decline because of eight years of Republican policies and leadership. The downing of the U-2 reconnaissance plane and the subsequent failure of the Eisenhower-Khrushchev Paris summit in May 1960 forced questions about American power, prestige, and leadership to the front pages. While Richard Nixon, the likely Republican nominee at that point, actually moved up in the polls immediately after these two events (49% of people polled chose Nixon to represent the United States in future summits compared with 37% who chose Kennedy),¹⁰⁰ Kennedy quickly went on the offensive. In mid-June, he gave a major foreign policy speech on the Senate floor. He charged the Eisenhower administration with woefully inadequate and weak foreign policy, and, in turn, presented a twelve-point program (which included a major defense appropriations increase) to address the

¹⁰⁰ Robert A. Divine, Foreign Policy and U.S. Presidential Elections: 1952-1960 (New York: New Viewpoint/Franklin Watts, Inc., 1974), p. 209.

Soviet challenge and to demonstrate his leadership ability in international affairs.¹⁰¹ It is hardly surprising that in his June 15 New York Times column James Reston suggested that Kennedy was preparing himself for his campaign against Nixon, who naturally would base his run for the presidency on his foreign policy expertise and leadership capability.¹⁰² Clearly, the tenor of the impending presidential campaign was already being set.

The Democrats were assisted further in bringing attention to the power and prestige question by New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, who, in his brief bid to unseat Richard Nixon for the Republican nomination, urged the Republicans to assert a more strident position on national security and defense in their platform. This would, in turn, foster a perception that the Republicans were strengthening the power and prestige of the nation as well, and, thus, make them less vulnerable to Democratic criticism in this sphere.¹⁰³ Rockefeller succeeded in pressuring Nixon and the Republicans to include language in the platform that emphasized the further development of an invulnerable second-strike capability, a commitment to modern, well-protected strategic missiles, and the production of "highly mobile and versatile forces...to deter or check local aggression and brush-

¹⁰¹ As reported in the New York Times, 15 June 1961, p. 1.

¹⁰² James Reston, "Kennedy Starts to Work on the Vice President," New York Times, 15 June 1960, p. 40.

¹⁰³ See Theodore H. White, The Making of the President, 1960 (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1962), pp. 180-88 and pp. 191-198, for a good discussion of Rockefeller's debate with Nixon and the Republican Party. This conflict was also played out in the New York Times on an almost daily basis during June and July 1960.

fire wars."¹⁰⁴ In this particular instance, some of the Republicans' platform language was very similar to that of the Democrats. Yet, the same Republican platform continued to endorse Eisenhower's "Long Pull", which necessarily demanded fiscal conservatism and the emphasis on the deterrent value of nuclear weapons; in turn, the platform was ultimately promoting the type of leadership that had been provided during the previous eight years. Moreover, the Republicans' section on national defense followed the preamble and a rather lengthy section on foreign policy--both of which stressed the power of the United States and the success of Republican leadership under the direction of Eisenhower and Nixon.¹⁰⁵

The Republicans naturally highlighted what they saw as the foreign policy successes of the Eisenhower administration, such as, keeping other nations from falling behind the Iron Curtain, "forestalling aggression in Berlin, the Formosa Straits, and Lebanon," and the continued non-recognition of Communist China.¹⁰⁶ Yet they also became vulnerable to as much criticism in the foreign policy arena because of perceived failures in their handling of Indochina, Cuba, the Middle East, and Hungary--as well as national defense strategy--during the same period. Added to those perceptions were strong arguments against Republican leadership on the domestic front. In essence, by setting up American

¹⁰⁴ Porter and Johnson, p. 608.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 604-7.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 605.

power, prestige, and leadership as the unifying themes of their 1960 campaign, the Republicans opened a Pandora's box that they were, in turn, incapable of closing; the missile gap was yet another example of the Republicans' failures during the 1950s. Moreover, the missile gap and questions about American power, prestige, and leadership were all part of a larger, implied question: Who should be responsible for defining and implementing the American national interest? It was this question that essentially underlay the entire 1960 presidential campaign.

American Power, Prestige, and Leadership and the 1960 Campaign

Beginning with his acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention, John Kennedy emphasized the need for new leadership to restore American power and prestige; in turn, the United States would be able to meet the challenges of what he called the "New Frontier" of the 1960s. Once Congress adjourned in early September and the presidential campaign began in earnest, the press was constantly filled with language that stressed national security, the need to meet the Communist challenge, and the restoration of American strength and prestige to ensure world peace. Moreover, the Republican administration came under heavy Democratic criticism for allegedly increasing the possibility of war, and Nixon's leadership skills were consistently questioned. The attention that had been given to the power and prestige issue was so prominent that on September 21 Nixon asked that a voluntary moratorium on the issue be enacted so that Khrushchev would not perceive weakness and division on the part of the United

States.¹⁰⁷ Nixon suggested even further that it was the *duty* of all of the candidates to support Eisenhower's efforts for peace.¹⁰⁸

Not only did Kennedy and the Democrats¹⁰⁹ reject the moratorium, but Kennedy continued to attack Nixon's foreign policy experience and suggested that the United States had to do more than just react to Communist action.¹¹⁰ Polls in late September gave Nixon a slight lead (47%-46%) based on foreign policy experience;¹¹¹ Khrushchev's presence in the United States had certainly elevated foreign affairs and national leadership as paramount issues at this point. Yet, Kennedy's performance in the first televised debate on September 26--one primarily dominated by domestic, not foreign, issues--seemed to reassure voters that he was capable of national leadership--and, thus, interpreting the national interest. Robert Divine, in his study on foreign policy and presidential elections, neatly summarized the impact of Kennedy's performance in that first debate:

Still relatively unknown and unproven, [Kennedy] had displayed a remarkable degree of maturity, remaining calm and unruffled as he rattled off answer after answer with machine-like rapidity. "Kennedy was alert, aggressive and cool," summed up Time. Viewers realized that he was not the green immature challenger of the GOP stereotype, but rather a gifted man with remarkable poise and

¹⁰⁷ Nixon's request coincided with a visit that Khrushchev was making to the United Nations during the two weeks of September and first days of October, 1960.

¹⁰⁸ New York Times, 21 September 1960, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Senator William Fulbright openly scoffed at the idea and accused the Republicans of "a conspiracy of silence to mislead Americans." See New York Times 22 September 1960, p. 16.

¹¹⁰ New York Times, 21 September 1960, p. 1; 22 September 1960, p. 1; 24 September 1960, p. 1; and, 30 September 1960, p. 1.

¹¹¹ Divine, pp. 250-51.

polish. "Kennedy did not show that he was Nixon's master," Newsweek acknowledged grudgingly, "but he did show that he was Nixon's match"....Above all the debate seemed to remove any doubt of Kennedy's ability to perform effectively under pressure.¹¹²

Because of Kennedy's seemingly skillful handling of Nixon, who had been touting his own ability to handle Khrushchev, Kennedy was also viewed as being capable of managing Khrushchev--or any other international leader or question of the national interest, for that matter.¹¹³ While it is generally acknowledged that Nixon's performance improved dramatically during the three succeeding debates--specifically on foreign policy questions in the second and third debates--nothing he did seemed to damage the leadership image that Kennedy had attained because of the first episode.¹¹⁴

The power and prestige issue remained in the forefront in October 1960, not only because it was raised in the each of the remaining debates (on October 7, 13, and 21) but because various surveys and polls kept the issue flowing in the media. An October 2 New York Times survey indicated that most voters were concerned about American prestige, and in the ensuing weeks information emerged that suggested that the Eisenhower administration was withholding reports that demonstrated a decline in American prestige. Furthermore, on October 20 Senator William Fulbright publicly accused the administration of

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 254-55.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 255; also, Bundy, p. 345.

¹¹⁴ Theodore White provided an excellent analysis of the debate performances during the 1960 presidential campaign. See White, pp. 279-295.

suppressing unfavorable United States Information Agency (USIA) data-- specifically, a 29 August 1960 USIA report--and argued that Nixon was deliberately misleading the American people by claiming the predominance of American power and prestige. During the final debate on October 21, Kennedy questioned Nixon on the report, and while Nixon maintained--albeit erroneously-- that the report in question was for 1957 and that he would be willing to have it released, he also blamed Kennedy for contributing to that alleged decline by making it a prominent campaign theme.¹¹⁵ This was only the beginning of a rather heated and intense discussion that would continue almost until Election Day.

In the days following the last television debate, Kennedy continued to press Nixon and the Administration publicly for the survey's release. His position was bolstered by an October 25 New York Times report that cited a summer 1960 USIA survey indicating an almost unanimous belief in nearly ten non-Communist countries that the Soviet Union was the world's leading military power and that the gap between the United States and the Soviet Union was widening.¹¹⁶ A CBS News poll reported similar data, which led Senator Fulbright to conclude publicly that the USIA data would be released if the CBS News report was incorrect.¹¹⁷ On October 27, the New York Times printed a secret June 1960

¹¹⁵ New York Times, 2 October 1960, p. 21; 21 October 1960, p. 1; and, 22 October 1960, p. 1.

¹¹⁶ New York Times, 25 October 1960, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ New York Times, 25 October 1960, p. 28.

USIA report, which was based on data that had been collected in late May, that showed that both the Americans and Soviets lost prestige in Great Britain and France after the Paris Summit collapse; but this still was not the report that Fulbright had requested and the White House continued to refuse to release.¹¹⁸ On October 29 the New York Times printed yet another confidential USIA report (dated 10 October 1960) on a global survey that demonstrated a world-wide belief that the Soviets were leading in the space race and that the American capacity for world leadership was on the decline.¹¹⁹ Finally, on November 2--just six days prior to the election--the Times published a section of the August 29 secret USIA report that Fulbright and Kennedy had pressed for and, again, that global survey indicated a continuation and acceleration in the decline of American prestige.¹²⁰ This series of reports could only help but add legitimacy to the arguments that the Democrats had been making almost on a daily basis. All the Republicans could do was to try to deflect the reports by questioning their accuracy and by suggesting that the Democrats were being unpatriotic and distorting the image of the United States; in turn, they hoped to paint the Democrats as being

¹¹⁸ New York Times, 27 October 1960, p. 1

¹¹⁹ New York Times, 29 October 1960, p. 10. It is interesting to note that this story followed the Times's previous day endorsement of the Democratic ticket based on foreign policy considerations.

¹²⁰ New York Times, 2 November 1960, p. 29. One of the lead stories on the front page of the Times that morning reported on a Kennedy speech in Los Angeles the previous day in which he had linked national power and prestige to respect in the international arena.

irresponsible and inexperienced--and, thus, incapable of handling the national interest responsibly.¹²¹

Twice in the final weeks of the campaign, Kennedy specifically raised the missile gap issue as a symbol of the loss of American power and prestige--once to the American Legion convention on October 18 and once more on November 4 during a major national defense policy speech in Chicago. There was little the Republicans could do, however, except try to counterattack with their own rhetoric; yet it was really to no avail at that point. Again, the primary problem for the Republicans was that national security constraints restricted their use of concrete data (specifically, the U-2 intelligence) that could have, in turn, possibly shown that American power was far more stable than the Democrats were arguing. Because the Republicans necessarily were unable to do that, they were also incapable of countering effectively the outcry about the supposed decline in American prestige. After all, if there had been no legitimate questions in the public's mind concerning the United States power position particularly vis-a-vis the Soviet Unions'--and unfortunately for the Republicans, the public's distress had never truly been relieved after Sputnik--the arguments concerning American prestige also could not have taken root.

In January 1960, the importance of the public's awareness--as well as the adversary's awareness--of the reality of power was raised during the House subcommittee hearings on the defense appropriations for 1961. As previously

¹²¹ For example, see New York Times, 29 October 1960, p. 1; and, 5 November 1960, p. 1.

discussed, Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates presented a positive overall picture of American military power based on an across-the-board analysis of operational and developmental weapons systems, force structures, and defense management in the United States. Yet, Daniel J. Flood (D-Pennsylvania) pressed Gates as well as his fellow committee members to remember the relationship between perception and reality, particularly in terms of deterrence; in fact, he chided both Gates and the Committee for seemingly neglecting this fact:

I do not think you are aware of it...[but] there must be, with the reality of power, a public image-general public image in the minds of others as to the reality of that power....That is the catch in this business. It is a close analogy to the concept of deterrence that we discussed....No matter how good you think you are, it is of no value as a deterrent unless the other guy does the thinking on deterrence. He must think even though he is wrong.¹²²

Flood continued by discussing why he thought the public had a negative perception of American power, and his assessment was amazingly vivid:

I think the reason why there is no longer a public image of supremacy in these matters is because of an attitude here in Washington. There has been a preaching of "balanced forces." You say[:] "Do not get excited. Do not worry about this Soviet thing; we have balanced forces and catching up to the Russians missile for missile is not that important." Well, that may or may not all be true....You were completely satisfied that, because you understood [the argument] clearly, had stated it brilliantly, that you were presenting the public image, which you are not presenting. The public has no concept of that....This goes back to sputnik. When that sputnik flew around the globe and the desert tribes and the mountain tribes and the coastal tribes--black, white, red, and yellow--all over the world heard about it, all they knew was this was a public image, a public manifestation of the ascendancy and the primacy over America. And that has not been changed up until

¹²² Department of Defense Appropriations for 1961. Hearings before the Subcommittee on Defense Appropriations, p. 120.

noon today, in the jungles, in the mountains and on the seacoasts of the world. They still think that...the mere reality of power in your inventories and arsenals will not do. There must be a public image in the minds of the peoples of the world of that reality of power, and there is no image. Therefore, we are short one of the two legs that we must have.¹²³

It was a leg that Richard Nixon and the Republicans desperately needed during the 1960 presidential campaign as well, but one that they were never able to attain.

Certainly, negative public perceptions were fed by the seemingly constant Democratic rhetoric that emphasized the decline of American power and prestige and criticized the Republican leadership for allowing the nation to suffer that fate. That rhetoric took on an air of legitimacy because it was supported by statistical data, which itself could be questioned and countered--but then only by experts, who used equally questionable data to bolster their own cases. The only truly definitive data, which would have had the best chance for resolving the power and prestige debate (and the missile gap myth), was that being collected by the U-2 reconnaissance program; but Nixon and the Republicans were restrained from using that specific evidence publicly because of the national security secrecy demanded by the very nature of the U-2 program. The Democrats put the Republicans on the defensive, and because the American public could not be given the definitive proof about American national security and power, the Democrats were able to question effectively the Eisenhower administration's defense posture; in turn, it became a liability for Richard Nixon and the

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 120-21.

Republicans during the 1960 presidential campaign. Ultimately, a significant portion of the American public had come to believe that the Republicans had misinterpreted and mishandled the national interest, and that perception cost Nixon the 1960 election.

National Security Briefings for Presidential Candidates

Knowing the importance of U-2 reconnaissance data should leave one questioning when and to what extent Kennedy--or any presidential candidate, for that matter--was briefed about national security issues during the 1960 campaign. Presumably, adequate and thorough briefings on the alleged missile gap, and national power in general, would have eliminated these kinds of issues from creating such a brushfire during a presidential campaign (unless, of course, the candidate deliberately chose to continue the issues rhetorically for purely political purposes). The custom of national security briefings for opposition party candidates apparently began during World War II, according to a Laurin Henry article on transferring presidential responsibility that appeared in a Brookings Institution anthology on the 1960 presidential election and transition.¹²⁴ Chester Bowles, who, in conjunction with Adlai Stevenson, initially was appointed by Kennedy to receive those briefings, summarized the purpose that one incumbent president intended for such briefings and alluded to the controversy that emerged in 1960:

¹²⁴ Laurin L. Henry, "The Transition: Transfer of Presidential Responsibility," in The Presidential Election and Transition 1960-1961, ed. Paul T. David (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1961), p. 208.

In the election of 1948 [President] Truman had asked the intelligence people to keep his opponent, Thomas E. Dewey, fully informed on critical situations. Although Truman agreed that Dewey had the right to say what he wished, he believed that if Dewey and his associates had access to the factual information on which the Administration based its foreign policy decisions and statements, they would be more likely to act responsibly. President Eisenhower had continued this position in the election of 1956, but the Nixon campaign managers made it clear that they did not intend to continue to do so in 1960.¹²⁵

As it turned out, Eisenhower, himself, actually helped to exacerbate the position that the Nixon campaign had taken on these briefings by being somewhat ambiguous about the issue.

According to Henry, Eisenhower initially confirmed in a 31 March 1960 press conference "that intelligence briefings on current foreign and security topics would be available, as usual, to the presidential candidates of both major parties." Yet, in the beginning of July, the President then suggested that after the election the winner would have ample time to familiarize himself with the administration's policies and approaches-and, as Henry assessed, "apparently the key words were 'after election'."¹²⁶ Henry maintained that Eisenhower back-peddled somewhat in an attempt to promote the perception that Nixon was fully trained and totally involved in Administration policy making and, in turn, not in need of briefings. Presumably, you would not offer briefings to one candidate and not the other, so it might be better not even to discuss the matter at all, which is what Eisenhower seemed to be doing. To suggest that Nixon needed to be briefed could be

¹²⁵ Bowles, pp. 296-97.

¹²⁶ Henry, p. 208.

interpreted as a criticism of Nixon's capability and training, which might, in turn, undermine a primary theme of the Republican Party's presidential campaign.¹²⁷ Nonetheless, shortly after the close of the Democratic convention, an offer for national security briefings was extended to the Democratic ticket, and while one cannot be certain why the offer was made, precedent may have influenced Eisenhower's thinking more than anything else.¹²⁸

In fact, John Kennedy did receive at least two, and possibly a third,¹²⁹ intelligence briefing by CIA Director Allen Dulles--one in late July 1960 and one in mid-September 1960. Kennedy also flew to the Strategic Air Command Headquarters in late August for an Administration-run briefing on the American strategic defense system. Theodore Sorensen has commented, however, that Kennedy immediately realized upon arrival in Omaha "that he was not to be given a full-scale top secret fill-in on Soviet-American missile and bomber strength." Kennedy also apparently expressed quite angrily "that he had had more access to information merely as a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee--and that if the Air Force was that complacent, he would remember it at

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 209.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 208.

¹²⁹ While Laurin Henry and Desmond Ball both suggested that Kennedy was briefed three times, a 20 March 1962 White House Press statement stated that Kennedy only received two such briefings during the 1960 campaign. Even Ball admitted that he was never able to confirm officially the third, and, in fact, cited Henry's research that maintained a public reporting of three briefings. See Henry, p. 210; Ball, p. 19-20. Also see Harold W. Chase and Allen H. Lerman, ed., Kennedy and the Press: The News Conferences (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, Co., 1965), p. 210, for a brief discussion of the March 1962 White House statement.

appropriations time the following year."¹³⁰ Furthermore, while the U-2 data was collected prior to the Kennedy-Nixon campaign, Sorensen has stated quite emphatically that "it was never made available to Kennedy in the CIA and military briefings made available to him."¹³¹ As to the exact nature of those briefings, little more has been said specifically on the precise data than what Allen Dulles reported in 1962: "My briefings were intelligence briefings on the world situation. They did not cover our own Government's plans or programs for action, overt or covert."¹³² As for the actual number of briefings, neither Laurin Henry nor others were able to conclude that "there [was] any indication whether their relative infrequency reflected a low level of interest on Kennedy's part or the [precise] number of offerings by the agency."¹³³

One can only speculate whether the Democratic Party's or Kennedy's position would have been very different even if more definitive intelligence had been available or if CIA briefings had been more frequent and extensive. Allen Dulles did testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's five-day

¹³⁰ Sorensen, p. 612.

¹³¹ Ibid.

According to Chase and Lerman, p. 210, the same apparently held true for the CIA plans to stage an invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles, which ultimately would result in the Bay of Pigs debacle shortly after Kennedy took office in 1961. The White House maintained in 1962 that Kennedy was not briefed on the Cuban operation until after the election in mid-November 1960. In fact, during the fourth debate, Richard Nixon suggested that Kennedy was being exceedingly militant for pressing for greater military action in Cuba. Nixon thought that Kennedy was revealing secret CIA plans, which Nixon believed--albeit incorrectly--that Kennedy had learned about in CIA briefings.

¹³² Chase and Lerman, p. 211.

¹³³ Henry, p. 210.

inquiry into the U-2 affair, and although the hearings reportedly were highly secretive and restrained--the public transcript was heavily censored--Dulles' presentation was apparently rather elaborate, detailed, and included some specific U-2 data.¹³⁴ As a member of the Committee, Kennedy would have been entitled to all of the information that was presented, but he did not attend any of the sessions, nor did they seem to influence his position. In 1960, both the Senate and House Armed Services Committees apparently received CIA, Air Force, Army, and other intelligences estimates on Soviet missile capability, that supposedly clearly debunked the missile gap myth;¹³⁵ yet the position of the Democrats on Capitol Hill did not change at all during the election season.

One can make a good case that pure politics compelled Kennedy and the Democrats to ignore even the best data; yet, as has been shown in this study, the plethora of data and the conflict that surrounded the dissemination of that information made for an extraordinarily confusing and difficult situation. One could also make an equally compelling argument that, given the confusing atmosphere and the fact that it was occurring within the context of a major general election, it was in the Republicans' best interest to present the most positive picture of American military power and leadership precisely because of the political stakes. Nelson Rockefeller's effort to pressure his party into a more strident defense position--because it was clear that some party members were as

¹³⁴ Ball, p. 21.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

pessimistic and skeptical about American power as their Democratic counterparts--seemed to support the Democrats' claim that the Republican leadership was presenting a rosier picture than perhaps was true. Again, pure politics could have been as significant a force on the Republicans' side as well. Nonetheless, the most important factor in this entire debate was that U-2 data could not be released in enough detail to convince the Democrats and some Republicans--as well as the American public--to change their position on American power, prestige, and leadership. In turn, it allowed Kennedy, who was naturally predisposed to this pessimistic outlook, to represent strongly his Party's national defense posture and to attack rather effectively his Republican counterpart in the 1960 presidential campaign.

So What Happened To The Missile Gap?

Once the 1960 presidential election was over, the debate about the alleged missile gap essentially ended. The issue did emerge again, albeit very briefly, in early February 1961 when new Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara apparently suggested to reporters in an off-the-record defense briefing that there really was no missile gap. Subsequently, in a February 8 press conference, President Kennedy said little more than that the missile gap allegations were still under review by the Defense Department and that no definitive decision concerning the question had been made. After that, no further public statements were ever made by the Kennedy administration, which leads one to conclude that once the Administration's defense appraisal was completed, it was reasonably

clear to the Administration that a missile gap did not exist. Administration advisors did, however, continue to defend the position that Kennedy and the Democratic Party had taken in the late 1950s and during the 1960 campaign, precisely because of the plethora of confusing intelligence data and the conflict and ambiguity that surrounded its dissemination.¹³⁶

As a result of that confusion and conflict, the Democratic National Party, the Democratic Congressional leadership, and the Democrats' 1960 presidential candidate--John F. Kennedy--had been able to mount a successful attack against the Republicans on questions of American power, prestige, and leadership--and, of course, the missile gap. In a strange twist of fate, the Republican Party and Richard Nixon could offer little defense but their own rhetoric--and that was just not enough to hold onto the White House in 1960.

¹³⁶ Papers of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, NSF: Subjects: Missile Gap, 2/63-5/63 & 6/63-7/63, Box 298, JFKL.

CHAPTER III

On the National Interest

Often a new American president argues that an electoral mandate has been received to provide new leadership and to reinterpret what is in the best interest of the United States, particularly with regard to national security policy. From the end of World War II forward, every American president has been forced to confront the risk of a thermonuclear explosion and to define the role for the American nuclear arsenal according to its interpretation of the American national interest. The Kennedy administration represents an interesting case in the Cold War era precisely because it tried to change dramatically the strategic thinking and policies of the United States and the NATO allies in an effort to define more accurately what was in the national interest. The primary national security goal of the Kennedy administration was to lower the risks of a thermonuclear exchange by increasing both the conventional and nuclear options for responding to adversarial aggression, which would strengthen deterrence; moreover, the expansion of means would ensure that the United States could respond to various levels of aggression and avoid the embarrassment of not fulfilling previously negotiated commitments or not protecting vital interests.¹ This new strategy was called "flexible response."

¹ Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, p. 203.

As is the case with any new president, Kennedy carefully chose individuals to implement his interpretation of the national interest; for national defense he chose Robert S. McNamara. Roger Hilsman, Director of Intelligence and Research in the Kennedy State Department, has noted that, in choosing McNamara, Kennedy "found a Secretary of Defense who shared his views, who had the imagination to push those views even further down the line of their logical development, and who had the will for strong leadership."² McNamara's accomplishments and influence are well documented; his refinement and institutionalization of President Kennedy's basic defense posture are better known in the field of nuclear strategy as the "McNamara Strategy."³ This approach refers first, to systems analysis--the technique used by McNamara and his staff to make decisions concerning every aspect of the defense establishment, including strategy, forces, and weapons; and second, to the development of nuclear, conventional, unconventional, and non-military options mandated by Kennedy's flexible response strategy. One of the most interesting facts about the Kennedy administration, however, is that despite its effort to redefine nuclear strategy and national defense according to a more accurate interpretation of the national interest, by early 1963 it was promoting rhetorically a strategy of assured

² Roger Hilsman, To Move A Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F. Kennedy (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1967), p. 55.

³ A prime example is William W. Kaufmann's The McNamara Strategy (New York: Harper & Row, 1971). Kaufmann, a former professor at Princeton's Center of International Studies and a former RAND Social Science Division staffer, was enlisted by Harry Rowen (one of McNamara's top civilian advisors in the Pentagon) to serve as a part-time consultant on national defense, particularly on the counterforce/no-cities targeting doctrine. Kaufmann continued as a part-time professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology as well.

destruction and damage limitation, which was strikingly similar to Eisenhower's massive retaliation strategy. This occurred, moreover, despite the fact that defense budgets had been expanded rather substantially to implement a flexible response.

When one recognizes that a president's view of the national interest has become so closely identified with someone else--albeit a respected member of that particular administration, or that an administration's results are different than its stated intentions, one cannot help but be puzzled by the concept of the national interest. Consequently, it is perfectly natural to raise questions about what the national interest is and how it is defined in a contextual setting. More specifically, what does a president mean when a particular strategy or set of policies is implemented because "it is in the national interest," and what issues and concerns are being recognized when the national interest is used to justify an administration's approach or actions? Further, can the national interest ever be truly identified or are chosen policies and approaches just best efforts to approximate what an administration judges to be the national interest; moreover, upon what basis are those judgments made? Finally, is the national interest easily reinterpreted and redefined or is such a goal just used rhetorically to defend particularized interests of any new presidential administration?

This chapter will examine Kennedy's flexible response in order to comprehend more fully the contextual evaluation and implementation of the national interest. It, therefore, examines what a flexible response reflects about

the Kennedy administration's view of national sovereignty and legitimacy, American national security, and the economic and fiscal concerns of the United States. It also tries trying to identify a national consensus about reasonably attainable foreign policy goals that may have driven Kennedy's decisions. It demands reflecting upon the Kennedy view of the international order and the NATO alliance, and any efforts taken by the Kennedy administration to comprehend the national interest of American counterparts in the international system. The goal of such an inquiry is to put the broader questions about the national interest in a manageable framework.

The flexible response, and thus this chapter, naturally involves a series of important issues, including: defense management and the budget process; nuclear and conventional force considerations; the importance of the 1961 Berlin crisis; targeting doctrines; civil defense; and, national nuclear forces. Furthermore, considerable contention and debate surrounded various aspects of the flexible response that, in turn, underlines the extreme difficulty that necessarily accompanies any attempt to define and implement the national interest contextually. Yet, such a discussion also leaves one contemplating whether or not the development of national policy is only about defining the national interest.

Protecting American Sovereignty & Legitimacy

One of the most fundamental elements of national sovereignty is a state's ability to develop the means for responding to attacks on its national interest,

most particularly to defend itself against an incursion on its territory. Yet a state's national interest often extends beyond the maintenance of its territorial integrity to the protection of its allies' vital interests and commitments negotiated under the auspices of various alliances and international agreements. In fact, in order to maintain its legitimacy as an international actor, a state must ensure the protection of its territory and avoid the embarrassment and humiliation of not meeting the expectations of previously negotiated commitments. The flexible response strategy that was developed during the Kennedy administration was designed precisely with these goals in mind.⁴

Kennedy's flexible response entailed making basic strategic judgements concerning capabilities, the purposes of various types of weapons, and circumstances under which particular nuclear weapons would be used. Even before the 1960 election, Kennedy's National Security Policy Committee was stressing the importance of these judgements for subsequent defense policy decisions and, ultimately, the accurate interpretation and implementation of the national interest:

For the new defense program to get under way with evidence of purpose and direction, the newly elected President should arrive at a judgment on the two or three basic strategic issues which underlie much of the present inter-Service debate and the conflict between State and Defense on national security policy. Without early Presidential guidance on these judgments, intelligent program

⁴ Gaddis, p. 214.

decisions, decisions as to target selection, command and control, and our strategic relations with our allies cannot be made.⁵

The committee recommended that Kennedy find a balance "between attempting to achieve a politically meaningful 'win' capability in general nuclear war" and the "very great political and military dangers in having merely a punitive retaliatory capability with no possibility of a 'win'."⁶ Such a combination would ensure that deterrence would be strengthened and the United States would have the flexibility to respond to various levels of aggression. Flexibility would also come from the expansion of non-nuclear options, and Kennedy was reminded that during the campaign he had "[come] out clearly for a strengthening and modernization of our limited war capabilities and particularly the non-nuclear component of these capabilities."⁷ As a result of these judgments, the United States could protect its territory and would be better equipped to address challenges to other aspects of its national interest.

Defense Management and the Budget Process

Flexible response not only involved bolstering conventional and unconventional weapons, building up nuclear weapons, and solidifying alliances; it

⁵ "Report of Senator Kennedy's National Security Policy Committee," Pre-Presidential Papers: Transition Files: Task Force Reports 1960: National Security Policy Committee, Box 1074, JFKL. In A Thousand Days (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), p. 155, Arthur Schlesinger reported that Paul Nitze, David Bruce, and Roswell Gilpatric were primarily responsible for this report. Both Nitze and Gilpatric would hold prominent positions in the Kennedy-McNamara Defense Department, and Bruce would serve as Kennedy's Ambassador to Great Britain.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

also demanded effectively managing domestic resources vital to national defense-- particularly the Defense Department itself. Robert McNamara brought to the Defense Department staff numerous former RAND Corporation employees who were proficient in the same cost-benefit analysis and research that McNamara had used in the military during World War II and later in his work at Ford Motor Company.⁸ McNamara's approach to defense management is known as systems analysis and is best defined by another RAND associate, E. S. Quade:

An inquiry to aid a decision maker choose a course of action by systematically investigating his proper objective, comparing quantitatively where possible the costs and effectiveness and risks associated with the alternative policies or strategies for achieving them and formulating additional alternatives if those examined are found wanting.⁹

This technique was employed especially in the Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis, a new office headed by Alain E. Enthoven, and it was applied directly to solving questions about strategy, force, and weapons.¹⁰ Systems analysis and an efficient, centralized defense organization were fundamental to devising the options and flexibility necessitated by Kennedy's and McNamara's flexible response.¹¹ Only then could the national interest be accurately implemented.

⁸ See Kaplan, The Wizards of Armageddon, pp. 252-4, for a complete discussion of these appointments.

⁹ E. S. Quade, as cited by Ralph Sanders, The Politics of Defense Analysis (New York: Dunellen Publishing Co., Inc., 1973), p. 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹¹ In The McNamara Strategy, p. 51, William Kaufmann maintained that Robert McNamara was naturally predisposed to flexible response aside from Kennedy's endorsement of this new strategy.

Alain Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith have noted, in their study of McNamara's tenure at the Pentagon, that McNamara's approach from the outset was a new concept in defense management. McNamara was determined to lead and to exercise the legal authority and responsibility afforded to the secretary of defense. "[H]e wanted all defense problems approached in a rational and analytical way, and...he wanted them resolved on the basis of the national interest. He insisted on integrating and balancing the nation's foreign policy, military strategy, force requirements, and defense budgets."¹² McNamara's approach was directly in line with the conclusions of Kennedy's Committee on the Defense Establishment, which in its report to Kennedy in late 1960 supported "the clarification and strengthening of the authority of the Secretary of Defense over the entire U.S. military establishment."¹³ That committee made specific recommendations concerning the strengthening of civilian authority, the command of military operations, and budgetary procedures with the primary objective "[of making] the Secretary of Defense the civilian official in the Department of Defense with unquestioned authority and control over all elements of the Department of Defense at all levels."¹⁴ While some of the committee's

¹² Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, How Much is Enough? Shaping the Defense Program, 1961-1969 (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 31.

¹³ "Report to Senator Kennedy from Committee on the Defense Establishment," Pre-Presidential Papers: Transition Files: Task Force Reports, 1960, Defense, Box 1073, JFKL. Kennedy established the committee on 14 September 1960 and appointed Senator Stuart Symington its chairman. Other committee members included: Clark Clifford, Thomas K. Finletter, Roswell Gilpatric, Fowler Hamilton, and Marx Leva--nearly all of whom served in or advised the Kennedy administration in some capacity.

¹⁴ Ibid.

suggestions were not implemented, such as the elimination of departmental service secretaries and their under and assistant secretaries, it did emphasize how crucial it was to structure and manage the department so that service interests would always be subordinate to the national interest.¹⁵

A crucial element in the defense management reorganization was the defense budgeting process, and McNamara was not alone in realizing that defense budgeting desperately needed to be revamped. In a 30 January 1961 memorandum, which was prepared for the first formal National Security Council meeting on February 1, Budget Director David Bell clearly identified four major weaknesses in the defense budget system that was inherited from the Eisenhower administration. Bell maintained that to overcome the "[l]ack of correspondence between [underlying defense] plans and budgets", which tended to produce arbitrary budget and program reviews, it was imperative that defense budgeting be closely integrated into clear, strategic guidelines. Bell also recognized a "[l]ack of common assumptions and doctrine among the three Military Departments....which means that plans and budgets are aimed at different objectives" and that "[t]here is no common intelligence basis for planning."¹⁶

What he advocated, instead, was a system in which defense planning and budgeting occur on as unified a basis as possible. He argued further that planning

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Memorandum and Discussion Notes for 1 February 1961 NSC Meeting, David E. Bell to McGeorge Bundy and Robert McNamara, 30 January 1961, NSF: Meetings & Memoranda (M&M): National Security Council Meetings, 1961, Meeting 475, Box 313, JFKL.

and budgeting practices were irrational and, in turn, recommended that "an assessment of costs and results organized by output categories [ie., strategic deterrent, limited war, capability]" become a major element in the planning and budgeting process. Finally, he urged that "defense planning and budgeting...be conducted against firm projections four or five years ahead" to eliminate the current contradiction of planning various individual programs and weapons systems over the long-term, but subjecting overall planning and budgeting to a short-term annual budget and annual Congressional cycle. Underlying all four of these recommendations was the need for "better staff, better organization, and stronger leadership in the Office of Secretary of Defense" and, to a lesser degree a "larger perspective and stronger leadership in the Executive Office of the President."¹⁷

McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, later summarized the vision that Bell and McNamara shared on the integration of military budget and national security policy and the implications of their proposal:

The essential elements here are that they intend to pull the budget process and the military plan into one process of judgment, directly under the Secretary of Defense. This will be new. It is not the same as the basic question of national policy...it is the practical question of carrying policy out effectively and at the right cost, and it is enormously important. It should be regularly discussed at the highest level, and this is a way of starting.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 31 January 1961, NSF: M&M: NSC Meetings, 1961, Meeting 475, Box 313, JFKL.

Defense Department Comptroller Charles J. Hitch, having been "charged [by McNamara]...with the responsibility for making a systematic analysis of all requirements [for the budgeting process]," developed the Planning-Programming Budget System (PPBS), which subsequently became the modus operandi for implementing the defense budgeting reorganization envisioned by Bell and McNamara.¹⁹ McNamara maintained that such a change was absolutely necessary to achieve maximum military effectiveness and to keep defense expenditures within reasonable bounds; moreover, a flexible response demanded such reorganization.²⁰

The PPBS was designed to transform the defense budget process from a parochial Services-oriented procedure to an orderly, comprehensive, mission-oriented system, in order to bring more efficiency and organization to a crucial aspect of the defense management system:

The fundamental idea behind PPBS was decision making based on explicit criteria of the national interest in defense programs, as opposed to decision making by compromise among various institutional, parochial, or other vested interests in the Defense Department....The main purpose of PPBS was to develop explicit criteria, openly and thoroughly debated by all interested parties, that could be used by the Secretary of Defense, the President, and the Congress as measures of the need for adequacy of defense programs.²¹

¹⁹ Enthoven and Smith, p. 33.

²⁰ Robert S. McNamara, The Essence of Security: Reflections in Office (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 88.

²¹ Enthoven and Smith, p. 33.

Under this new system, one of the primary responsibilities of the Defense Secretary would be to ensure that defense policies would meet national interests and not the special interests of the Department or the military.

To do so, he must examine proposals from a broader perspective than that of the organization proposing them, choose among real alternatives, and ascertain at what point further spending on a given military program results in incremental gains so small that it is no longer justified....Thus, PPBS starts with a search for plain statements of the openly defensible national purposes that each program is meant to serve, for alternative ways of achieving these purposes, and for criteria by which to judge competing alternatives. This idea provides both the goal and the rationale for PPBS.²²

Key features of this new approach were: the consideration of needs and costs together; the consideration of alternatives; the use of systems analysis and an analytical staff; the use of Multiyear Force and Financial Planning; and, the use of such tools as the Five-Year Defense Plan, the Draft Presidential Memorandum, readiness, information and control tables, and the development concept paper.²³ It is hardly surprising that "[t]he implementation of this idea led to a greater centralization of major-program decision making in the Office of the Secretary of Defense."²⁴

Clearly, the new Kennedy administration had taken the position that the United States' sovereignty and legitimacy depended upon the careful and efficient management of the defense organization, guided by those officials closest to the

²² Ibid., pp. 33-4.

²³ Ibid., pp. 35-45.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

President himself. Only then could the Administration be sure of the accurate definition and implementation of the nation's interests. More specifically, effective management would ensure that proper choices would be made concerning forces, weapons systems, and overall strategy. As a result, the United States would be able to protect its vital interest and avoid the embarrassment and humiliation that necessarily would ensue from being incapable of countering adversarial aggression. In his inaugural address, President Kennedy stressed that all nations should work to ensure permanent peace and to avoid a nuclear holocaust; but the United States should not tempt its adversaries with weakness. "For only when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed," he said.²⁵ Subsequent to his appointment as Secretary of Defense, McNamara was ordered by Kennedy to conduct a thorough reappraisal of the entire defense establishment (Services, programs, and the FY 1962 budget), including everything from specific weapons systems and military expenditures to overall strategy, targeting, and capabilities.²⁶ This assignment precipitated, among other things, a series of recommendations that McNamara made regarding a supplemental defense budget for FY 1962, in which numerous changes were made in funding levels for certain programs and

²⁵ John F. Kennedy, "Inaugural Address," Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1961 (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1961), p. 856.

²⁶ Sorensen, Kennedy, pp. 602-3.

nearly \$2 billion was requested for additional FY 1962 defense spending.²⁷

Again, all of this was accomplished under the guise of the flexible response--and, ultimately, the national interest.

The mind of the Administration, or at least its civilian contingent, seemed to be in relative agreement on the theoretical framework that should underpin the types of budgeting choices made under a flexible response. Secretary of Defense Dean Rusk best summarized that framework by outlining several foreign policy considerations that necessarily affected American defense, including: that a general war deterrent should incorporate "[a]n effective, invulnerable, and reliable US nuclear retaliatory force" as well as "[e]ffective civil defense measures"; that stopping limited aggression demanded "[a] mobile, substantial, and flexible U.S. capability for operations short of general war"; that guerrilla and counter-guerrilla capabilities needed to be increased and improved; and, NATO members and Asian allies needed to be reassured of the American willingness and ability to protect the free world's interest in Europe and Asia.²⁸ The FY 1962 supplemental defense budget reflected this mindset; yet, there was also a realization that the reallocation and redistribution of funds would create controversy and that the Administration would have to defend its choices.

²⁷ John F. Kennedy, "Special Message on the Defense Budget," Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1961 (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1961), pp. 902-6.

²⁸ Letter and Memorandum, "Foreign Policy Considerations Bearing on the US Defense Posture," Dean Rusk to David Bell, Director, Bureau of Budget, 4 February 1961, NSF: Departments & Agencies (D&A): Department of Defense, Vol. I, February 1961, Box 273, JFKL. In his cover letter to Bell, Rusk stated that he was forwarding the same memorandum to McNamara.

McGeorge Bundy suggested, in a memorandum to Theodore Sorensen concerning the text of the President's March 1961 special message to Congress on the Defense budget, that any justification for the changes in the budget should be developed around the idea that flexibility and responsible choices corresponded with a new military posture, which reflected more accurately the best interest of the nation:

...I believe that the main thrust of the budget message should be directed not at justification of these relatively modest quantitative changes, but at the discussion of more important underlying questions of military posture which are implied by these first changes....Yet most of the changes can also be defended by more general arguments, of which the most important are the need for flexibility of all sorts, and the need for hard choices among hundreds of possible ways of spending billions of dollars....The need for flexibility is quite varied: we need to be able to make sensible choices in rapidly changing circumstances--this is the basic case for strengthened command and control; we need to be free to move rapidly to sharply different weapons systems--this is the case for investment in development and in long lead-time items; we need to have a much more varied set of capabilities--this is the case for guerrilla and anti-guerrilla efforts and for research and development in the field of conventional warfare. Each of these points can be spread around to a number of additional items in the budget changes.²⁹

Bundy maintained that flexibility and making proper choices had to be stressed because having adequate strength was essential to deterring aggression against the United States and its allies. Further, if deterrence should fail, that same flexibility would provide the United States with the appropriate means to address that aggression at the appropriate level, no matter what that level might be. Very

²⁹ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to Theodore Sorensen, 13 March 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense, Vol. I, March 1961, Box 273, JFKL.

simply, the administration was rewriting the basic military policy passed down by the Eisenhower administration, but that was the primary intention of the new administration and what it perceived that it had been called upon to do.³⁰ Only when the proper military posture was in place could the sovereignty and legitimacy of the United States be ensured.

Kennedy's "Special Message on the Defense," which was submitted to Congress on 28 March 1961 to outline the FY 1962 supplemental budget request, demonstrated the Administration's firm commitment to merging budgeting choices with clearly defined strategic assumptions. The Administration's basic national security principles were clearly articulated at the beginning of that statement and were immediately followed by the particular weapon systems and military programs that would be given highest priority in the Kennedy defense budget. Kennedy affirmed that the purpose of American military strength was peace and that the United States would not use its strength to initiate hostilities. Yet he also maintained that arbitrary budget ceilings should not bind American security commitments, that Constitutional responsibilities demanded civilian control over the military, and that American military strength must be at a level to reinforce deterrence. Furthermore, the American military posture must be flexible, determined, capable of addressing limited wars, and structured in a way "to reduce the danger of irrational or unpremeditated general war."³¹ "The Budget that

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ John F. Kennedy, "Special Message on the Defense Budget," pp. 902-3.

follows," he said, "...is designed to implement these assumptions as we now see them, and to chart a fresh, clear course in a time of rising dangers and persistent hope."³² In other words, coordination of basic principles with appropriate military strength would ensure the preservation of American sovereignty and legitimacy.

Making Nuclear and Conventional Choices

What were the choices that the Kennedy administration made to protect the national interest? The FY 1962 supplemental defense budget called for a substantial increase in funding for certain strategic missile projects, particularly the Polaris and Minuteman programs. Emphasis was also placed on improving the airborne alert capability and increasing funding for the ground alert force and bomb alarms. Additional funds were recommended for advancing Continental defense and warning systems--specifically the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System and the Midas satellite-borne system. Finally, allocations were increased for improving American Command and Control of the strategic deterrent and command communications centers. The supplemental budget also stressed the need to deter and confine more effectively limited wars by strengthening limited and guerrilla warfare capabilities; expanding ongoing and initiating new research for non-nuclear programs such as anti-submarine warfare systems; increasing funds for airlift capability, amphibious transports, helicopters, rifles, modern non-nuclear weapons, electronics and communications, and ammunition--all to

³² Ibid., p. 902.

improve the flexibility of conventional forces; and, recommending new allocations for non-nuclear (targeting) capability of fighter aircraft and for conventional force personnel, training, and readiness.³³ All of these measures were designed to ensure the effectiveness of a flexible response and, thus, the protection of American sovereignty and legitimacy.

Yet the March 1961 supplemental defense budget was not the only effort of the Kennedy administration to guarantee a flexible response, particularly in terms of conventional force capabilities. A crucial part of the Kennedy's post-election directive to McNamara was a reappraisal of the conventional force structure, and the conventional force study group report was submitted to the President in early May 1961. While McNamara asserted that the combined conventional strength of the United States and its allies was substantial and had deterred an overt attack by the Sino-Soviet bloc, it "[had] not effectively stopped the indirect aggression carried on by the Communists in many parts of the world." Furthermore, he said that "[m]ilitarily, we are neither organized nor oriented for the task of meeting and counteracting this type of Soviet strategy."³⁴

A mere increase in actual forces was not McNamara's answer, however, and he strongly urged Kennedy not to take such an action. McNamara stressed instead the effective reorganization and management of the existing force

³³ Kennedy, "Special Message on the Defense Budget," pp. 903-5.

³⁴ Memorandum, "Reappraisal of Capabilities of Conventional Forces," Robert S. McNamara to the President, 10 May 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense, Vol. I, DoD Study on Conventional Forces, Box 273, JFKL.

structure, a recommendation that was very much in line with his--and the Administration's--overall approach to national defense:

We believe that...a further increase in the FY'62 Defense Department Budget is not the answer to the problems which confront us....A substantial augmentation of our forces at this time would provide us with no appreciable assurance that we could better combat the indirect attacks which we face today.

It is apparent that new approaches to organizing and utilizing our military power must be developed. We propose to place increased emphasis on this subject during the coming year. Re-programming of funds within the existing Budget should provide adequate financial support for whatever additional para-military activities appear necessary.³⁵

McNamara did, however, highlight a few exceptions, including an increase of funding for high-thrust boosters for military space projects, new allocations for the Military Assistance program, and a \$100 million increase "for procurement of long-lead equipment necessary to support a proposed reorganization of combat forces of the Army."³⁶

The reorganization of the Army was particularly important for ensuring its flexibility in conventional conflicts. McNamara was not looking to reduce the nuclear power of the Army. He was arguing, however, that the proper organization and utilization of its divisional structure would allow for an increase in conventional firepower, greater cooperation and compatibility with Ally forces, more effective tactical mobility and command and control capabilities, and

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

mechanized divisions and separate airborne brigades in Europe.³⁷ The final result of such changes would be a greater range of options for decision makers and, in turn, more adequate means for protecting American sovereignty and legitimacy. While Kennedy requested funding these types of conventional programs in a 25 May 1961 speech to Congress on urgent national needs,³⁸ the real impetus for new conventional force allocations was the impending crisis in Berlin during the summer of 1961.

The Importance of Berlin

As tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union increased during the Cold War, American presence in West Berlin and American access to Berlin remained a constant source of controversy between the Americans and Soviets. In 1958 Khrushchev tried to force the West to sign a peace treaty regarding Germany, thus forcing the recognition of the German Democratic Republic and ending Western occupation of and access to Berlin. While a channel of dialogue was opened between the United States and the Soviet Union as a way to counteract the Soviet pressure, it was quickly closed because of the U-2 incident and Khrushchev's subsequent storming out of the Paris Summit in 1960. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Kennedy firmly believed that Khrushchev would continue to press for a resolution to the Berlin question and, more

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ The text of Kennedy's 25 May 1961 "Special Message on Urgent National Needs" may be found in Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1961 (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1961), pp. 922-926.

generally, the German problem. In fact, Khrushchev's 6 January 1961 speech on wars of national liberation, in which he again vowed to solve the "German problem," confirmed the new Administration's perceptions on this matter.³⁹ Not only was the United States' sovereignty and legitimacy at stake concerning its position in Germany itself; "[U.S.] abandonment of Berlin would be taken as an indication of our unreadiness to meet our defense commitments and thus would have a shattering effect on NATO and our other alliances [as well]."⁴⁰ Clearly, the defense of nothing *less than* the status quo in Berlin was in the national interest. The more important question for the Kennedy administration was, however, what would actually comprise that defense.

It was generally accepted within the Administration that while West Berlin might be indefensible from a massive, direct conventional assault by the Soviets, that kind and level of Soviet attack was somewhat improbable. Yet it was also admitted that the threat of massive retaliation would do little to deter lesser--and more probable--forms of Soviet aggression; moreover, it was unlikely that American allies and the public at large would tolerate the United States running the risk of an actual nuclear exchange over the Berlin question.⁴¹ It became apparent rather quickly that, to avoid the embarrassment and humiliation of not

³⁹ Sorensen, p. 583, p. 584; Schlesinger, pp. 302-4, 346-7; and Kennedy, *The Strategy of Peace*, pp. 212-213. The State Department provided the new administration with a 16 page background piece on Berlin 1961 a mere 10 days prior to Inauguration Day. See: "The Berlin Problem in 1961," 10 January 1961, NSF: Country (CO): Germany: Berlin-General, 1/61, Box 81, JFKL.

⁴⁰ Memorandum and Paper on "Problem of Berlin," George C. McGhee to McGeorge Bundy, 24 March 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General: "The Problem of Berlin," 3/24/61, Box 81, JFKL.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

being capable of addressing an adversarial attack on Berlin, something had to be done to strengthen the conventional forces that were responsible for protecting the American presence in West Berlin. If nothing else, the enhancement of American conventional force strength might convince the Soviets of the American resolve to react, and, thus, deter possible Soviet aggression.⁴²

Nearly all areas of a conventional buildup were discussed and analyzed by the various sectors of the Administration. Augmenting actual manpower, both by utilizing reservists and strategic Army forces and by increasing the number of combat-ready divisions in Europe, was a major component of this discussion. So, too, were airlift and sealift capabilities, logistical support and non-combat units, and general supply levels for both military and civilian purposes. Broader questions about the reciprocal effect of such buildups for both the Americans and the Soviets, the implications for the domestic economy, the contributions of the NATO allies, and the possibility of a national emergency declaration were integrated into this military planning as well.⁴³ Moreover, the appropriate place

⁴² Ibid.; also: Memorandum, Henry Owen to McGeorge Bundy, 17 May 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 5/61, Box 81, JFKL; Report by the Joint Chiefs of Staff [On Military Planning for a Possible Berlin Crisis], 5 May 1961 (Part 1), NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: Report of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part 1, Box 81; Memorandum on Berlin, Admiral Arleigh Burke to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 19 June 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 7/19/61-7/22/61, Box 81. In a special June 1961 report on Berlin and Germany, former Secretary of State Dean Acheson emphasized the importance of a strong conventional force structure if the United States was to be able to defend its interests in Berlin. Acheson, in particular, interpreted Soviet questioning of Western access rights as a test of the West's willingness to carry out its containment rhetoric. Acheson's report remained unavailable at the Kennedy Library even though it had been declassified. Yet, Sorensen, pp. 583-84, and Schlesinger, pp. 380-83, have provided good summaries of Acheson's perspective.

⁴³ The National Security Files at the Kennedy Library have a plethora of documents in which this array of issues are highlighted, including: Memorandum, C.V. Clifton to McGeorge Bundy, 17 May 1961, Memoranda, C.V. Clifton to L.L. Lemnitzer (Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff) and L.L. Lemnitzer to the President, 21 June 1961 & 14 June 1961, Memoranda, McGeorge Bundy to Robert McNamara and

for the "extremes"--meaning, negotiations and the nuclear option--were also evaluated to ensure flexibility in a possible confrontation over Berlin.⁴⁴ In a 25 July 1961 address to the nation, Kennedy articulated the official United States position concerning the national interest.

In that speech, Kennedy reemphasized that the United States was in West Berlin "as a result of our victory over Nazi Germany--and our basic rights to be there deriving from that victory include both our presence in West Berlin and the enjoyment of access across East Germany....our rights [and interests] there are

L.L. Lemnitzer to Robert McNamara (on Mobilization Re: Berlin Situation), 10 July 1961 & 13 July 1961, Memorandum, Frank Ellis (Director, Office of Civil & Defense Mobilization) to National Security Council, 13 July 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin-General, 5/61, 6/17/61-6/22/61, 7/13/61, Box 81; Memorandum & Draft Paper on Military Planning & Preparation Toward A Berlin Crisis, Robert McNamara to L.L. Lemnitzer, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin-General, 7/22/61, Box 82; Memoranda of NSC Meeting Discussions, No. 486 (6/29/61), No. 487 (7/13/61), No. 488 (7/19/61), NSF: M&M: NSC Meetings, 1961, Box 313; Memoranda, McGeorge Bundy to the President [Re: Meeting on Berlin & Meeting of Inter-Departmental Coordinating Group on Berlin], 17 July 1961 & 26 July 1961, and Record of Meeting, 3 August 1961, NSF: M&M: Meetings with the President, 7/61-8/61, Box 317; National Security Action Memoranda (NSAM) 62 (Berlin), 78 (Berlin), 92 (Increase in Forces in Europe), NSF: M&M: NSAM 62, 78, Box 330; :NSAM 92, Box 331; Memoranda, McGeorge Bundy to the President & Marcus Raskin to McGeorge Bundy, 2 August 1962, and the President to Dean Rusk, 21 August 1961, NSF: D&A: State, 8/1/61-8/4/61 & 8/15/61-8/31/61, Box 284; Memoranda, the President to Robert McNamara, 14 August 1961 [2 separate memos written on same day], NSF: D&A: Defense-Vol. II, 8/61, Box 273; Memorandum, Robert McNamara to the President, 15 August 1961, NSF: D&A: Defense (B): General, 1961, Box 276; Memorandum of Conference, 27 July 1961, NSF: C.V. Clifton: Conferences with the President: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 3/61-9/61, Box 345. Also, in the President's Office Files (POF), Memoranda, McGeorge Bundy to the President 14 August 1961 & 15 August 1961, POF: Staff Memoranda: Bundy, McGeorge, 8/61, Box 62; Memoranda, the President to Robert McNamara, 20 August 1961 & 21 August 1961, POF: D&A: Defense, 7/61-8/61, Box 77.

⁴⁴ Henry Kissinger was a major advisor who consistently argued for remaining firm with regard to Berlin, yet also always leaving the door open for diplomacy. See: Memorandum, Henry Kissinger to W.W. Rostow, 4 April 1961, Memorandum, Henry Kissinger to McGeorge Bundy, 14 July 1961, and, McGeorge Bundy to Theodore Sorensen, 22 July 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General: 4/61, 7/14/61, 7/19/61-7/22/61, Box 81, JFKL. Two examples of the nuclear option being discussed are: Report by the Joint Chiefs [on Military Planning for a Possible Berlin Crisis], 5 May 1961; and, Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 7 July 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General: 7/7/61-7/12/61, Box 81, JFKL.

clear and deep-rooted."⁴⁵ Specifically, Kennedy announced a \$3.2 billion supplemental defense budget request for an immediate buildup in conventional forces to coincide with the \$2 billion he had requested to be authorized additionally in March 1961 for FY 1962--but primarily for strategic nuclear forces. As a result, the Army's total authorized strength was increased from 875,000 to approximately 1 million, and the active duty strength of the Navy and Air Force were increased by 29,000 and 63,000 respectively. By September 1961 an additional 40,000 troops were sent to Europe and 10,000 more by November of that year. Approximately 158,000 reserves and National Guardsmen were called up under a request to mobilize up to 250,000 men. Two National Guard divisions were activated as well as 54 Navy and Air Force air squadrons; further, three STRAF (strategic Army force) divisions were converted to combat-ready status. Finally, \$1.8 billion--more than half of the total funds requested--were used to procure conventional weapons, ammunition, and equipment.⁴⁶ It would be noted in mid-1962 that "at the conventional level there can never be a balance, but the United States has the beginning of a better 'peace-keeping' force than she has had at any time since the early 1950s."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ John F. Kennedy, "Report to the Nation on Berlin," Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1961 (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1961), p. 926.

⁴⁶ This data was compiled from the "Report to the Nation on Berlin," p. 927, as well as several other sources: Memorandum, Robert McNamara to the President, 15 August 1961, NSF: D&A: Dept. of Defense (B): General, 1961, Box 276, JFKL; Esmond Wright, "Foreign Policy Since Dulles," The Political Science Quarterly 33 (April-June 1961, p. 124; Alastair Buchan, "Defense on the New Frontier," pp. 135-6; and, Sorensen, p. 590, p. 627.

⁴⁷ Buchan, p. 136.

Kennedy chastised Khrushchev for the pressure that he had attempted to exert on the United States with little concern for American rights and interests in Germany and Berlin, as well as in other areas of the world.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Kennedy was determined to reassure West Berlin, West Germany, and the NATO allies of the American commitment to West European security, and to demonstrate to Khrushchev American firmness and resolve to act, if necessary:

We cannot and will not permit the Communist to drive us out of Berlin, either gradually or by force. For the fulfillment of our pledge to that city is essential to the morale and security of Western Germany, to the unity of Western Europe, and to the faith of the entire Free World. Soviet strategy has long been aimed, not merely at Berlin, but at dividing and neutralizing all of Europe, forcing us back to our own shores. We must meet our oft-stated pledge to the free peoples of West Berlin--and maintain our rights and their safety, even in the face of force--in order to maintain the confidence of other free peoples in our word and resolve. The strength of the alliance on which our security depends is dependent in turn on our willingness to meet our commitments to them.⁴⁹

The conventional force buildup hopefully would deter the Soviets from threatening American rights and interests in Berlin as well as demonstrate to West Berlin, the NATO allies, and the rest of the free world that its safety was in the American national interest. Very simply, American sovereignty and legitimacy would be preserved.

⁴⁸ Kennedy, "Report to the Nation on Berlin," p. 926.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 927.

Counterforce/No-Cities Targeting

Another major refinement of flexible response, which McNamara and his staff worked on in 1961 and formally began articulating in early 1962, was the development of a new targeting doctrine for a controlled, discriminatory, limited nuclear exchange. According to the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP) passed on to the Kennedy administration by Eisenhower, the target list for such an exchange "predominantly included Soviet and satellite cities; no strategic reserves were to be retained; and there was no provision for the preservation of command and control."⁵⁰ Any direct armed conflict with the Soviet Union would have entailed one massive nuclear attack on Soviet, Chinese, and Eastern Bloc military targets and cities.⁵¹ The SIOP (Single Integrated Operational Plan--an arm of the JSCP which included the target list) was rewritten by several of McNamara's civilian experts and adopted in January 1962 by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Once again, the goal was to provide the decision maker with more flexibility so that the protection of the national interest would be possible.

Under the new targeting plan, China and the satellite countries were no longer linked with the Soviet Union as targets, military and civilian targets were separated, protection was recommended for the U. S. command and control structure, and strategic weapon reserves were emphasized as a crucial element of the system. Moreover, a five-step ladder of targets, starting with Soviet retaliatory

⁵⁰ Ball, p. 190.

⁵¹ Ibid.; Kaplan, p. 269.

forces and gradually moving up to, as a last resort, an all-out attack on Soviet cities, was established to moderate any American-Soviet nuclear conflict.⁵² Further adjustments were also made to the U. S. strategic arsenal, including changes in the Minuteman missile system, and the national command and control system was redesigned to sustain a first-strike and allow for continued presidential control over the military.⁵³ The specifics of this new policy emerged gradually: in McNamara's FY 1963 defense budget testimony on Capitol Hill in January 1962, in a February 1962 speech given by McNamara in Chicago to the Fellows of the American Bar Foundation, and in a May 1962 NATO Ministerial meeting. It was finally explained formally in public, and in detail, in McNamara's June 1962 commencement address at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

In the Ann Arbor speech, McNamara asserted that the no-cities doctrine was designed to "...preserve the fabric of our societies" in the event of a nuclear exchange precisely because cities would not be the targets--retaliatory forces would.⁵⁴ He also stressed that NATO's maintenance of an invulnerable retaliatory force was crucial to the Alliance, but this would not serve as an argument for other NATO members' developing independent nuclear deterrents (forces). The United States, he claimed, was already allocating additional funds to guarantee the adequacy of the NATO nuclear deterrent; further funds by other

⁵² Ball, p. 191; Kaplan, p. 282.

⁵³ Ball, p. 191-94.

⁵⁴ Robert S. McNamara, "The United States and Western Europe," Vital Speeches of the Day, 1 August 1962, p. 627.

nations would be wasteful. He, instead, called upon the Allies to contribute more to non-nuclear forces, just as the Americans were also doing.⁵⁵

McNamara stated that NATO members should decrease their reliance on the nuclear option because NATO nuclear strength would surely deter a nuclear attack in the area that was protected by the NATO umbrella. The conventional option, on the other hand, had to be fully developed to deter non-nuclear forms of aggression--even though Soviet conventional strength had also been exaggerated. The result of such improvements would clearly maximize the effectiveness of flexible response:

We expect that our allies will also undertake to strengthen further their non-nuclear forces, and to improve the quality of and staying power of these forces. These achievements will complement our deterrent strength. With improvements in Alliance ground force strength and staying power, improved non-nuclear air capabilities, and better equipped and trained reserve forces, we can be assured that no deficiency exists in the NATO defense of this vital region, and that no aggression, small or large, can succeed.⁵⁶

Once again, the end result would be the protection of the national interest--that of both the Americans and the West Europeans.

The counterforce/no-cities targeting doctrine, articulated in McNamara's Ann Arbor speech as the combination of nuclear and conventional options, exemplifies the flexible response that was developed by the Kennedy administration. In a sense, the United States and the Allies were supposed to have the best of both worlds under this no-cities strategy. The Allies would be

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 627-28.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 628-29.

assured of an effective deterrent because of both nuclear and conventional strength. If a nuclear war were to break out, it would be limited and fought by means of a counterforce bombing strategy whereby cities--the fabric of society--would be saved. A credible second-strike capability, with adequate reserve striking power, would allow a counter-city strike if necessary (in the worst-case scenario); that second-strike power would be ensured even in the case of a surprise attack. Ultimately, however, the adversary would be deterred from attacking cities because of the no-cities policy and the credibility of the U.S. second-strike threat. Yet, the conventional option was not neglected by the Administration precisely because of its desire to have something more than the 'all or nothing' nuclear option.⁵⁷ Fred Kaplan, in his study on nuclear strategy, articulated very simply the essence of this new counterforce targeting doctrine: "The watchwords [of the doctrine] were...control, flexibility, discrimination, option."⁵⁸ During the first half of the Administration, nuclear weapons had become a rational, acceptable, and real means for defending the American national interest.

Civil Defense

Sovereignty not only involves protecting one's territory or rights and interests in other areas of the world; it also includes safeguarding one's citizens.

⁵⁷ Stewart Alsop stressed this point in particular in a 1962 assessment of the Administration's defense policy. See "Our New Strategy: The Alternatives to Total War," Saturday Evening Post, 1 December 1962, p. 618.

⁵⁸ Kaplan, p. 279.

A strong, invulnerable retaliatory capacity presumably would deter the adversary from a nuclear attack. While adequate civil defense might further enhance the credibility of deterrence by convincing the adversary of the willingness to fight a nuclear war, the most important outcome of a sufficient civil defense program was the protection of the civilian population in the case of a miscalculation or a war of escalation. Increasing overall defense flexibility during the Kennedy administration demanded thinking about and preparing for the unthinkable--a possible nuclear explosion. In turn, appropriate civil defense measures became an important part of Kennedy's flexible response.

F.R. Collbohm, President of RAND Corporation, neatly summarized the importance of civil defense to flexible response in a March 1961 letter to McGeorge Bundy:

Our weapon systems are designed to deter, but our lack of civil defense discredits our resolve. We have committed ourselves to political actions and military responses which, in the circumstance of overtly threatened major attack, we would be hard pressed to fill. If we are to act effectively in times of crisis as well as survive in time of war, we must take preparatory actions in times of peace. If our promises are to be credible to our allies, and if our political and military leaders are to be free to act flexibly and resolutely, we must initiate measures to demonstrate the survival capability, not only of our military forces and their control functions but of the civilian population on which our military capability depends....An adequate civil defense will make it possible to have a strategy compatible with our situation and our responsibility: we will seek to deter war, but if attacked we will seek to survive and to respond appropriately.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Letter, F. R. Collbohm [President of RAND Corporation] to McGeorge Bundy, 22 March 1961, NSF: Subjects: Civil Defense, 1/61-3/61, Box 295, JFKL.

Essentially, adequate civil defense mechanisms would also help to ensure American sovereignty and legitimacy. Kennedy shared this perspective and, therefore, directed McGeorge Bundy to coordinate a comprehensive analysis of the civil defense system. The purposes and goals of civil defense would be redefined; yet, any such program would remain "consistent with the nature and character of a free and democratic society" and attempt "[to] save the lives of as many citizens as possible."⁶⁰

In a 25 May 1961 speech to Congress, Kennedy emphasized his commitment to an effective civil defense program. "It is," he said, "insurance we trust [we] will never need--but insurance which we could never forgive ourselves for foregoing [*sic*] in the event of catastrophe."⁶¹ Just as the reorganization of the defense budgeting process and of the Army were critical components of the Administration's flexible response, so, too, was the reorganization of the civil defense structure, particularly for the non-military aspects of the strategy. The Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (OCDM),⁶² the federal agency primarily responsible for civil defense, had a poor reputation within government

⁶⁰ Letter, McGeorge Bundy to Mr. Sherley Ewing, Director-State of Maryland Civil Defense Agency, 26 April 1961, NSF: Subjects: Civil Defense, 4/1/61-5/17/61, Box 295, JFKL.

⁶¹ Kennedy, "Special Message on Urgent National Needs," p. 924.

⁶² The Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, an Executive Office agency under the direct authority of the president, had been created by merging the Federal Civil Defense Administration and the Office of Defense Mobilization as ordered by the Reorganization Plan No. 1 of 1958. A national civil defense apparatus had been in place since the creation of the National Security Resources Board, which had been established by the National Security Act of 1947. For good background see: Bureau of the Budget Staff Study: Organization for Non-military Defense, 23 February 1961, NSF: Subjects: Civil Defense, 1/61-3/61, Box 295, JFKL.

circles, as suggested by a February 1961 Budget Bureau study on organizing civil defense:

OCDM has been severely criticized by certain members of Congress as a "do nothing," "boondoggling" organization staffed with incompetent "political hacks." They have suggested that responsibility for civil defense must be borne by the military. This opinion is supported by the belief that changes in the nature of the threat of attack have made non-military defense an inseparable element of our national security posture.⁶³

This negative status further exacerbated ongoing Congressional reluctance to finance fully national civil defense projects.⁶⁴ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Kennedy announced in his May 25 speech that the fallout shelter program (the largest and most expensive aspect of civil defense)⁶⁵ would become the responsibility of the Secretary of Defense. Furthermore, other preparedness programs (such as, food stockpiling, health issues, education, manpower, etc.) would be reassigned to appropriate department and agency heads, and OCDM would be redesigned as a small agency (the Office of Emergency Planning) to help the President coordinate civil defense activities.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. The Budget Bureau staff study reported that Congress had appropriated only \$619 million of the \$2.4 billion requested in Executive branch budgets since 1951.

⁶⁵ An OCDM five-year civil defense program proposal suggested that \$15 billion would be necessary for shelter construction (a combined blast and fallout shelter program). While the OCDM proposal was on the high side (because of the expensive nature of blast shelters), a draft program prepared for McGeorge Bundy by Carl Kaysen and Marcus Raskin estimated that a four-year fallout shelter construction program (a combination of existing structure improvement and new building construction) would still cost approximately \$4.5 billion, to be shared jointly by the federal, state, local, and private sectors. See: Draft Memorandum on the Civil Defense Program, Carl Kaysen & Marcus Raskin to McGeorge Bundy, 16 May 1961; and, Letter & Memorandum on Civil Defense: Appendix, Draft Program, Carl Kaysen to McGeorge Bundy, 18 May 1961, NSF: Subjects: Civil Defense, 4/1/61-5/17/61 & 5/18/61-5/31/61, Box 295, JFKL.

Additional appropriations would also be requested once the reorganization had occurred and the appropriate officials had been able to reassess actual needs for an expanded civil defense program. While Kennedy admitted that the civil defense expenditures would necessarily drive up an already escalating federal budget, he maintained that "no insurance [was] cost-free" and that "this form of survival insurance justifies the expenditure of effort, time, and money."⁶⁶ In fact, Kennedy's July 1961 \$3.2 billion supplemental budget request, in response to the Berlin Crisis, included \$207.6 million for civil defense; the appropriations legislation that Kennedy signed into law on 17 August 1961 allocated this same amount.⁶⁷ Clearly, the Administration and Congress were in agreement that proper civil defense measures were necessary and definitely in the nation's interest.

Interpreting the National Interest: An Invitation to Struggle

The B-70 Bomber Controversy

There was not, however, total agreement within the government on what specific means would protect American sovereignty and legitimacy, and this was hardly surprising--in this case or in any other effort to reinterpret the national interest--considering the very nature of the task at hand. Implementing the national interest necessarily affects certain potentially controversial processes,

⁶⁶ Kennedy, "Special Message on Urgent National Needs," p. 924-5.

⁶⁷ Congressional Quarterly, "Congress Increases Kennedy Defense Budget," in Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1961 (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1961), pp. 142-47.

such as the allocation and redistribution of budget funds, the interpretation of national security concerns, and relations with allies. As a result, specialized concerns and questions often emerge and serve to refocus the debate and attention that naturally surrounds the national interest. It may leave one questioning whether the national interest ever can be identified accurately in the first place--let alone, be successfully reinterpreted.

The FY 1962 supplemental defense budget reduced the level of funding of several weapons programs to reflect the Administration's conclusion that certain systems were more cost-effective in the long-term than others, the most prominent being the Air Force's manned bomber. Eisenhower's massive retaliation strategy, which emphasized the deterrent value of nuclear weapons, had depended on an effective and overpowering airborne striking power; the only way to carry out a strategic nuclear strike at that time was by means of the manned bomber. By 1961 the Air Force had in operation the B-47 and B-52 bombers and the B-58 medium-range supersonic bomber. The B-70 supersonic intercontinental strategic bomber was in the development stage. Yet because of the introduction of the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), the manned bomber was no longer considered by the Kennedy administration to be an effective component of either the strategic offensive or defensive force. It was too vulnerable and demanded too much lead-time to be used in a counterforce attack; many of its functions

could be handled less expensively by the ICBM.⁶⁸ Therefore, the long-term budget process called for the beginning of a gradual phasing out of the B-47, B-52, and the B-58, and the scaling down of the B-70 bomber to a research and development project only, instead of a full-scale weapon system development program. McNamara defended this major change by explaining "that we have...selected that combination of programs which we believe will give the Nation a fully adequate defense at the least cost, in light of the threat as we view it today."⁶⁹ That included the development of a rational and realistic plan for a controlled, limited nuclear exchange, under which the ICBM was considered to be the most efficient and effective tool.⁷⁰

It is hardly surprising that the Air Force was upset with the Administration's decision. Not only had the Air Force been primarily responsible for carrying out Eisenhower's massive retaliation and therefore accustomed to receiving a substantial portion of the defense budget, but its personnel were used to having their judgment, intuition, and experience be paramount in program development, procurement, and strategic decision making--roles which they

⁶⁸ U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Authorizing Appropriations for Aircraft, Missiles, and Naval Vessels for the Armed Forces. Hearings Before the House Armed Services Committee on H.R. 6151, 87th Cong., 1st ses., 1961, pp. 1237-38; Kennedy, "Special Message on the Defense Budget", p. 905; and, Enthoven & Smith, pp. 244-45.

⁶⁹ House, Committee on Armed Service, Hearings Before the House Armed Services Committee on H.R. 6151, p.1237.

⁷⁰ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to Theodore Sorensen, 13 March 1961.

perceived to have been diminished in the McNamara Pentagon.⁷¹ Yet, military egos were not the only problem here; the Air Force was not in agreement with the strategic direction that the Kennedy administration was taking and it found an ally to support its position--the House Armed Services Committee.

Both the Air Force and the Armed Services Committee had grave concerns about placing total reliance on ICBMs, particularly when many ICBM programs were still in the developmental stage and major questions persisted about the overall ICBM concept. McNamara himself admitted to these uncertainties, and, perhaps, best summarized the continued need for caution in this realm, particularly considering a more drastic proposal--an immediate and total cancellation of the entire manned bomber program:

Since evidence is not conclusive it is not timely to decide either (a) to proceed at this time with an all-out weapon system [B-70] development program, or (b) that there is to be no further step taken in manned strategic bombers beyond the B-52 by terminating the B-70 program. Even though there will be primary dependence on ballistic missiles for the strategic mission for the future, there remain certain uncertainties with respect to missiles[,] including the question of reliability. There are certain advantages inherent in a controlled force of manned bombers. Until full confidence can be achieved in the missile force and until there is conclusive evidence of the feasibility or lack of feasibility, based on technical, military, economic and timing factors, of a Mach 3 [B-70] bomber, it is believed to be essential to explore this phase of flight to preserve the option to advance towards a weapon system at the earliest time

⁷¹ Richard D. Challener, "The National Security Policy from Truman to Eisenhower," in The National Security: Its Theory and Practice, 1945-1960, p. 55; Stewart Alsop, "Master of the Pentagon," Saturday Evening Post, 5 August 1961, p. 46; Alastair Buchan, "Defense on the New Frontier," p. 132; and Sorensen, p. 606.

an assessment of the relative risks involved should favor such decision.⁷²

McNamara's reassurances, however, were not enough. The Air Force and the Armed Services Committee viewed the B-70 scale-down as undermining the American capacity to offset the potential development of an adversarial antiballistic missile. The committee members, in particular, feared the enemy's potential power; they were also afraid of being blamed by their constituents for not adequately defending against that power. Furthermore, Air Force testimony emphasized that phasing out the manned bomber quickly, with no replacements but ICBMs, would severely weaken the American deterrent capability. This assessment only helped to exacerbate members' alarm.⁷³

Both the Air Force and the Armed Services Committee perceived a flexible response as being in the national interest, yet their definition of "flexible" differed significantly from that of both Kennedy and McNamara. Consequently, there also was disagreement on what was necessary for protecting the sovereignty and legitimacy of the United States. While Kennedy and McNamara would preserve American sovereignty and legitimacy by expanding options to address

⁷² Memorandum & Attachments, Secretary of Defense and Director of the Bureau of the Budget to the President, 10 March 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense, Vol. I, March 1961, Box 273, JFKL. McNamara presented similar testimony before the House Armed Services Committee hearings on the FY 1962 supplemental defense: see House, Committee on Armed Services, Hearings Before the House Armed Services Committee on H.R. 6151, pp. 1244-45.

⁷³ The discussion in the House Armed Services Committee 21 April 1961 hearing on H.R. 6151 best represents the dilemmas and judgments of both the Committee and the Air Force. See pp. 1558-99, Hearings Before the House Armed Service Committee on H.R. 6151. In particular, see Frank C. Osmers's (R-NJ) comments, pp. 1572-73, and the statement of Air Force Chief of Staff, General Thomas White, pp. 1593-96.

any possible situation, including a limited nuclear exchange, the Air Force-Armed Services Committee approach focused on the options most appropriate for bolstering an old perception of nuclear deterrence. The Air Force continued to emphasize the importance of nuclear superiority and an advanced, updated airborne striking force. Only then would an American threat to carry out a massive nuclear first-strike be credible (of course, this was very similar to the Air Force's preparations under Eisenhower's massive retaliation).

Yet, Kennedy had made a decision concerning American sovereignty and legitimacy long before he faced this initial controversy with the Air Force, and he summarized that position in the March 1961 message to Congress on the defense budget:

The elimination of waste, duplication and outmoded or unjustifiable expenditures from the Defense Budget is a long and arduous undertaking, resisted by special arguments and interests from economic, military, technical and other special groups....But hard decisions must be made. Unneeded facilities or projects must be phased out. The defense establishment must be lean and fit, efficient and effective, always adjusting to new opportunities and advances, and planning for the future. The national interest must be weighed against special or local interests; and it is the national interest that calls upon us to cut our losses and cut back those programs in which a very dim promise no longer justifies a very large cost.⁷⁴

One of the eight major principles that was delineated in the beginning of that message was that American defense would be both flexible and determined so that "[a]ny potential aggressor contemplating an attack on any part of the Free World with any kind of weapons, conventional or nuclear, must know that our

⁷⁴ Kennedy, "Special Message on the Defense Budget," p. 905.

response will be suitable, selective, swift and effective."⁷⁵ Kennedy and his civilian advisors had determined that the B-70 project in particular, and the manned bomber program in general, did not fit that set of criteria--especially in the long-term--and, therefore, unnecessary funding would be a liability to American defense, and to the American national interest.

This Administration decision did not, however, keep the Armed Services Committee from acting upon its authority over certain aspects of national defense policy and, therefore, interpreting the national interest.⁷⁶ The Committee, in total agreement with the Air Force, authorized \$337 million above the Administration's FY 1962 supplemental budget request, earmarked specifically for B-52 or B-58 manned bombers. In the House-Senate conference on this legislation, conferees agreed to the Senate's authorization of \$525 million for long-range manned bomber procurement. While the type of bomber was not specified, the Senate's original intent was to provide funds for the procurement of additional B-52s.⁷⁷ The subsequent appropriations legislation, which was signed into law on 17 August 1961, actually allocated \$266 million more than Kennedy had requested precisely because of the \$514.5 million appropriated for B-52 or B-

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 903.

⁷⁶ The Armed Service Committee's legitimacy in these kinds of matters stemmed from a provision of PL 86-149, passed in the 86th Congress (1959), that required "prior authorization of appropriations to procure planes, missiles and ships, beginning in 1961." There is no question that at this particular point (1961) the Committee was looking to capture and exercise some control over national defense policies--power that previously had solely rested with the Appropriations Committee. See *Congressional Quarterly*, "Extra Funds Approved for Planes, Missiles, Ships," Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1961 (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1961), p. 414.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 415.

58 long-range bomber development, the \$180 million above Administration requests for the B-70 bomber development, and the \$85.8 million additional for the Dynasoar space glider program.⁷⁸ While Congress had expanded the President's obligational authority for military functions, it was up to the President actually to exercise it.

In the midst of the Berlin crisis and one day prior to the signing of the defense appropriations legislation, Robert McNamara strongly urged Kennedy not to spend the additional funds that Congress had earmarked for long-range bombers, the B-70 bomber, and the Dynasoar space glider. A difficult consequence of that decision was that the language of the appropriation bill precluded using the funds for other projects. McNamara maintained, however, that actually exercising the newly-provided obligational authority in these three instances would not "increase the strength and readiness of our forces."⁷⁹ In turn, it was better not to spend the additional funds. In October 1961, McNamara told the President that he had "received and given careful consideration to the report of the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee" and "completed a review of U.S. requirements for long-range nuclear delivery systems, and for military space research and development." Yet, he said, "I remain convinced that the additional

⁷⁸ Kennedy's total request was \$46,396,945,000, but Congress appropriated \$46,662,556,000. See: Memorandum, Robert McNamara to the President, 16 August 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense, Vol. II-August 1961, Box 273, JFKL; Congressional Quarterly, "Congress Increases Kennedy Defense Budget," p. 142-3.

⁷⁹ Memorandum, Robert McNamara to the President, 16 August 1961.

appropriations should not be spent."⁸⁰ Kennedy accepted McNamara's recommendation and the President's decision was announced publicly late that month.⁸¹ In fact, the President would technically impound the funds--an Executive Branch technique that was used to bypass Congressional decisions with which it disagreed--and the controversy would continue during the FY 1963 defense budget process in 1962.

The FY 1963 defense budget was the first budget totally prepared by the Kennedy administration and the first developed under the new budget process. As was the case with the FY 1962 supplemental request, the Administration's emphasis concerning general war offensive forces was placed on missiles instead of manned bombers.⁸² Again the funding level for the B-70 bomber was not increased, and while plans were maintained to complete its limited development program, the B-70 was not approved as a full-scale weapon system.⁸³ McNamara neatly summarized the reasoning that underpinned his recommendations. "The forces I am recommending will provide major improvements in the quality of our

⁸⁰ Memorandum, Robert McNamara to the President, 7 October 1961, NSF: D&A: Defense: Defense Budget FY 1963, January-October 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

⁸¹ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to Robert McNamara, 28 October 1961, NSF: D&A: Defense-Vol. II, September-October 1961, Box 273, JFKL. Congressional Quarterly, "Congress Increases Kennedy Defense Budget, p. 147.

⁸² Memorandum, Robert McNamara to the President, "Recommended Department of Defense FY'63 Budget and 1963-67 Program," 6 October 1961, NSF: D&A: Defense: Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

⁸³ Ibid. Also: U.S., Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Hearings on Military Posture and H.R. 9751. To Authorize Appropriations During Fiscal Year 1963 for Aircraft, Missiles and Naval Vessels for Armed Forces, and for Other Purposes, 87th Cong., 2nd ses., 1962, p. 3177.

strategic posture: in its survivability, its flexibility, and its ability to be used in a controlled and deliberate way under a wide range of contingencies."⁸⁴ Yet, once again, his logic did not convince the House Armed Services Committee nor the Air Force.

In fact, the Armed Services Committee was particularly furious with McNamara's refusal to spend certain defense funds and he was grilled on why "after the President signs the appropriations bill...and after the Congress makes the money available, then you say not withstanding all those facts, 'I do not think that I should spend the people's moneys for those things.'"⁸⁵ McNamara again argued that even without the additional manned bombers, the programs that were being fully funded would provide the United States with "power in excess of our requirements." He insisted, moreover, that the decision not to spend the appropriated funds was not unilateral and only a recommendation to the President.⁸⁶

The Committee, however, remained unconvinced that the Administration's decision was an accurate interpretation of the national interest. Its line of questioning, in turn, expanded to demanding explanations on why money was being spent on the B-70 at all if it was not going to become operational; on the role the Budget Bureau played in making cuts in the Services' budget requests; on

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ This specific question was asked by Carl Vinson, the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee. House, Committee on Armed Services, Hearings on Military Posture and H.R. 9751, p. 3306-07.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 3185 & p. 3307.

the relationship between the Defense Department and the State Department; and, on the relationship between the military personnel and civilians in the Pentagon.⁸⁷ As was the case in 1961, the Committee accepted the Air Force's argument for sustaining funds for the manned bomber, and particularly for the redesigned B-70 project--now referred to as the RS-70, a reconnaissance strike version of the B-70.

General Frederic H. Smith, Jr., Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force, clearly summarized his Service's point of view on the manned bomber issue in his 14 February testimony before the Armed Services Committee:

[W]e feel that if we do not provide a follow-on strategic weapon system to the B-52 we will not have the proper emphasis on a mixed force.

At the present time we do have principal reliance on aircraft and have a large number in the strategic role on which we depend. But we feel at some time in the future we must have a weapon system [that] is manned which is capable of penetrating deep into enemy territory, attacking targets which have not been clearly identified through intelligence, and which can report back not only the targets it has located and the targets which we have destroyed with other attacks, but the general situation within the enemy's overall economy and warmaking capability, which only a man can [see and] report back.⁸⁸

This type of mission could not be carried out by a missile system, yet it was precisely the role that the Air Force envisioned for the new RS-70 reconnaissance strike bomber.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 3157-3242.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 3723.

Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis LeMay led an Air Force delegation that made a special presentation on the RS-70 to the Armed Services Committee while the Committee was proceeding with the Air Force section of the defense authorization legislation. LeMay argued that the Air Force simply could not execute an efficient, effective campaign without the RS-70; in other words, the Air Force would not be able to fulfill its mission.⁸⁹ This consequently raised serious questions about whether American sovereignty and legitimacy actually could be protected sufficiently. Even though Robert McNamara had repeatedly reassured Committee members that American defense and security would not suffer without the B-70/RS-70, Committee members were unwilling to accept the new role of the missile systems. They were also extremely fearful of being blamed for selling American security short, particularly if the adversary should develop an effective anti-ballistic missile system.⁹⁰ Therefore, the committee concluded that it clearly was in the nation's interest to maintain and strengthen manned bomber programs in general, and to increase funding for the B-70/RS-70 project in particular, with the intention of seeing that aircraft to actual deployment. During the markup of the defense authorizing legislation, Chairman Carl Vinson attached an amendment which raised Air Force authorizations by \$491 million; in addition, it "directed" the Secretary of the Air Force "to utilize authorization in an amount no less than \$491 million during fiscal year 1963 to proceed with development

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 3909-10.

⁹⁰ The remarks that Rep. William Bray (R-IN) made during Committee hearings are a good example of this projection. Ibid., p. 3787.

production planning and long leadtime procurement for an RS-70 weapon system."⁹¹

While the Committee was well aware that it had potentially involved itself in a major separation of powers controversy (could it legally direct the actions of a particular Secretary within the jurisdictional boundaries of the Constitution?), it maintained that Article I, Section I of the Constitution afforded Congress the power to "raise and support armies" and to formulate rules governing the armed forces. Congress would, therefore, be a central actor in national defense policy, and the president was obliged to follow its directions, particularly in the realm of defense budgeting.⁹² Several members were leery of the amendment, but Vinson insisted that it was absolutely necessary considering what the Administration had done with the FY 1962 supplemental defense budget. It would also clearly illustrate that "[w]e are getting tired of the views of Congress being swept aside by people who are not elected by the people."⁹³ Very simply, Congress not only had the *right* but also the *responsibility* to ensure that the national interest was accurately interpreted and implemented, particularly in the realm of national defense policy. As the Congressional Quarterly Weekly suggested, Vinson's

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 3986.

⁹² U.S., Congress, House, Authorizing Appropriations for Aircraft, Missiles, and Naval Vessels, H. Rept. 1406 to Accompany H.R. 9751, 87th Cong., 2nd. ses., 1962, pp. 6-7, 9.

⁹³ The defense authorization legislation was favorable and unanimously reported out by the House Armed Service Committee. See: House, Committee on Armed Services, Hearings on Military Posture and H.R. 9751, p. 3988-92.

committee report directly "challenged the right of the Administration to ignore Congressional directives in this particular case."⁹⁴

Not surprisingly, the Administration did not simply give in to the Armed Services Committee's and Vinson's demands. It realized rather quickly, however, that measures had to be taken to avoid a significant separation of powers battle between the executive and the legislature, either on the House floor or in the courts, as it would hurt Congress, the Administration and the country as a whole.⁹⁵ Kennedy, also certain of the executive's Constitutional authority in such matters, used a private White House meeting with Vinson to persuade the Chairman to delete the offensive language in return for a promise of nothing more than a restudy of the RS-70 program. All of this was intended, said Kennedy in a follow-up letter to Vinson, to ensure that "a spirit of comity govern[s] relations between the Executive and Legislative," as was also implied by the Constitution.⁹⁶

Because the President agreed to have the RS-70 program reexamined, Vinson withdrew the language during the floor debate on the legislation. While Congress actually appropriated \$362 million for six RS-70 aircraft, the Defense Department released only \$50 million of those funds, and that was exclusively for

⁹⁴ "Committee Update," Congressional Quarterly Weekly, Vol 20, No. 10, 9 March 1962, p. 401.

⁹⁵ Sorensen, p. 348.

⁹⁶ Letter, President John F. Kennedy to Honorable Carl Vinson, 20 March 1962, White House Name File: Vinson, Carl, Box 2890, JFKL.

the development of the RS-70's radar components.⁹⁷ The Administration had remained firm in its decision to pursue the defense projects that most efficiently and effectively preserved American national security--and the national interest. The B-70/RS-70 project never fit the Administration's qualifications in this regard.

Flexible Response & NATO Relations

From the beginning, the Kennedy administration understood that NATO and its members would remain major focal points of, and major players in, American defense policy. The Administration's commitment to Europe was clearly evident in Kennedy's Inaugural Address:

To those old allies whose cultural and spiritual origins we share, we pledge the loyalty of faithful friends. United, there is little we cannot do in a host of cooperative ventures. Divided, there is little we can do--for we dare not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder.⁹⁸

Yet, the particulars of the Administration's European policy were constructed long before Inauguration Day; in fact, shortly after the Democratic Convention in July 1960, Kennedy asked Adlai Stevenson to head a task force to formulate a long-term policy approach concerning American-European relations. Stevenson subsequently enlisted George Ball to do the actual work and to prepare a report for Kennedy. A preliminary draft was given to Stevenson in early October and

⁹⁷ Ball, Politics and Force Levels, p. 220.

⁹⁸ Kennedy, "Inaugural Address," p. 856.

the final report was presented to Kennedy immediately after the November election.⁹⁹

The Stevenson Report argued that the new administration would be operating in a rapidly changing international arena, in which a primary objective of the United States would be to prevent a shift in the world balance of power in favor of the Communist bloc.¹⁰⁰ This potential power shift was addressed as a three-pronged problem. First, it placed the power shift in terms of a 'world in revolution': the rapid decolonization process that was producing a plethora of new nations, as well as the ongoing struggles of countries in Latin America and Africa. While it was in the national interest to provide assistance for political and economic development, it had to be offered under conditions in which "the emerging peoples can exercise a broad freedom of choice with respect to the varying types of political and economic systems, free from the dictation of major powers." Furthermore, the best means for helping these nations, it said, was "to provide an example of success--by demonstrating that a society operating within a

⁹⁹ George W. Ball, The Past Has Another Pattern: Memoirs, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1982), p. 159-60; Schlesinger, p. 155.

¹⁰⁰ Report, Adlai E. Stevenson to Honorable John F. Kennedy, Part Two: The Problem After January 20 -- Components of a New Foreign Policy, 8 November 1960, Pre-Presidential Papers: Transition Files: Task Force Reports, 1960: Stevenson Report, 11/60, Box 1074, JFKL. This report was divided into two primary parts: the first dealt with decisions that needed to be made during the transition period (such as, appointments, delegation of responsibilities, the budget, etc.); the second concentrated on the substance of policy after Kennedy assumed office. In addition, there were two support papers attached--one on American foreign economic policy and one on the Western Alliance. Four appendices discussed specific issues concerning China, Taiwan, and the UN, Subsaharan Africa, Latin America, and the organization of the State Department.

framework of freedom can achieve power, prosperity, and a new standard of tolerance and justice."¹⁰¹

Coupled with this "revolution" was the realization that maintaining the balance of power necessarily demanded the total cooperation of the Atlantic Community--both giving economic and political assistance to the newly emerging and lesser developed nations and in preventing of Communist military aggression. The Stevenson Report's recommendation was blatantly clear: "Both of these tasks are common responsibilities of all members of the Atlantic Community. On this point we must insist emphatically."¹⁰² Moreover, any negotiations with the Soviet Union required a common front; that demanded trying to prevent a potential defection by the French and the West Germans, especially on the issue of independent nuclear forces. "It is imperative," Stevenson stressed, "that this drift [toward the creation of national nuclear forces] be reversed since, if continued, it would mean the beginning of the end for the hope for a united Western World...[if not] hope for a lasting peace will grow dimmer and dimmer."¹⁰³ Strengthening the alliance also involved relieving doubts and fears about the American commitment to European defense, finding effective means for ensuring nuclear and conventional security, cooperation, and burden-sharing within NATO, and achieving a resolution of the French-Algerian conflict. Once

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

the forces of alliance disintegration were reversed--or, at least, stymied--attention could be refocused on worldwide efforts for arms control and disarmament, particularly with respect to productive negotiations with the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁴

In order for the Administration to be able to work toward greater unity within the Atlantic Community--and this is the third of the three prongs--the appropriate tools were needed to improve economic development programs and to strengthen the leverage that the United States could exert over its allies to secure greater military and economic contributions from them. Congress would necessarily be an important player in this project as well as in any effort to revise American nuclear strategy and national defense policy in general. While the specifics of these two projects would be discussed in individual support papers, the report warned the Administration against the presumption that effective economic development policy and the restoration of allied cooperation would be easy. "These proposals will be extremely difficult to carry out. Each involves a need for careful preparation of public opinion, great boldness in the approach to Congress--and by Congress--and complicated negotiations with our Allies."¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the report's underlying assumption was that precisely because the national interest was at stake (as reflected by a potentially dangerous and unacceptable shift in the balance of power), the Administration must devote as much attention and effort as possible to the realization of these objectives.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

The second support paper, in particular, provided a detailed plan for rebuilding a stronger partnership between Western Europe and the United States. American nuclear power, and especially the United States' effort to maintain its superiority and to monopolize that power, was at the heart of American-West European tensions; yet, it was also the key for unlocking a renewal in NATO cooperation:

The effects of our present policy, which is to maintain tenaciously the presumed U. S. nuclear "monopoly", has dangerously divided the Alliance. It has furthermore induced both the British and the French to develop independent nuclear capabilities thus weakening NATO politically and economically. The whole force of technological progress, as the Dutch and German ultra-centrifuge development shows, is to break down the so-called "monopoly". There is the irony of a policy that denies atomic information to our Allies that is known to our common enemy. There is limited time to employ America's waning nuclear asset as the means of solving a number of problems that plague our Atlantic policy...The initiative that can lift the Atlantic Community out of this morass can come only from America. Our nuclear resources, if fully used, offer a means of initiating an attack on all of these problems.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, the linkage among various aspects of American-West European cooperation was stressed. Improvements in one area would have equally positive effects on the others. It was also crucial, however, to recognize the necessarily high level of dependence that underpinned the various components of Stevenson's recommendations:

The proposals [made here] represent an interrelated set of policies which can only be effective if each aspect is fitted together and moved forward along with all the others....our nuclear resources can

¹⁰⁶ Second Support Paper [of the Stevenson Report], "Policy For Partnership Between A United Europe And America Within a Strong Atlantic Community," Pre-Presidential Papers: Transition Files: Task Force Reports, 1960: Stevenson Report, 11/60, Box 1074, JFKL.

be the means of revivifying NATO; a strong Atlantic Community is essential to deter [a] Russian attack or blackmail; similarly, a strengthened NATO is indispensable to meaningful negotiations with the Communist bloc; an Atlantic Community settled upon a common strategy and common purpose is a prerequisite to the resolution of internal disputes and consecration by the European nations to the burning tasks of economic development. Progress in dealing with one problem is dependent on progress in the other areas.¹⁰⁷

The underlying premise of Stevenson's specific recommendations was that it was necessary to increase the Europeans' sense of security vis-a-vis the Soviet threat by fortifying the NATO military force structure; this would also precipitate greater confidence in and commitment to NATO. The success or failure of any American effort to improve cooperation with the Europeans depended upon the United States' ability to comprehend and handle proficiently the total breadth of this extraordinarily complex relationship.

Just as a flexible response on the national level involved improvements in nuclear as well as conventional strength, similar changes also were needed in the the international sphere and the NATO alliance. The major difference, however, was the distribution of responsibility among alliance members. As far as nuclear power was concerned, the United States would continue to take the lead on maintaining an effective strategic nuclear deterrent in the European theater, with emphasis being placed on a strong second-strike capability. This capability would include both land-based and seaborne missiles that necessarily would be dispersed, hardened, and mobile to ensure their withstanding an enemy attack.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

Decision making within NATO would be conducted so as to convince the European members that there was an effective nuclear deterrent that was free from an American veto. This entailed a sufficiently integrated command structure that would govern the use of the alliance's nuclear power; such a structure would, in turn, compel members to remain in the alliance and discourage dependence on national nuclear forces.¹⁰⁸

The antidote for a possible Soviet ground attack had been changed under the flexible response strategy; no longer would such aggression be addressed with a strategic or tactical nuclear strike. Any conventional aggression would now be answered in kind, by conventional counter-strike. Therefore, Stevenson urged that major improvements be made in NATO's conventional ground forces and tactical air forces (including the airlift capability of both the United States and Great Britain). Increased emphasis also had to be placed on integrating conventional production and supply. Furthermore, financial burden-sharing was essential to help relieve the pressure being placed on the American balance of payments by the extensive U. S. military contribution to NATO. The underlying presumption here was that while the United States would continue to carry the financial burden of nuclear power, the Europeans must pick up the slack on NATO's conventional defense.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Stevenson's report was generally well-received by the new Administration,¹¹⁰ and it tended to correspond with other advice that Kennedy was also receiving.¹¹¹ Yet, while these recommendations seemed fairly rational and reasonable--at least in theory--their practical implications not surprisingly served to intensify NATO tensions rather than relieve them. The primary reason for increased strain among alliance members was a result of differing and conflicting interpretations of what was in each member's national interest. The centerpiece of this tension was the role of nuclear power in NATO security policy and who would exercise control over the use of that power. Underlying this question about nuclear power was a growing European concern about the American commitment to the defense of Europe. Moreover, the Europeans' inability to receive a satisfactory answer to the nuclear power question only helped to exacerbate their fears about European security arrangements. The principal leader on the European side of this controversy was France--and its president, Charles de Gaulle.

As was previously suggested, the American position on NATO nuclear power was that it would be supplied and essentially controlled by the United States; this, of course, would eliminate the need for individual national nuclear

¹¹⁰ Ball, p. 160-1; Schlesinger, p. 156-7.

¹¹¹ In particular, the Nitze-Gilpatric-Bruce National Security Policy Committee report, which was also prepared during the transition, highlighted some of the same issues and problems identified in the Stevenson report. In March 1961, Dean Acheson offered his assessment of American-West European relationship; he, too, raised similar concerns as Stevenson and the National Security Policy Committee. See: "A Review of North Atlantic Problems For the Future," NSF: Regional Security: NATO: Acheson Report, 3/61, Box 220, JFKL.

forces. Once again, under the flexible response, the expectation was that the Europeans would have greater responsibility for the conventional needs of the alliance. Yet this new approach ran directly in the face of Charles de Gaulle's foreign policy, which stressed independence, flexibility, and the restoration of French glory--the heart of which was the French force de frappe (the nuclear striking force).¹¹² Even though the costs of such a force would be extreme and the level of deterrent effectiveness would never be able to match that of the American force serving NATO, de Gaulle viewed a nuclear force as equivalent to power, prestige, and influence in the international system. Clearly, de Gaulle had determined that the force de frappe was in the French national interest, and it would be considered a top priority no matter how such a move was interpreted by other alliance members.

It is quite understandable, therefore, that any attempt by the United States to diminish the importance or slow the developmental progress of the French nuclear force--or other French efforts to exert influence in NATO nuclear policy, for that matter--tended to ignite tensions between these alliance members. Shortly after de Gaulle assumed power, he proposed a NATO tripartite directorate to control and expand NATO's military and diplomatic course; it would have, in turn, allowed France greater access to NATO nuclear decision making, among other things. The Eisenhower administration rejected the idea

¹¹² Wolfram F. Hanrieder and Graeme P. Auton, The Foreign Policies of West Germany, France, & Great Britain (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980), pp. 105-11; Alfred Grosser, The Western Alliance: European-American Relations Since 1945, trans. Michael Shaw, with a Foreword by Stanley Hoffmann (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1980), pp. 183-90.

outright, and that position was maintained by Kennedy. Even before the French actually exploded their first nuclear device in 1960, the United States consistently refused to provide any technological or real assistance to France (raw materials, for example) under the auspices of the 1946 MacMahon Act.¹¹³ Further, after Kennedy took office, on the heels of the French nuclear explosion in the Sahara, the new administration remained steadfast in its commitment to a well established U.S. policy on this matter. This occurred despite internal suggestions made to the contrary, particularly by Ambassador James Gavin who was serving as the American representative in Paris at the time.¹¹⁴ De Gaulle's negative reaction toward the Kennedy administration's multilateral force (MLF) proposal reflected consistency, if nothing else: the American involvement and control over the MLF was, again, far too extensive to be considered a useful tool for extending the French national interest.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ The MacMahon Act, the popular name for the Atomic Energy Act, was passed into law August 1946; it prohibited "the delivery to any foreign nation of information on the production of fissionable materials or nuclear weapons." Bundy, p. 468.

¹¹⁴ There is a plethora of material in the National Security Files that illustrate Ambassador James Gavin's position and the contrasting position of the Administration. For example, see: Letters, James Gavin to the President, 13 November 1961; McGeorge Bundy to James Gavin, 17 November 1961; and, James Gavin to McGeorge Bundy, 27 November 1961; Memoranda, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 28 February 1962; and, L.D. Battle [Executive Secretary, Secretary of State] to McGeorge Bundy, 5 March 1962; Letters, John F. Kennedy to James Gavin, undated draft in response to James Gavin to the President (with enclosure), 9 March 1962, NSF: CO: France-General, 11/1/61-12/31/61, 2/17/62-3/9/62, 3/5/62-3/10/62, 3/11/62-3/30/62, Box 71, JFKL. The differences between Gavin and the White House seemed to precipitate Gavin's resignation in mid-1962.

¹¹⁵ Telegram, Central Intelligence Agency Information Report, 18 February 1963, NSF: Regional Security (RS): Europe, Vol. IV, Box 213; Memorandum, USIA Briefing Item, "Initial West European Assessment of US Multilateral Force Proposal," 7 March 1963, NSF: RS: Multilateral Force-General, Vol. II, Merchant, 3/9/63-3/28/63, Box 217, JFKL.

Finally, the French skepticism about the American commitment to European security, which seemed to begin with the lack of American support for the 1956 Suez debacle, was heightened by suggestions made by both the Eisenhower and the Kennedy administrations for nuclear test bans, meaningful arms control and disarmament negotiations, and peaceful applications of nuclear power. Such emphases were interpreted by the French as further limitations on the development of the French nuclear program, an international power game in which the French already clearly saw themselves as running far behind the two superpowers. De Gaulle and most of his European colleagues were quite pleased and encouraged by the Kennedy administration's defense buildup--especially in terms of conventional force--in response to the 1961 Berlin crisis, precisely because it seemed to imply a renewed U.S. commitment to European defense interests.¹¹⁶ Yet, de Gaulle's support and enthusiasm were short-lived, particularly as discussions surrounding a new American defense budget recommended a downsizing in those same forces.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ A sense of the Allies' support for a US military response to the crisis in Berlin can be obtained from the following: Memorandum, Summary of Confidential Discussion Between the Vice President and Chancellor Adenauer, 19 August 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin-General, VP TRip, 8/18/61-8/20/61, Box 82; Memorandum of Conversation Between the Secretary of State and French Ambassador, 24 August 1961; Memorandum of Conversation, Four-Power Ambassadorial Group Meeting, 26 August 1961: Undated Memorandum and Instructions for General Norstad [In response to Work of Four-Power Ambassadorial Group], NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin-General, 8/23/61-8/24/61, 8/26/61-8/28/61, 8/29/61-8/31/61, Box 82, JFKL.

¹¹⁷ Memorandum, Robert McNamara to the President, "Recommended Department of Defense FY'63 Budget and 1963-67 Program," 6 October 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense: Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

Moreover, McNamara's articulation of the counterforce/no-cities targeting doctrine in 1962, which necessarily precluded national nuclear force development programs and emphasized the Europeans' conventional responsibility to NATO,¹¹⁸ reconfirmed the worst fears and suspicions of the French and many other Europeans about American willingness to use nuclear weapons to defend European security. They were convinced that the United States did not perceive a possible attack on Europe as a strike against the United States; they were, therefore, convinced that the United States would not risk possibly sacrificing an American city if a European city was attacked. As a result, the American nuclear deterrent was considered to be ineffective at best, particularly concerning its role in NATO defense strategy. There was no other way to defend vital French and European interests *except* by proceeding with the development of national nuclear forces. A small yet credible nuclear deterrent was considered to be more effective than a large American nuclear force that the enemy knew in advance would never be employed. In light of such perceptions, de Gaulle refused to slow down the progress of the French force de frappe.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Robert S. McNamara, "The United States and Western Europe," p. 626-629.

¹¹⁹ In a 23 July 1962, Charles de Gaulle apparently provided the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, L.L. Lemnitzer, a fairly lengthy, yet tempered, justification for the force de frappe. See: Memorandum, L.L. Lemnitzer to the President, "Meeting with President de Gaulle," 24 July 1962, NSF: CO: France-General, 7/1/62-7/31/62, Box 71a, JFKL. Also see the following for interesting assessments of de Gaulle and his approach to the alliance in general: Current Intelligence Weekly Summary, "De Gaulle and French Foreign Policy," 18 May 1961, NSF: CO: France-General, CIA Briefing Packet, 5/18/61, Box 70; and, Telegram, Central Intelligence Information Report, "Views...on de Gaulle Policies," 18 February 1963, NSF: RS: Europe, Vol. IV, Box 213, JFKL.

French-American relations were not helped by the fact that the United States continued to assist Great Britain with the development of a British national nuclear force during this entire period. Moreover, de Gaulle remained sharply opposed to the American promotion of Great Britain as the leader of the West Europeans--a position that de Gaulle strongly argued should rightly be held by the French. In fact, de Gaulle did his best to sabotage Anglo-American efforts to exert influence in continental policies, most notably symbolized by his 1963 veto of the British application for membership in the European Economic Community.

To presume that Anglo-American cooperation was exemplary during this same time frame, or even much easier than that between the United States and France, would be rather naive, however. In fact, some of the same tensions that troubled the French-American relationship also prevailed in Anglo-American relations. The British, too, were adversely affected by the MacMahon Act, and even more so than the French because British scientists had been intimately involved in the Manhattan Project. As a result, in order for the British to proceed with nuclear research and development, important technological advances had to be duplicated at the expense of the British government--and ultimately, the British taxpayer. This was an especially difficult pill for the British to swallow, particularly considering the severe economic constraints under which the British government was already operating. Nonetheless, the British continued to pursue a national nuclear force, which resulted in their first atomic explosion at Monte

Bello in October 1952. Their first hydrogen explosion, off the Christmas Islands, would come five years later, in May 1957.¹²⁰

Great Britain shared with France a similar perspective on the role nuclear weaponry would play, particularly for increasing British power, prestige and influence in the international system. Once again, nuclear power was considered to be equivalent to real power, and to be a nuclear player would allow the British to promote specific national interests as well as possibly to influence the bipolar struggle between the United States and Soviet Union. Large conventional forces were no longer seen as practical means for defending most British interests; particularly, the exorbitant cost of such a force made a nuclear defense system far more attractive, precisely because an effective nuclear deterrent could be purchased at a much lesser cost (this, of course, was prior to the explosion in expensive missile delivery systems!). Great Britain was determined, therefore, to keep conventional forces at a bare minimum. The British, in fact, began emphasizing the replacement of the old conventional force structure with smaller, mobile, brushfire units that could be easily airlifted to wherever they were needed.¹²¹ Mixed in with British economic concerns and the desire to raise British international prestige, which would also hopefully bolster British domestic morale, was the same skepticism about the American commitment to European defense. Further, a British national nuclear force would provide the same

¹²⁰ See Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, pp. 463-72, Hanrieder & Auton, pp. 190-8; Grosser, pp. 168-170.

¹²¹ Hanrieder and Auton, p. 198.

insurance for Great Britain's national security as the force de frappe would for France's.¹²²

The British nuclear threat would be carried out by the British Vulcan, Victor, and Valiant long-range bomber forces (better known as the "V-bombers"), which the British intended to maintain well into the 1960s and which played a role analogous to American long-range bombers. Great Britain also went ahead with research and development on the Blue Streak missile, a mid-range, liquid-fueled, ground-based ballistic missile that would eventually replace the V-bomber air-to-surface system.¹²³ While French and British nuclear preparations were similar to that of the Americans and the Soviets, the extent of their progress was well behind that of the superpowers. Yet, Anglo-American relations concerning nuclear cooperation took an important turn in the late 1950s, precipitated directly by the traditionally much greater international status afforded to Great Britain than to France by the United States and, thus, to Anglo-American relations.

Not surprisingly, efforts were made on both sides of this bilateral relationship to repair the bridge that had been damaged by the 1956 Suez crisis.¹²⁴ A major American concession was made during an October 1957 meeting between British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and President Eisenhower; Eisenhower agreed to persuade Congress to amend the Atomic

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Bundy, p. 471-2.

¹²⁴ Bundy, p. 471; Richard E. Neustadt, *Alliance Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 30-1.

Energy Act to allow for research and collaboration between British and American scientists and engineers on nuclear projects. From Eisenhower's perspective, such a move would necessarily increase international security because brainpower would be pooled (Sputnik had been launched just a few weeks earlier).¹²⁵ To the British, this amendment was an important means for accelerating the development of their national nuclear force as well as an American "stamp of approval" for that force and the British position in the international system. What was even more crucial about the amendment, however, was that it enabled Macmillan to negotiate the British purchase of the American Skybolt air-to-surface ballistic missile system after his government cancelled the Blue Streak missile in late 1959 because of financial constraints.¹²⁶

The Skybolt missile would be launched from the British V-bombers, thus offering further justification for extending their life in the British defense arsenal. Yet, Skybolt's existence was questionable almost from the very beginning of this Macmillan-Eisenhower agreement, due primarily to ongoing technical and budgetary questions that were being raised within the American defense establishment. In fact, Robert McNamara's predecessor, Thomas Gates, actually cancelled all funds for Skybolt in the last Eisenhower defense budget in January 1961. McNamara did restore the funds for full development shortly after the Kennedy administration took office and continued that funding in the FY 1963

¹²⁵ Eisenhower, p. 219.

¹²⁶ Bundy, p. 471-2; Hanrieder and Auton, p. 199-200; Neustadt, p. 31-3.

defense budget. He did so, however, against the advice of several other presidential advisors, including Carl Kaysen, Jerome Wiesner, and David Bell, as well as two of his own advisors--Pentagon Controller Charles Hitch and Defense Research and Engineering Director Harold Brown.¹²⁷ The FY 1963 allocations, in particular, were a result of an agreement between McNamara and the Air Force, under which a fixed ceiling for total developmental costs had been set. Yet, "[b]y the spring of 1962 it had become clear that the "treaty" would be breached," and McNamara was noticing the same "slippages in schedule and increases in cost" about which he consistently had been warned and which his predecessor had endured.¹²⁸

At the same time in mid-1962 that the Air Force was urging McNamara to release more funds for Skybolt, McNamara again had reports from Hitch and Brown urging him to cancel the program. This time, McNamara was already predisposed to heed their counsel. He, too, agreed that Skybolt was no longer cost-effective or worth the risk, particularly in light of progress being made in ICBM production; therefore, it was no longer in the national interest to see the system to its completion. This is not to say that McNamara and his advisors were unaware that their decision would affect Great Britain. It was abundantly clear,

¹²⁷ Report, Richard E. Neustadt to the President, "Skybolt and Nassau: American Policy-Making and Anglo-American Reflections," 15 November 1963, NSF: M&M: Staff Memoranda: Richard E. Neustadt--"Skybolt and Nassau," 11/63, Box 322, JFKL. Also see: Memorandum, Director, Bureau of the Budget [David Bell] to the President, "FY 1963 Defense Budget Issues," 13 November 1961; and, Memorandum, Carl Kaysen to the President, 9 December 1961, NSF: D&A: Defense: Defense Budget FY 1963 - November-December, 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

¹²⁸ Report, Richard E. Neustadt to the President, "Skybolt and Nassau," 15 November 1963.

however, that American interests were going to take precedence. McNamara decided that previously allocated funds for Skybolt would be released on a month-to-month basis for the remainder of 1962, and then the program would be completely eliminated from the FY 1964 defense budget that would be submitted to Congress in January 1963. A formal announcement concerning Skybolt would not be made until late 1962, after Kennedy had accepted McNamara's recommendation. The Administration would deal with the British in due course; an adequate alternative certainly could be negotiated.¹²⁹

The cancellation of Skybolt, not surprisingly, was a serious blow for the British. Administration consultant Richard Neustadt best summarized precisely what Skybolt had meant to Great Britain and the far-reaching implications of the Administration's decision, in a report he submitted to Kennedy in November 1963:

[T]he Air Force knew--as McNamara, Hitch, and Brown did also--that the SKYBOLT program had been undertaken to meet British purposes as well as ours, and that the British Government was totally dependent on the program to maintain its current version of a nuclear deterrent after the mid-1960's. Manned aircraft--the V-Bombers--were the only British strike-forces at hand or in development. Soviet defense-measures progressively decreased their capability. SKYBOLT was expected to renew it and maintain it for at least five years. British claims to status as a nuclear power, in possession of an independent nuclear deterrent, were thus mortgaged to SKYBOLT, not as a weapon of defense suppression but as the means of mounting an attack.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

But, as Neustadt also suggested, it was not *just* that the British national nuclear deterrent that hinged on Skybolt's deployment, but the stability of the Macmillan government as well:

Besides, the British Government had more at stake than nuclear status. Military power was the surface of the issue; beneath lay Tory power. The Labour opposition had decried the whole deterrent posture; Labour spokesmen had poured scorn on SKYBOLT as a weapon; right-wing Tory back benchers had criticized dependence on Americans. Macmillan, meanwhile, had defended everything and his Defense Minister's supporting case had often been extravagant. Macmillan's reputation, front-bench credibility and Tory solidarity were linked with the success of SKYBOLT.¹³¹

As far as the British were concerned, an alternative would have to be negotiated.

The strains in Anglo-American relations were exacerbated by misinformation, miscommunication, and misinterpretations on both sides of the Atlantic concerning the Skybolt agreement itself as well as the future of the missile.¹³² Tensions reached crisis proportions particularly when news of the system's cancellation filtered into the British press in early December 1962, a few days prior to a McNamara visit to London and a subsequent NATO meeting in Paris. Moreover, it overshadowed a mid-December Macmillan-de Gaulle conference and clearly was to be the entire agenda for a pre-Christmas meeting between Kennedy and Macmillan at Nassau, which had been scheduled long before Skybolt had emerged as a primary issue, let alone a crisis. It is rather amazing, therefore, how seemingly easy it was to resolve this predicament,

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid. Also see Neustadt, pp. 30-55.

especially when one considers the crisis atmosphere that surrounded the elimination of Skybolt's funding.

While Macmillan declined Kennedy's initial offer to continue Skybolt's development but to split the costs with the British, he did negotiate the American provision of the Polaris missile for a British-built submarine force. That force, as well as the necessary nuclear warheads, would be constructed with American technical assistance. In return, the British committed the force permanently and irrevocably to an integrated, multilateral NATO force, but with a special proviso that it could be withdrawn for British defense purposes in the case of a British national security emergency. The interests of both sides seemed to be satisfied--especially the British. As Richard Neustadt later suggested: "Integration thus [had been] married to a form of independence."¹³³ The British had been determined to have a national nuclear force, and not only would that definitely be achieved but a certain level of national independence would be maintained as well.

There was concern, particularly on the United States' part, about how the French would react to the Anglo-American agreement that was reached at Nassau and the broader implications for the Western Alliance. The success of a new multilateral NATO force, as well as more general multilateral integration within Europe, clearly depended on French involvement and cooperation, and the United States quickly realized that de Gaulle had to be courted if intra-alliance harmony was to be ensured. The vehicle for that courtship would be American

¹³³ Neustadt, p. 53.

assistance for the French nuclear program. While de Gaulle had consistently maintained that outside aid for the French nuclear force would be declined if French independence was at all compromised, the United States hoped that a British-like escape clause might entice de Gaulle. Therefore, Kennedy decided that de Gaulle immediately would be offered the same terms on Polaris as had Macmillan, thus hopefully demonstrating to the French that they were being treated on the same plane as the British. Not surprisingly, however, de Gaulle immediately rejected the offer.¹³⁴

The Nassau Agreement represented, in de Gaulle's estimation, all that was iniquitous about the Western Alliance. It was negotiated bilaterally and offered to France only as a *fait accompli*. Moreover, French nuclear technology lagged even farther behind the Americans than did the British; in turn, the capacity to build the necessary submarine force to accommodate Polaris--let alone the warheads--was lacking. Further, the emergency clause was not considered to be sufficiently potent to meet the standard of independence that de Gaulle had established as being essential for a French national nuclear force.¹³⁵ Perhaps French Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville best summarized the very essence of the French objection to the Nassau Agreement:

The Anglo-American Bahamas agreement...illustrated the fact that the ideas people had about the future of Europe on this and the other side of the Channel were unfortunately at odds the moment the time for practical action arrived. The difference between a

¹³⁴ Report, Richard E. Neustadt to the President, "Skybolt and Nassau," 15 November 1963.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* Also see: Neustadt, pp. 54-5; Grosser, pp. 206-7.

nuclear force as part of NATO and a national nuclear force is the difference between an Atlantic Europe and a European Europe.¹³⁶

Very simply, differing interpretations of what was in the national interest of individual alliance members compelled those states to view the Nassau Agreement, as well as other questions concerning NATO nuclear strategy, in a very different light. As is often the case in alliance politics, what is good for one member is not necessarily considered good for another, even if the alliance itself is at stake. The sovereignty and legitimacy of the individual state will undoubtedly take precedence, and ever to presume otherwise is naive and shortsighted.

In the broader context, this specific example of alliance politics again illustrates clearly how difficult and contentious the definition and implementation of the national interest is. The national interest is not interpreted in a political vacuum, and, thus numerous factors may shape and hamper any administration's effort to define and sell its view of American sovereignty and legitimacy. As has been demonstrated, developing nuclear strategy in the early 1960s demanded reorganizing the Defense establishment, reallocating and redistributing budget funds, using crisis situations to sell and implement certain aspects of that policy (the 1961 Berlin crisis), fighting with Congressional and departmental opponents (the B-70 bomber controversy), and negotiating one's way through the mine field of alliance politics.

¹³⁶ As cited by Grosser, p. 207.

The Kennedy administration, like any presidential administration, approached American national security with good intentions: to protect and defend American sovereignty and legitimacy in the best possible way. Yet, at many points, it seemed to forget that defining the national interest in context is very much a part of the game--and art--of politics; parochial interests will be protected at every turn. Therefore, understanding the national interest in a contextual setting is as much about marketing a set of policies as it is anything else. The Kennedy administration had to learn that the 'selling' of its interpretation of the national interest was far more difficult than it might ever have imagined.

CHAPTER IV

On National Leadership

It is nearly impossible to study American government, or any government or formal political system for that matter, without confronting the issue of leadership. Interests are defined, nor policies implemented, by some magical wave of a wand. Instead, something and/or someone precipitate that definition and implementation, and for specific reasons. Carefully intertwined in the definition and implementation of interests and policies are the questions of responsibility and accountability. By contemplating the concept of leadership, one can shed light on these theoretical issues precisely because leadership is at the center of this very complicated web. Political scholar Aaron Wildavsky, in his study of Moses as a political leader, argued that leadership is a function of the regime in which it exists.¹ If one accepts Wildavsky's assertion, then understanding a specific regime should enlighten us about leadership within that regime, just as studying examples of leadership should reveal particular elements of the regime that, in turn, should assist us in better comprehending the regime itself.

The governmental framework of United States is that of a representative democracy. In a representative democracy, power ultimately rests in the hands of the people. Yet, in the interest of avoiding factionalism and promoting order, the

¹ Aaron Wildavsky, The Nursing Father. Moses as a Political Leader (University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1984), pp. 19-26, 182-216.

responsibility of governance in such a regime is entrusted to a small number of individuals who are elected by the general public and who are accountable to the public.² A primary implication of such a system is that those who are elected are in the position to lead the system and, thus, are expected to do so; moreover, the public at least tacitly agrees to follow those it has chosen to elect. Wildavsky, among others, further maintained that in order to grasp fully the concept of leadership one must appreciate the notion of followership as well.³ One of the most fundamental lessons that can be drawn from a study of representative democracy, at least in theory, is that leading and following--at a very basic level--are literally built into the regime precisely because they are the very essence of the regime.

One quickly realizes, however, that there is much more to leadership in the United States than just being a nationally elected official. While a national leader most probably would be elected, it is imprudent and naive to conclude that all elected representatives are necessarily national leaders. In fact, it is abundantly clear that despite the fact that there are 536 elected representatives in the national government (535 members of Congress and one president), the American public is fortunate if at any given time it has any more than just a handful of *possible* leaders, let alone a solitary national leader actually in place. This is due in part to the constitutional rules that dictate the differing schemes of

² This, of course, is the classic argument that is found in *Federalist No. 10*. See Clinton Rossiter, ed., *The Federalist Papers* (New York: Mentor Books-NAL Penguin Inc., 1961), pp. 77-83.

³ Wildavsky, p. 212-16.

representation for the executive and the legislature. Yet, this challenge to true national leadership also stems from the intricate structure of the American government, the diversity and complexity of the American people, and the increasingly formidable issues that this nation must confront. Such a system naturally makes followership of an individual--or even a small group--a difficult prospect at best.

Nonetheless, leadership and followership do occur, especially in the realm of foreign policy or when questions with supreme national consequence are at the fore. From what branch of the national government that leadership emerges is, however, a very different query; it most often depends, at least initially, on the constitutional jurisdiction under which a specific problem seems to fall. Interests, issues, and policies are guided and directed toward specific conclusions because the authority has been afforded for that to happen. Yet, more often than not, a significant amount of bargaining, cajoling, delegating, and managing surround a policy process, particularly when such a process takes place within a system in which constitutional responsibilities are shared and blended and duties within the branches are extremely vague. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the determination of leadership and followership within the American government can be an arduous task, precisely because of the separate but equal branches at the national level and the system of checks and balances which guide their operation.

This chapter studies the concept of leadership--and, thus, followership--in terms of the development and implementation of the flexible response strategy

during the Kennedy administration. Such an inquiry demands investigating within what constitutional boundaries nuclear strategy and national defense policy fall and, therefore, how questions of authority and power help to determine who will lead and follow in this particular policy arena. As was suggested above, leadership also invariably raises questions about responsibility and accountability; in the United States, the public's will is carried out by representatives who then must answer directly to the American people. In the case of the flexible response, who was responsible for its conception and execution as a national defense strategy--both theoretically and practically--and, more importantly, who was to be held accountable in the public's eyes?

Finally, the flexible response was much more than a simple framework that suggested a certain approach to American nuclear power. It would affect numerous actual and defense-related issues, such as those that will be analyzed here: defense organization, management, and budgeting; and, the determination of the appropriate balance between strategic nuclear and conventional force systems. As the effects of the flexible response overflowed into various policy areas, jurisdictional boundaries became less clear; moreover, policy implementation naturally involved a range of actors and other variables. Therefore, negotiation and administration of the system became crucial elements in effectively transforming flexible response from a theoretical concept to an actual defense program. True leadership would become synonymous with one's ability to manage adeptly various components of that transformation. An

examination of the development and implementation of flexible response illustrates once again that simply being elected, even to the office of the presidency, is not necessarily equivalent to national leadership in the American political system.

Nuclear Strategy & National Defense: Who Has Power and Authority?

Statistical Reflections on National Leadership from 1960's Election

Few experts would argue that national security and defense issues were the dominant themes of the 1960 presidential campaign; in fact, it is generally accepted that it was an election driven by domestic concerns. Yet, one of John F. Kennedy's primary tasks during the campaign was to convince the American public that he could handle sufficiently the complexity of the international arena in order to complement the voters' tendency to support the Democrats on domestic affairs. By doing so, the Democratic ticket could maintain a hold on voters who might otherwise vote for Richard Nixon because they misperceived Kennedy's youthfulness as necessarily meaning he was inexperienced in foreign affairs, and thus incapable of national leadership in either the domestic or international spheres.⁴ A demonstration by Kennedy of at least an average level of competency in foreign affairs--that would then translate into national leadership

⁴ Divine, Foreign Policy and U.S. Presidential Elections: 1952-1960, p. 252-57, 270-72.

skills--was essential for ensuring that the Democrats did not lose their traditional hold in the domestic sphere, and thus lose the 1960 election as well.⁵

There is data which suggests that Kennedy and the Democrats made just enough headway in foreign affairs, as well as on defense-related issues, to affirm Kennedy's leadership ability and to secure the Democrats' victory in 1960. The cross-tabulation of two 1959 American Institute of Public Opinion (AIPO) polls--less than a year before the 1960 election--indicated that while 31 percent of the respondents had more confidence in the Republicans' handling of major international issues (ie., keeping peace, dealing with the Soviet Union, foreign policy, external communism), 28 percent sided with the Democratic Party and 29 percent saw no difference between the two parties.⁶ Even though only a small percentage of respondents in those same polls identified "National defense preparedness" and "Space, Sputnik, and missiles" as the most important issues of the day, the Democrats garnered overwhelming confidence from the voters who did recognize those particular problems (35 percent to 8 percent, and 50 percent to 21 percent respectively).⁷ What is most interesting about this data is that while the Republicans may have had a slight lead in foreign affairs, they clearly

⁵ James Sundquist argued that Kennedy did not make huge inroads among voters who advocated Republican control of foreign affairs, but that Kennedy carried a strong enough mandate in domestic affairs to offset his losses on other issues. See Sundquist, *Politics and Policy*, pp. 467-68.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 464
The polls asked two questions: "What do you think is the most important problem facing the country today?" and "Which political party do you think can do a better job handling the problem you have just mentioned--the Republican or Democratic Party?" Of the 7515 responses, over 3600 (about 48 percent) indicated foreign policy issues as the most important ones.

⁷ *Ibid.*

were not dominating the Democrats in the arena that is traditionally an asset for the incumbent party--and should have been for the Republicans in 1960. The public seemingly had begun to question the quality of Republican leadership in the foreign affairs realm, even prior to the commencement of the 1960 election season; the actual candidates had not even been formally announced at this point, yet the Republican Party was looking as if it was vulnerable.

In an 18 October 1960 AIPO poll--conducted just prior to the 1960 presidential election--switches in voters' preferences between 1956 and 1960 were evaluated.⁸ That poll indicated that among those voters who identified "national defense, defense preparedness, and the missile gap" as the most important problem (albeit a small group--about 5 percent), 59 percent who had voted for the Republicans in 1956 were switching to the Democrats in 1960. In that particular poll, six primary issues had been identified by voters, and on five of those issues the index of relative pulling power was positive for the Democrats. The issue with the second highest index of relative pulling power to the Democrats--second only to "unemployment"--was national defense policy. Additionally, the issue of "American prestige abroad" was raised by voters for the first time in AIPO polls (similar AIPO polls had been conducted several times throughout the 1950s), and this issue also provided a positive pulling power index for the Democrats as well.

⁸ Ibid., p. 467.

The poll was based on 2944 responses to the following questions: "What do you think is the most important problem facing the country today?" and "If the presidential election were being held today, which candidates would you vote for--the Democratic candidates, Kennedy and Johnson, or the Republican candidates, Nixon and Lodge?" If the voter were undecided, the question asked was: "As of today, do you lean more to Kennedy and Johnson or more to Nixon and Lodge?"

One cannot help but be reminded that Kennedy had emphasized the question of American power and prestige continuously during the campaign, and the polling data did seem to indicate that his effort was successful.

Even in the one area of the AIPO poll that registered a negative pulling power index for the Democrats--foreign policy issues (the largest category of the six)--25 percent of Republicans in 1956 were still switching to the Democratic ticket in 1960. Furthermore, 58 percent of voters in the foreign policy category who had not voted in 1956, who did not remember how they had voted, or who had voted for an "other" party candidate were also supporting Kennedy-Johnson in 1960. On the other hand, the 1960 Republican ticket was only gaining 8 percent of the Democrats in 1956 who were identified in the foreign policy category (meaning that 92 percent of the Democrats in 1956 were staying with the Democratic ticket in 1960).⁹

This evidence suggests that Nixon-Lodge had not garnered enough support from voters in the foreign affairs category to overcome the losses on other issues, even though the Republicans were still considered to be the predominant party in this particular area. Clearly, Kennedy-Johnson had been able to demonstrate at least an average level of competency in foreign affairs; the public, therefore, seemed willing to accept the Democrats' leadership in the office of the presidency in November 1960. However, the real test for the Kennedy administration was translating those election results into policy implementation.

⁹ Ibid.

The Constitutional Powers of the Executive and Legislature

Nuclear strategy is one of numerous twentieth century phenomena for which the American Founding Fathers of course could not have provided a prescription. Even in more general terms--control of American national defense--it is not a clearly defined, exclusive, constitutional power of either the executive or the legislature. In fact, the specific constitutional responsibilities of each branch invariably demand that both the president and the Congress be involved in national defense policy.

The president is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and, therefore, responsible for directing their operation. Because of the president's power of appointment and position as chief of the executive branch, the president not only appoints the civilian head of each of the military services but also serves as the immediate supervisor of those individuals. Some scholars have even maintained that the presidential oath itself, under which the president promises to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution, implies a "constitutional responsibility for the preservation of national security."¹⁰ As Edward Corwin suggested in his classic analysis of the presidency, particularly in a wartime situation, the "constitutional basis [for American war power] has shifted from the doctrine of delegated powers to the doctrine of inherent powers", thus ensuring that the president has full use of the nation's power during a military crisis. Moreover, it also seems that the president's Commander-in-Chief power "has been

¹⁰ Cecil V. Crabb, Jr. and Pat M. Holt, Invitation to Struggle: Congress, the President and Foreign Policy, 2nd ed., (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1984), pp. 10-11.

transformed from a simple power of military command to a vast reservoir of indeterminate powers [especially] in time of emergency."¹¹ One might be apt to conclude from such evidence that the president does have *primary* responsibility for national defense, even if it is not exclusive. Yet, even if one grants the president the responsibility and the constitutional authority for national defense, it does not necessarily mean that the president actually is able to execute that authority.

Congress also has certain constitutional powers that guarantee its involvement in national defense policy. According to Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution, the legislature is responsible for raising the funds (ie., taxes, duties, etc.) to provide for the defense of the United States. Furthermore, Congress is authorized to declare war; to raise, support, and make rules for the governance and regulation of the military; and, to provide for the organization and arming of the military. While the president does appoint the service secretaries, those appointments must be approved by two-thirds of the Senate. Finally, Section 8's 'necessary and proper clause' and Section 9's provision concerning Congressional control over the expenditure of Treasury monies are sweeping powers that ensure Congressional oversight of budgeting for the executive branch--and, thus, the military.

¹¹ Edward S. Corwin, The President: Office and Powers, 1787-1984, 5th Rev. ed., edited by Randall W. Bland, Theodore, T. Hindson, & Jack W. Peltason (New York: New York University Press, 1984), p. 296.

The sheer breadth of Congressional power might be interpreted as the presumption of Congressional dominance not only in national security matters but in other areas as well. Yet numerous scholars argue the exact opposite: that "Congress's enumerated powers...are not boundless" and that "[t]he very act of listing the powers was intended to limit government, for by implication those powers that are not listed are prohibited."¹² Clearly, there is a sharing of authority between the executive and the legislature in national security matters. More often than not, however, the president seems to take the lead in this policy area, particularly when a national security agenda has been incorporated into a campaign, thus leaving Congress struggling to find ways to exercise its constitutionally-mandated influence.

Constitutional Powers, National Leadership, and the 1960 Presidential Transition

The development and implementation of the flexible response during the Kennedy administration definitely reflects this tendency for the executive and legislature to clash over the leadership position in national security affairs. From the beginning, there seemed to be little question in John Kennedy's mind about who would lead and who would follow, especially on such issues as national defense. A special advisor to the Administration, Richard E. Neustadt, best summarized the importance of establishing the proper tone during the transition in order to ensure the President's leadership role after the Inauguration:

¹² A prime example is Roger H. Davidson and Walter J. Oleszek, Congress and Its Members, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1990), p. 19.

One hears talk all over town about "another Hundred Days" once Kennedy is in the White House. If this means an impression to be made on Congressmen, bureaucrats, press, public, foreign governments, the analogy is apt. Nothing would help the new Administration more than such a first impression of energy, direction, action, and accomplishment. Creating that impression and sustaining it become a prime objective for the months after Inauguration Day. Since an impression of the Roosevelt sort feeds on reality, and could not be sustained by mere "public relations," establishing conditions that will foster real accomplishment becomes a prime objective for the brief transition period before Inauguration Day.¹³

Kennedy's leadership ability had been validated in the November 1960 election, but he needed to work quickly to set the necessary structure for the implementation of his election agenda--and, in this case, a new nuclear strategy, the flexible response. Finding the appropriate secretary of defense was a primary task, yet it proved more difficult than it first might seem.¹⁴

Kennedy apparently contemplated retaining Eisenhower's defense secretary, Thomas Gates, but advisors persuaded him against such a move. "[A]fter having made a campaign issue about the inadequacy of our defense, [Kennedy] could hardly anoint the man who bore so heavy a part of the responsibility."¹⁵ He offered the job to Robert Lovett, a New York businessman

¹³ Memorandum on Organizing The Transition. A Tentative Check-List for the Weeks Between Election and Inaugural, Prepared by Richard E. Neustadt, 15 September 1960, POF: Special Correspondence: Neustadt, Richard E., 9/15/60-10/11/63, Box 31, JFKL.

¹⁴ Neustadt maintained, in his transition memorandum, that the appointment of a personal staff, of the Science and Security aides, and of the Executive Office aides (ie., Budget Director, Council of Economic Advisors Chairman, etc.) should be the immediate post-election priorities of the president-elect. According to Neustadt, Cabinet officers need not be designated until early December, although such appointments should be made no later than that. The announcement concerning Robert McNamara's appointment as Secretary of Defense would be made on 13 December 1960.

¹⁵ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days*, p. 129.

who had served as Assistant Secretary of War during World War II and as Secretary of Defense during the Truman administration, but Lovett declined for health reasons. Lovett did, however, recommend the new president of Ford Motor Company, Robert S. McNamara. "He knew McNamara had built a brilliant record with statistical control in the military during World War II, while Lovett was civilian head of the Army Air Force."¹⁶ Lovett's recommendation came without reservation, and other Kennedy advisors (such as Clark Clifford, Sargent Shriver, and John Kenneth Galbraith) confirmed McNamara's qualifications. McNamara accepted the position following two meetings with the President-elect, but only under the condition that he would be responsible for choosing the other appointees who would serve under him at the Pentagon.¹⁷ This proviso would enhance McNamara's ability to implement the drastic changes within the Defense Department that eventually became synonymous with his personal approach to defense management.

Neustadt also urged Kennedy to use the transition period for "the working out of strategy and tactics for an exploitation of the "honeymoon" ahead."

Neustadt's frame of reference was extremely broad and, perhaps, necessarily so:

This means decisions on the substance, timing, publicity, and priority of legislative proposals to Congress. It means decisions of the same sort on discretionary executive actions. It means decisions on relationships between projected proposals and actions. It means weighing short-range gains against long-range troubles, political and

¹⁶ Henry L. Trehitt, McNamara (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 7.

¹⁷ Schlesinger, pp. 131-33; Trehitt, pp. 6-9. Also see: Deborah Shapley, Promise and Power: The Life and Times of Robert McNamara (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1993), pp. 82-86.

other. It means judging what should be done in the President's name, and what should not, and how to enforce the distinction. It also means evaluating fiscal implications of proposals and of actions, both, and making some immediate decisions on taxation and the budget.¹⁸

The implication of such an effort was to lay the foundation on which presidential leadership could also be established. An important technique for implementing this recommendation was the use of various working groups and task forces, which would be responsible for evaluating particular policy areas. Two different committees examined defense-related issues during the Kennedy transition: one reviewed the defense establishment itself; the other assessed American national security policy and various contiguous questions. It is hardly surprising that both task forces emphasized the importance of the president's role, guidance, and authority in national defense matters. It was also abundantly clear whom these particular committees' deemed as the leader in this policy area.

In its late 1960 report, the Committee on the Defense Establishment reminded the President-elect that the 1960 Democratic Party Platform had pledged a complete reexamination of the American military organization "as a first order of business of the next Administration."¹⁹ The presumption of the Party had been that it was well within the executive's authority--and responsibility--to conduct such a review, and the Committee had acted upon Senator Kennedy's

¹⁸ Memorandum on Organizing The Transition, Prepared by Richard E. Neustadt, 15 September 1960.

¹⁹ "Report to Senator Kennedy from Committee on the Defense Establishment," Pre-Presidential Papers: Transition Files: Task Force Reports, 1960, Defense, Box 1073, JFKL.

subsequent request to do precisely that. The Committee maintained that the fundamental issue in any analysis of American defense policy was the improvement of reaction time. Its reasoning was three-fold:

First is the unprecedented strategic value of time--the ability to react instantly against aggression in this nuclear-space age. In World Wars I and II our country had at least eighteen months to build and mobilize its defenses. If there should ever be a World War III, we would be fortunate to have eighteen minutes to react. Second is the crucial time element in the United States v. Soviet arms race--the need for early selection among alternative weapon systems and for shorter lead times between conception and use. Third is the effect of time on defense cost. Regardless of how much the people of this country spend, they cannot buy time. Yet we tend to forget the costly effect of building weapons which become obsolescent as a result of delay. Only by giving full recognition to these all-important time factors can the Defense Establishment of the United States be strengthened in a meaningful way.²⁰

It is not unreasonable to assume that subsequent improvements in the defense system would, in turn, enhance the president's ability to execute the Commander-in-Chief responsibilities. While both Kennedy and the Committee recognized that some changes in the defense establishment might demand legislative action, it was within the executive's purview to make the necessary recommendations upon which the legislature could then act.²¹

According to the Committee, the key for resolving the reaction time issue lay in clarifying and reinforcing civilian command and control within the Department of Defense itself. Specifically, the authority of the Secretary over all aspects and levels of the Department must be unequivocal and unquestionable;

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

efficient organization of civilian assistants and Under Secretaries would help to address this problem. The implementation of the most streamlined and direct chain of command, from the president on down, would in turn increase the Administration's capacity to fulfill other major objectives in the Defense Department modernization process, including: decreasing the waste and delays in new weapons systems development; minimizing the Service-oriented parochialism in defense planning and military mission formulation; and, better utilizing the human and material resources of the Department.²² Remedying the perceived weaknesses in the administration and management of the defense establishment in this manner would, of course, also enable the president to "preserve, protect, and defend" the nation more effectively. Again, this seemed to be the underlying purpose of the task force.

The prominence of the president was the obvious assumption of the National Security Policy Committee as well, the second defense-related task force which was led by Paul Nitze, Roswell Gilpatric, and David Bruce.²³ In describing its purpose, it was absolutely clear for whom the Committee had been working--and would continue to work:

²² Ibid.

²³ The Committee emphasized the extensive series of consultations that had been part of the committee's proceedings. A bipartisan group of "senior Americans [who were] well informed on national security matters," including Robert Lovett, William Foster, Dean Acheson, and Thomas Finletter (among others), led this list. Appropriate staffers in the Defense, State, and Treasury Departments and in the Budget Bureau were also consulted. Private research institutions, such as RAND, the Institute of Defense Analyses, and MIT, were contacted. Finally, knowledgeable foreigners from the British, French, German, and Canadian governments were interviewed as well. See "Report of Senator Kennedy's National Security Policy Committee," Pre-Presidential Papers: Transition Files: Task Force Reports 1960: National Security Policy Committee, Box 1074, JFKL.

[The Committee] has attempted to isolate the principal national security issues which the President will face during his early months in office and to sort out those which the Committee feels reasonably firm recommendations can be made and those requiring further guidance from the President-elect....The Committee, or one or more of its members, would welcome an opportunity to discuss these issues with the President-elect as soon after November 9th as may suit his convenience. In any case the Committee would welcome guidance as to any further work Senator Kennedy may want it to undertake.²⁴

Yet, the Committee's initial presumption did not end here. This theme of presidential direction and leadership was, in fact, a constant throughout the report.

According to the report, the effective transition to a new defense program depended greatly on early and definitive guidance from the new president. It was the president's responsibility to determine the appropriate mix between "win" capabilities and a retaliatory capacity in the nuclear sphere; the president would also have to calculate "the speed and scope" at which American limited war capability would be bolstered and updated, especially in terms of non-nuclear power. Remembering the difficulties that the previous administration had on these issues was paramount, and the committee did not hesitate to raise them. Of particular importance and concern were the "[b]udgetary pressures and the pressures for greater general war capabilities [that] have caused a continuous squeeze on our non-nuclear capabilities."²⁵ While the report's recommendation

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. The Committee willingly admitted that the new defense program would demand an increase in federal expenditures. This probably would place a burden on the national budget and might adversely affect the U.S. balance of payments. Again, it was incumbent upon the president-elect to evaluate the

on these particular issues was explicit, it was tempered with some apprehension as well: "To have capabilities which would meet all contingencies will be a tremendous undertaking. An early Presidential decision, after appropriate briefing...will be needed."²⁶ This was even more the case when considering the possibility of actually fighting a nuclear war, general or limited:

Judgments as to the circumstances under which nuclear war must be accepted as unavoidable, who should have his hand on the safety catches and the triggers of nuclear war and the nature of the initial target systems, should deterrence fail, must all be made by the President.

Those judgments are inherently not delegatable. The time for an intense period of briefing, discussion, and consideration of these areas of strategic judgment should be set aside by the President-elect before he takes office.²⁷

The Committee was absolutely sure about the need for active presidential direction and leadership whenever the nuclear war scenario was on the table.

Once the president had given guidance on the broader strategic questions, specific program decisions could be evaluated--and these *were* issues on which the president could delegate authority, most likely to a team that would be headed by the president's Secretary of Defense. On the matter of disarmament policy planning and negotiation, it was also the president's obligation to provide early and precise direction; but, again, specific aspects could be delegated to

seriousness of that burden, to decide if it would be too excessive, and to make the necessary adjustments to the program. The Committee recommended that Congress should be asked for "greater flexibility in transferring funds between programs" to help alleviate some of the fiscal pressures.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

appropriate members of the State and Defense Departments and other related agencies.²⁸ In fact, the Committee recommended that the Secretary of State be charged with the disarmament planning organization and any actual negotiations, as well as serving as the conduit between the president and everyone else who would be involved in the process. "We believe," the Committee said, "the Secretary of State backed by the President and by the full resources of a revitalized State Department is in the best position to bring unity and force into our foreign policy and the politico-military aspects of our national security policy." The president would, of course, be responsible for any final decisions concerning arms control and disarmament questions.²⁹ Delegation of authority would not be interpreted as an abdication of responsibility--on arms control and disarmament or national defense policy, no matter how specific or general the issue might be.

A separate transition task force on disarmament placed greater emphasis than did the national security committee on a new disarmament agency and director, who would be independent from the State Department. Yet, in its discussion of image projection in the arms control and disarmament process, it also underlined the role and the importance of presidential leadership in this and other policy areas:

²⁸ William Foster, who had served on the Gaither Committee, was named the head of a new Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Sorensen would later say that ACDA came "to symbolize the combination of scientific, legal, military and diplomatic talents needed to develop concrete disarmament proposals...it provided useful studies of small and immediate problems, such as joint measures to prevent surprise attacks, and large, long-range problems, such as the economic adjustments necessary when all arms production ceases." See Sorensen, Kennedy, pp. 517-518.

²⁹ "Report of Senator Kennedy's National Security Policy Committee."

In all public announcements, President Kennedy should project the image of a man who, speaking for his country and its allies, reveals a deep sense of dedication and urgency on the issue of peace and a desire to settle East-West differences peacefully. If he has such an image, he will be free to move decisively in handling Russian diplomatic offensives. There is no reason to believe that the Russians will be more tractable in the future than in the past. It may be necessary sometime in the future to rebuff some Soviet overtures or even be prepared to break off negotiations. Only if the world has confidence in Kennedy as a man of peace will it believe that he was right in taking such deliberate action.³⁰

Image rarely would be considered as equivalent to leadership. It certainly is, however, often an important element of leadership as it possibly can increase one's bargaining capacity, thus enabling a president actually to carry out constitutional powers. That can, at times, mean the delegation of certain aspects of one's constitutional responsibilities. This is not just the case with arms control and disarmament issues; the same holds true in the broader spectrum of national security policy as well.

Exercising National Leadership to Implement the Flexible Response

McNamara, the Whiz Kids, and the Budget Battle

While it may seem very natural and perfectly acceptable that the executive takes the lead on national security issues, especially in light of these compelling arguments, it is not a foregone conclusion that everyone in government either

³⁰ "Report to the Honorable John F. Kennedy by the Task Force on Disarmament," 31 December 1960, Pre-Presidential Papers: Transition Files: Task Force Reports, 1960, Disarmament, Box 1073, JFKL. The secretary of this task force was Jerome Spingarn, a Washington attorney. The group was comprised of fourteen others, including such individuals as Benjamin Cohen, Jeffrey Kitchen, Klaus Knorr, Ernest Lefever, Richard Neustadt, Paul Nitze, Thomas Shelling, and Jerome Weisner--among others.

agrees upon or supports. As has been suggested, the proper organization of the defense establishment was a crucial aspect in ensuring that the president could lead effectively in the national security realm. Kennedy's acceptance of Robert McNamara as Secretary of Defense--on McNamara's terms--reflected a sort of unwritten contract between McNamara and the nation's Commander-in-Chief, that seemingly guaranteed that McNamara would always have the best interests of the President in mind, despite the independence that was also mandated by that contract. William W. Kaufmann, one of McNamara's well-known assistants, would later summarize that relationship as follows:

The President himself played a vital role in sponsoring major adjustments in the style and substance of the nation's defense effort. At his side, and deeply committed to his service, stood Robert S. McNamara. If Kennedy was the patron of new departures in the realm of national security, McNamara has been their architect and engineer.³¹

Thus, McNamara's ensuing reorganization of the Department of Defense was a reflection of the leeway that the Commander-in-Chief was willing to provide to secure the implementation of a certain vision of nuclear strategy and national defense.

McNamara spent the week immediately following his appointment gathering information on and evaluating possible candidates for various Defense Department positions. It apparently was recommended to him that Charles Hitch, a well-known economist and head of RAND's economics division, be considered for the job of Pentagon comptroller. It has been reported that McNamara read

³¹ Kaufmann, The McNamara Strategy, p. ix.

Hitch's latest book, The Economics of Defense in the Nuclear Age; he was impressed by Hitch's application of "principles of microeconomics, operations research and statistical analysis to...the whole gamut of national security, including comparing and choosing weapons systems, restructuring the defense budget, [and] formulating military strategy."³² McNamara recognized Hitch's approach as that which he had used during his own tenure in the military, and later at Ford. Hitch was given the job.

Charles Hitch and Paul Nitze, McNamara's Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, subsequently attracted other RAND associates to join McNamara's defense team, such as Alain Enthoven, Henry Rowen, Frank Trinkl, William Kaufmann, and Daniel Ellsberg. Enthoven, in particular, apparently deeply impressed McNamara with an almost "obsessive love for numbers, equations, calculations, along with a certain arrogance that his calculations could reveal truth."³³ He would serve as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Systems Analysis, and it is said that McNamara met with him nearly every day. As a whole, this highly celebrated band "of young, book-smart, Ivy League, think-tank civilian assistants" would become known as McNamara's "Whiz Kids";³⁴ systems analysis was their unifying forte. While it was quite clear from the beginning that the overall management of defense would rely heavily on their

³² Kaplan, The Wizards of Armageddon, p. 252.

³³ Ibid., p. 254.

³⁴ Ibid.

skills, it is hardly surprising that controversy also immediately surrounded their activities.

The second major task that McNamara faced, almost simultaneous with appointing his staff, was conducting a thorough, presidentially-ordered assessment of the entire national defense system, including: strategy, weapons, expenditures, and organization.³⁵ McNamara's new staff--and their talents--were quickly put to work. The short-term purpose of this assignment was the preparation of a supplemental budget request for FY 1962, to be submitted to Congress shortly after the Inauguration, that addressed the new President's concerns about the current national defense budget.³⁶ The project was, of course, also the initiation of the President's ultimate, long-term goal--the implementation of a flexible response.

There was, moreover, immediate recognition within the Administration that civilian input was not only appropriate but essential, especially so that the President could "personally...make the necessary decisions in light of your own

³⁵ Kennedy discussed this project in his 30 January 1961 *State of the Union* address to Congress. See "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union" in Public Papers of the President of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1961 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1962), pp. 23-4.

³⁶ It is interesting to note that Neustadt had recommended in his transition report that the goal of the various task forces and specific issue analyses should be the preparation of a presidential message to Congress. Having such a goal would naturally precipitate a timeframe and scope in which such evaluations would be conducted. See Memorandum on Organizing The Transition, Prepared by Richard E. Neustadt, 15 September 1960.

assessment of the complex issues involved [in reviewing basic military policy]."³⁷ McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy's Special Assistant for National Security, argued further: "In the past these matters have generally been settled in the light of pressure and argument mainly from interested parties--the Air Force especially, but others too. All of us are agreed that a better way must be found."³⁸ The President, while in the process of formulating basic military policy, absolutely should elicit the expertise of particularly the Joint Chiefs of Staff; yet, the initial studies should not be conducted by the military.³⁹ Furthermore, the reorganization of the defense budgeting process had been designed and was being implemented by the Pentagon's new civilian assistants, in conjunction with the Budget Bureau. The projected effects of the budget reform were the integration of defense planning and budgeting, budgeting based on unified military assumptions and doctrines, rational planning and budgeting practices that were based on systems analysis, and budgeting that was conducted with a long-term perspective--the lack of all of which was attributed to military parochialism in the

³⁷ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 30 January 1961, NSF: M&M: National Security Council Meetings, 1961, Meeting 475, Box 313, JKFL. This memorandum discussed policies that had previously been approved in the National Security Council, the most urgent of which was basic military policy. Bundy defined the issue as: "What is our view of the kind of strategic force we need, the kinds of limited-war forces, the kind of defense for the continental U.S., and the strategy on NATO." Bundy told Kennedy that those question had arisen out of policy papers that debated strategic versus limited-war forces; first-strike and counter-force strategic planning versus a deterrent and second-strike posture; and, long-term planning versus crisis management.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

defense budgeting process.⁴⁰ Defense Department Comptroller Charles Hitch had designed the Planning-Programming Budget System (PPBS), at McNamara's behest, to ensure the most cost-effective, neutral approach possible to defense budgeting. The intention was to have a system that met national needs, and not just the particular interests of the military or the Department.⁴¹

One is reminded that, during the transition, both defense-related task forces urged the strengthening of the defense secretary--a civilian--as the leader of the Defense Department and immediate representative of the executive. That recommendation was endorsed further by Kennedy Budget Director David Bell, who labeled it "the most important key" for correcting the weaknesses that were plaguing the defense budget process at that time.⁴² Alain Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith would later assert that the implementation of various elements of the PPBS had bolstered the role of the secretary in national security affairs, which ultimately helped the Secretary more effectively serve the President, to whom he was directly responsible, as well as the nation as a whole.⁴³ Very simply, increasing the importance and the involvement of the civilian defense advisors

⁴⁰ Memorandum and Discussion Notes for 1 February 1961 NSC Meeting, David E. Bell to McGeorge Bundy and Robert McNamara, 30 January 1961; and, Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 31 January 1961, NSF: M&M: National Security Council Meetings, 1961, Meeting 475, Box 313, JFKL. In a 31 January 1961 memorandum to Kennedy, in preparation for the same meeting, McGeorge Bundy stressed the importance of these budgetary changes to the President.

⁴¹ Enthoven and Smith, How Much is Enough?, pp. 32-72, provided a particularly good discussion of the specific aspects of the PPBS.

⁴² Memorandum and Discussion Notes for 1 February 1961, David E. Bell to McGeorge Bundy and Robert McNamara.

⁴³ Enthoven and Smith, pp. 6, 33, 38, 45.

were essential for the implementation of Kennedy's approach to national security, and critical for solidifying Kennedy's leadership position in this policy arena.

As one necessarily could have predicted, the military was not entirely happy with these developments; from its perspective, its power and influence were being usurped--in its area of expertise, no less. This certainly was the case as appropriations changes for certain programs became a reality, and pet projects of specific Services faced the possibility of complete cancellation (such as the Air Force's B-70 intercontinental strategic bomber). Even in the earliest stages of the Administration, McNamara seemingly tried to stave off potential criticism and rumors by publicly emphasizing the supposed military-civilian cooperation in the defense examination that the President had requested.

A prime example of McNamara's efforts in this regard was his first appearance before the House Armed Services Committee on 23 February 1961; the occasion was the annual military posture hearings:

During the last 4 or 5 weeks I and my associates, both military and civilian, have been at work carrying out the President's instructions. In addition to the regular staff machinery in the Pentagon, we have employed a number of special task groups to look into particular areas of the defense program. These task groups, each under the personal direction of a senior official, were composed of all the various elements of the Department having a particular interest in the area to be studied....The service Secretaries and chiefs have been kept informed, and as the studies have progressed, I have spent the better part of 2 days going over them in detail with the Joint Chiefs of Staff to let them furnish me their advice and recommendations.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ U. S., Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Military Posture Briefings. Hearings Before the House Armed Services Committee, 87th Cong., 1st ses., 1961, p. 633.

McNamara reminded the Committee on several occasions that Kennedy had discussed the national defense study in his January *State of the Union* address, and that McNamara had structured his investigation within the framework that Kennedy had presented to Congress at that time.⁴⁵ The clear implication was that McNamara was following the orders of his superior in the executive branch, that the President was the leader on this issue. It was, therefore, incumbent upon everyone else to follow--especially the military (which, constitutionally, fell under the President's command) and probably, at least to some extent, Congress as well. McNamara would present a similar argument in subsequent testimony before the Armed Services Committee, during authorization hearings on the President's FY 1962 supplemental defense budget.⁴⁶

The request of approximately \$2 billion for additional FY 1962 defense expenditures had been presented to Congress in President Kennedy's 28 March 1961 "Special Message on the Defense Budget." Reductions and some cancellations in funding levels had been included as well.⁴⁷ Some in the military were upset with these changes and the approach of the President's program; thus, the stage had been set for a sparring match. Despite McNamara's reassurances to the contrary, there had been leaks about in-house fighting from the beginning. In Spring 1961, The Economist would recognize the new budget process as a "hard-

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 633-4.

⁴⁶ House, Committee on Armed Services, Hearings Before the House Armed Services Committee on H.R. 6151, pp. 1236-37.

⁴⁷ Kennedy, "Special Message on the Defense Budget," pp. 902-906.

headed, cost-aware, task-conscious approach,"⁴⁸ and the new system probably could not have been implemented without the Pentagon's new civilian economic experts. Moreover, it had become abundantly clear that Kennedy's reformulation of American national security policy would continue to rely on the skills of McNamara's Whiz Kids. While McNamara was the public defender of the civilians' role in the implementation of flexible response, the military's perspective would be neatly summarized in a May 1963 Saturday Evening Post article by General Thomas White, who served as Air Force Chief of Staff in 1961 before retiring:

In common with many other military men...I am profoundly apprehensive of the pipe-smoking, tree-full-of-owls type of so-called professional 'defense intellectual' who have been brought into this nation's capital. I don't believe [that] a lot of these overconfident, sometimes arrogant young professors, mathematicians and other theorists have sufficient worldliness or motivation to stand up to the kind of enemy we face. War is a brutal, dirty, deadly affair. Our enemy is a coarse, crooked megalomaniac who aims to kill us....Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of American strategy-making today is that military influence is so disparaged by the so-called intellectual.⁴⁹

The Armed Services' authorizations hearings on the FY 1962 supplemental defense budget would become the arena in which the intra-Pentagon feud between the military and civilians was first played out publicly.

General White made it clear to members of the Armed Services Committee, during those hearings, that the Pentagon civilians were already having

⁴⁸ "New Brooms in the Pentagon," The Economist, 13 May 1961, p. 670.

⁴⁹ Thomas White, "Strategy and the Defense Intellectuals," Saturday Evening Post, 4 May 1963, p. 10.

a negative impact on the quality of national defense. According to White, the top civilian at Defense (McNamara) was responsible for the President's decision to begin phasing out the manned bomber (B-47, B-52, B-58, and the B-70 that was still in developmental phase--all Air Force programs) at a faster rate than had been recommended by the Air Force and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁵⁰ White's testimony to the Committee was so frank and persuasive, and his expertise was held in such high regard, that the ranking minority member, Leslie Arend (R-IL) tried to convince Committee Chairman Vinson to "get the [reasoning] of the civilians in control." Yet, Vinson refused to call upon the Pentagon civilians, for reasons that he would not articulate on the record.⁵¹ The Committee, however, did ultimately side with the Air Force and subsequently authorized more funds than Kennedy had requested, earmarked specifically for manned bombers.⁵²

This particular struggle was just the first of several during the Kennedy administration--between the military and civilians in the Pentagon as well as between the executive and legislature--over the allocation and distribution of defense budget funds. There was a consciousness within the Administration that the military needed to be reassured of its importance and influence in national defense strategy and, thus, be coaxed into following the President's lead in this area. In fact, in a May 1961 memorandum Chester Clifton, the President's

⁵⁰ House, Committee on Armed Services, Hearings Before the House Armed Services Committee on H.R. 6151, pp. 1561-75

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1575-76.

⁵² Congressional Quarterly, "Extra Funds Approved for Planes, Missiles, Ships," p. 415.

military aide, maintained that conventional force restructuring should not implemented without the counsel of the Joint Chiefs. "By law," he said, "they are the military advisors of the President and whatever decision he makes should be made with the knowledge of their best advice"⁵³ Further, a National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) to the Joint Chiefs presented Kennedy's view of the JCS "as my principal military advisor," Kennedy also "expect[ed] their advice to come to [him] direct and unfiltered," particularly during the Cold War.⁵⁴ The NSAM stated rather strongly and precisely what the President wanted from the JCS:

The Joint Chiefs of Staff have a responsibility for the defense of the nation in the Cold War similar to that which they have in conventional hostilities. They should know the military and paramilitary forces and resources available to the Department of Defense, verify their readiness, report on their adequacy, and make appropriate recommendations for their expansion and improvement. I look to the Chiefs to contribute dynamic and imaginative leadership in contributing to the success of the military and paramilitary aspects of Cold War programs....While I look to the Chiefs to present the military factors without reserve or hesitation, I regard them to be more than military men and expect their help in fitting military requirements into the over-all context of any situation, recognizing that the most difficult problem in Government is to combine all assets in a unified, effective pattern.⁵⁵

Yet these reassurances did little to quell the firestorm of Congressional and military criticism about White House budgetary cuts and the President's October

⁵³ Memorandum, C.V. Clifton to McGeorge Bundy, 17 May 1961, NSF: M&M: Staff Memoranda: Clifton: 3/61-6/62, Box 320, JFKL.

⁵⁴ National Security Action Memorandum No. 55, President Kennedy to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 28 June 1961, NSF: National Security Council: NSAM 55-Relations of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the President in Cold War Operations, Box 330, JFKL.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

1961 decision to impound appropriations for the B-70 bomber program. Neither Congress nor the military seemed inclined to follow the President **just** because he was in the position of the president--and particularly not blindly.

The Armed Services Committee proceeded to lead the fight over the direction of defense strategy; it used the Air Force's arguments about the weakening of American deterrent capability to justify its own efforts to exercise Congressional authority in appropriations matters, which allowed it to exert influence on national defense policy as well. Public Law 86-149, passed by Congress in 1959, required Congressional authorization of appropriations for the procurement of planes, missiles, and ships; therefore, the House Armed Services Committee had been secured a place in the budgetary process. Committee Chairman Carl Vinson took his responsibilities--and power--seriously, as demonstrated by his opening statement during the 1961 military posture hearings:

The committee is now directed by the plain letter of the law with respect to the authorization of at least the most expensive military equipment. A great authority has been conferred upon the committee and we must keep in mind that a great responsibility has been thrust upon us at the same time.⁵⁶

According to Vinson, the Administration's refusal to spend authorized and appropriated funds was defying the authority of Congress, the Armed Services Committee, and probably Carl Vinson himself.

As a result, Vinson actually amended the FY 1963 defense authorization legislation during Committee markup of the bill to order the Secretary of the Air

⁵⁶ House, Committee on Armed Services, Military Posture Briefings, p. 628.

Force to spend the \$491 million that was being authorized for the B-70/RS-70 weapon system, with or without the support of the Secretary of Defense. During the Committee's 1962 military posture and authorization hearings on the FY 1963 defense budget, the Air Force had argued that it could not fulfill its military mission without the B-70/RS-70 bomber, thus potentially undermining American nuclear deterrence. Moreover, committee members maintained that their constituents had elected them into office with the anticipation that congressional responsibilities would be carried out. Allowing American nuclear deterrence to be weakened was judged by members as being irresponsible and, thus, an abuse of the public's trust.⁵⁷ Very simply, Congress' "power of the purse"--one of the major vehicles for justifying congressional leadership in national defense policy--was being questioned. McNamara's efforts to allay congressional concerns were to no avail.⁵⁸

Vinson's amendment was designed, therefore, to ensure the strength of American nuclear deterrence, to confirm Congress' leadership position, and to offset any potential electoral reprisal based upon a perception of congressional abdication of duty. Committee Counsel Philip W. Kelleher was called upon to

⁵⁷ House, Committee on Armed Services, Hearings on Military Posture and H.R. 9751, pp. 3185-7, 3306-7, 3722-3, 3787, 3909-20, 3986-8.

⁵⁸ McNamara testified before the Committee for 3 days: 24-26 January 1962. *Ibid.*, pp. 3157-3242. While McNamara admitted to recommending that the FY 1962 B-70 appropriations not be spent, he insisted that the actual decision was made by the Commander-in-Chief. Also see: Memoranda, Robert McNamara to the President, 16 August 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense, Vol. II, August, 1961, Box 273; and, 7 October 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense: Defense Budget FY 1963, January-October 1961, Box 275, JFKL. Both of these memoranda demonstrate the persuasiveness of McNamara's recommendation to the President on this issue.

reassure nervous committee members of the amendment's constitutionality and the Defense Secretary's legal obligation to abide by congressional intentions in this particular case. "In my opinion," Kelleher asserted, "if the Secretary of the Air Force is directed, so is the Secretary of Defense. There is no way he can avoid it."⁵⁹ The Air Force had presented a strong and persuasive case for maintaining the B-70/RS-70 funds, and its expertise had been confirmed by the Committee's appropriations decision and the Vinson amendment.

The White House, on the other hand, knew that immediate action had to be taken to counteract the Vinson amendment, which it recognized as a serious separation of powers question.⁶⁰ Not only were the working relationship between the two branches and the unity of the party at stake; most importantly, the executive had to ensure its leadership role in national security matters. White House legal advisors apparently assured the President of his rightful position under the separation of powers, and they suggested he could legitimately choose to ignore the language altogether as a result.⁶¹ While Kennedy's constitutional position could probably be affirmed with relative ease, a claim in terms of political leadership would be somewhat more difficult. The former likely would not have been damaged if the language was ignored and a floor and/or

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 3987.

⁶⁰ The committee report that accompanied the authorization legislation had made it clear that the Committee also knew that its tactics challenged the separation of powers provision. See: House, H. Rept. 1406 to Accompany H. R. 9751, pp. 6-9. Also see Congressional Quarterly Weekly, Vol 20, No. 10, 9 March 1962, p. 401, for its summary of this controversy.

⁶¹ Sorensen, p. 348.

court fight was to ensue. The destruction to the latter, however, could be profound. Kennedy, therefore, invited Vinson to the White House and proceeded to persuade the Chairman to withdraw the offensive language from the legislation, which he did during the floor debate on the authorization bill. Vinson received a personal guarantee from the President, in that meeting and in a follow-up letter, that the B-70/RS-70 would be restudied; this seemingly addressed Vinson's fears that the constitutional jurisdiction of Congress was being threatened.⁶² While the Administration did restudy the program, only the monies for the development of its radar components were actually spent by the Defense Department.

As has been demonstrated, several factors precipitated the executive-legislature battle over budgeting for certain elements of Kennedy's flexible response--and, thus, executive leadership in national security affairs. Clearly both civilian and military egos were at play. Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis LeMay, who played an important role in the 1962 redesign of the RS-70 program, despised the Whiz Kids for the precise reasons that his predecessor Thomas White did. Furthermore, McNamara and his staff were determined to follow through with the President's directives on the implementation of flexible response. The President's strategy necessarily demanded making hard choices about certain programs that naturally would annoy the military, at the very least.⁶³ White

⁶² Letter, President John F. Kennedy to Honorable Carl Vinson, 20 March 1962, White House Name File: Vinson, Carl, Box 2890, JFKL.

⁶³ See Fred Kaplan, pp. 255-56, for a brief, but telling, account of LeMay's intense dislike for McNamara and his staff.

House budget cuts affected not only the Air Force, but constituents in congressional districts as well; one could reasonably conclude that both military and Congressional parochialism were also a part of this controversy.⁶⁴

In addition, there seemed to be a difference in opinion over the direction and implications of the new defense strategy, both within the Administration and in Congress. The importance of the manned bomber, which had been a primary component of Eisenhower's massive retaliation, was too ingrained in Air Force minds to allow for an unquestioned change in strategy. Moreover, the fear of potential Soviet power was still too great, and, particularly, Congress' fear of being blamed for a failure in American defense too profound, to permit Congress to rethink its budgeting priorities.⁶⁵

All of these factors, operating simultaneously, invariably precipitated the Air Force's unwillingness to support Kennedy's and McNamara's decisions and Congress' unwillingness to afford the President unchallenged leadership on these budgetary matters. While the president arguably won both the political and constitutional battle over leadership in this particular case, it is truly amazing that Kennedy and his advisors never seemed to anticipate how intense the resistance

⁶⁴ During Armed Services hearings on the President's 1962 supplemental budget, Robert McNamara received some intense questioning on the B-70 program from Clyde Doyle (D-CA), whose district included the North American plant, a major B-70 contractor. Doyle expressed extreme concern about the impact of the Administrations' change in strategy on the development of the B-70. See House, Committee on Armed Services, Hearings Before the House Armed Services on H.R. 6151, pp. 1289-92.

⁶⁵ House, H. Rept. 1406 to Accompany H.R. 9751, p. 8.

to the flexible response budget changes would be.⁶⁶ The Administration seemed to think that changes could be justified simply by arguing flexibility, necessity, and responsibility; in turn, the opponents would follow the President's lead because the arguments made sense and because they were being articulated by the person who had the authority to implement the changes.⁶⁷ Perhaps national leadership is as much about arrogance as it is about anything else. At the very least, it is an important component, among many, as this aspect of the flexible response case study shows.

Managing the Administration: The Nuclear and Conventional Balance Question

There was considerably less executive-legislative tension concerning many other aspects of flexible response than there was regarding the direction of the manned bomber program. This is not to say, however, that the formulation and implementation of flexible response was a simple, non-controversial process in all areas, particularly within the Kennedy administration itself. In fact, the differences of opinion about various elements of the strategy demanded that the President effectively manage and direct internal administration affairs as well as he had handled Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Vinson. While

⁶⁶ On 31 January 1962, Lawrence O'Brien, Kennedy's special assistant for Congressional affairs, received a memorandum from a member of his Congressional Liaison Staff reporting on the Vinson authorization hearings. The memo was in anticipation of a O'Brien-Vinson meeting that was to occur the next day. The staffer said: "The Defense Department advises that the atmosphere in the Committee has been excellent. They visualize no problem." Vinson's controversial amendment would come less than four weeks later. See Memorandum, Claude Desautels to Lawrence O'Brien, 31 January 1962, POF: White House Staff Files: O'Brien-House Files: Vinson, Carl, Box 15, JFKL.

⁶⁷ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to Theodore Sorensen, 13 March 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense, Vol. I, March 1961, Box 273, JFKL.

specific constitutional powers were not at stake, internal executive branch jurisdictions, authority, and responsibility were very much at issue.

Kennedy had recruited a circle of advisors, equally and unquestionably committed to flexible response, who were charged with helping him actually make the strategy a reality. There may have been agreement on the ultimate national security goal, but the means to that end sometimes proved to be somewhat more difficult. Therefore, eliminating as much strife as possible, and thus maintaining peace within the Administration's national security process, seemingly became equivalent to leading the process; that apparently demanded that a wide range of opinions be heard at nearly every turn.

John Kennedy had stated clearly in his Inaugural Address that the United States was willing to "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty."⁶⁸ Such a pledge demanded that American military strength be bolstered to deter the actions of American adversaries. Implementing a flexible response necessarily entailed finding the proper balance between strategic nuclear and conventional forces. Ultimately, however, it was the President himself who had to take responsibility for his administration's course, during each and every stage of the process. There could be no other public perception than that the President was the one in charge.

⁶⁸ Kennedy, "Inaugural Address," p. 865,

A mere eleven days after the Inauguration, Kennedy presented his first *State of the Union* address to Congress, in which he again reminded Congress and the nation that American military strategy needed to be revamped. He stated that Secretary of Defense McNamara had been "instructed...to reappraise our entire defense strategy," that included an assessment of, among other things, "the adequacy, modernization and mobility of our present conventional and nuclear forces and weapons systems in light of present and future dangers."⁶⁹

McNamara's initial recommendations concerning American strategic nuclear power were integrated into Kennedy's 28 March 1961 "Special Message on the Defense Budget," in which Kennedy requested supplemental appropriations to improve various missile programs, the airborne alert capacity, the ground alert forces and bomb alarms, Continental defense and warning systems, and the strategic deterrent command and control systems. The March defense message also recommended additional funding for improvements in the nation's limited, conventional war capacity, including: limited and guerrilla warfare techniques; non-nuclear weapons research and development; conventional force airlift and sealift capabilities; non-nuclear air capacities of fighter aircrafts; and, increased conventional personnel and necessary training and readiness programs. Kennedy argued that these changes were imperative for his being able to ensure "in [his] role as Commander-in-Chief of American Armed Forces...the adequacy of our present and planned military forces to accomplish our major national security

⁶⁹ Kennedy, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," 30 January 1961, p. 24.

objectives.⁷⁰ While McNamara, his staff, and the Budget Bureau were crucial in evaluating the defense system for Kennedy,⁷¹ the actual changes were the President's responsibility alone.

Further conventional and unconventional force alterations were announced in a 25 May 1961 presidential address to Congress on urgent national needs.

Kennedy's statement of purpose for the speech was clear:

The Constitution imposes upon me the obligation to "from time to time give to the Congress information of the State of the Union." While this has traditionally been interpreted as an annual affair, this tradition has been broken in extraordinary times. These are extraordinary times. And we face an extraordinary challenge. But our strength as well as our convictions have imposed upon this nation the role of leader in freedom's cause. No role in history could be more difficult or more important. We stand for freedom. That is our conviction for ourselves--that is our commitment to others. We are not against any man--or any nation--or any system--except as it is hostile to freedom.⁷²

Very simply, Kennedy had a constitutional responsibility, as Commander-in-Chief and Chief Executive of the United States, to let Congress and the American public know what the United States needed militarily so that his efforts to protect freedom would not be jeopardized. As a result, he said, "I have directed a further reinforcement of our capacity to deter or resist non-nuclear aggression." He

⁷⁰ Kennedy, "Special Message on the Defense Budget," pp. 902-905.

⁷¹ Memorandum and Attachment, David Bell to McGeorge Bundy and Robert McNamara, 30 January 1961, Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 31 January 1961, Record of Action by the National Security Council, 1 February 1961, NSF: M&M: NSC Meeting 1961, Meeting 475, Box 313; Memorandum [undated], Robert McNamara to the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, Air Force, et al, NSF: D&A: DoD, Vol., I, February 1961, Box 273; Memorandum and Attachments, Secretary of Defense & Director of the Bureau of the Budget to the President, 10 March 1961, NSF: D&A: DoD, Vol. I, March 1961, Box 273, JFKL.

⁷² Kennedy, "Special Message on Urgent National Needs," p. 922.

argued that, in conventional force terms, that meant "a change of position to give us still further increases in flexibility."⁷³ As was the case with the March defense message, Kennedy's proposals were a direct result of a conventional force analysis that he had specifically ordered McNamara to conduct.

Specifically, the Army's divisional structure needed to be reorganized and modernized, and additional funds were requested for its re-equipment. Existing American and NATO forces would be reoriented to non-nuclear, para-military, and unconventional war operations, and increases would be made in personnel and training of special and unconventional war units. New emphasis would be placed on deploying more rapidly highly trained Army reservists, and Marine Corps personnel also would be augmented; both of these modifications would be significant in possible limited war emergencies. Finally, a review of the U.S. intelligence system would be undertaken as well.⁷⁴ Further increases in military manpower would be implemented during the summer of 1961 as a result of the crisis in Berlin.

While there was never a question within the Kennedy administration about the need to correct perceived deficiencies in the conventional force structure, there was continuous internal debate about how extensive those changes should be and what the overall balance should be between strategic nuclear and

⁷³ Ibid., p.424.

⁷⁴ Ibid. Also see: Memorandum, "Reappraisal of Capabilities of Conventional Forces," Robert McNamara to the President, 10 May 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense, Vol. I, DoD Study on Conventional Forces, Box 273, JFKL.

conventional forces. One is reminded that Kennedy's national security transition committee had clearly stated that it would be the President's responsibility to determine that proper balance.⁷⁵ McNamara had specifically argued against any increases in Army personnel in the May 1961 conventional force analysis that he had prepared for the President; a reorganization of the current force structure would be more effective in deterring potential adversarial aggression, which would most likely be limited or indirect.⁷⁶ As was discussed above, Kennedy had accepted McNamara's recommendation, as his May 1961 address to Congress clearly indicated. Subsequent tensions in Berlin that summer precipitated a change in the Administration's position, however. The expansion of American military presence in Berlin necessitated an augmentation of Army manpower. Therefore, in a 25 July 1961 "Report to the Nation on Berlin," Kennedy asked Congress for the authorization to enlarge Army strength from 875,000 to 1 million men, and to order certain ready reserve units and individual reservists to active duty. Some tours of duty would be extended as well.⁷⁷ In response to Kennedy's request, Congress passed the essential authorization and appropriations legislation in early August, and American military strength in Berlin was raised substantially by the end of the year.

⁷⁵ "Report of Senator Kennedy's National Security Policy Committee." McGeorge Bundy had made a similar argument shortly after Inauguration Day. See: Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 30 January 1961 [National Security Council Meeting 475].

⁷⁶ Memorandum, "Reappraisal of Capabilities of Conventional Forces," Robert McNamara to the President, 10 May 1961.

⁷⁷ Kennedy, "Report to the Nation On Berlin," p. 927.

As the crisis in Berlin dissipated, Kennedy and his advisors returned to pursuing an effective, long-term flexible response. On the nuclear side, emphasis continued to be placed on the development of certain intercontinental ballistic missiles systems; on the conventional side, the proper reorganization of the Army returned to the fore, but without the maintenance of the high level of personnel that Berlin had precipitated, particularly the reservists. Internal Administration discussions concerning the correct nuclear-conventional balance--with the most appropriate, specific nuclear and conventional forces--were particularly apparent during preparations for the FY 1963 defense budget in late 1961 and early 1962. Again, the question was not about whether there should be nuclear or conventional forces, but, rather, what the particular choices should be on each side of the scale. That, after all, was what a flexible response was all about. Moreover, it was the President's responsibility to make these distinctions.

McNamara's arguments for advancing the Minuteman and Polaris missile programs, despite some unanswered questions about reliability, were not new to the President. In fact, McNamara had consistently stressed these programs. In mid-1963, McNamara would remind the President that the Minuteman program had been accelerated so that by mid-1964 600 hardened and dispersed missiles would be operational, and that the target for mid-1966 was 950. The number of Polaris submarines under construction had been doubled in the FY 1962 supplemental budget, and by early 1963 defense allocations had called for the construction of 29 Polaris submarines, 18 of which were to have been completed

at that point. McNamara said that the 1962, 1963, and 1964 defense budgets had included "over \$5.5 billion for development and procurement of the Polaris system." Administration budget decisions had also increased the Polaris missile stockpile from 144 to 288.⁷⁸ Moreover, while McNamara recommended limited funding for the continued development and limited production of the Nike-Zeus anti-ballistic missile defense system, it had not been his initial inclination to do so and it was not at the level that others had anticipated.⁷⁹ Presumably, these efforts were all part of McNamara's attempt to implement the President's first post-Inaugural defense instructions to him: "[To] develop the force structure necessary to our military requirements without regard to arbitrary budget ceilings" and "[to] procure and operate this force at the lowest possible cost."⁸⁰ The conventional force structure was to be handled in a similar manner, yet not everyone agreed with McNamara's recommendations--nuclear or conventional.

McNamara's preliminary review of the FY 1963 defense budget, which he presented to the President in early October 1961, pressed for development and production of the Minuteman and Polaris systems, but actually proposed a cutback in general purpose (conventional) forces. Specifically, reserve units that had been called up in response to the Berlin crisis would be returned to inactive

⁷⁸ Memorandum, Robert McNamara to the President, 17 April 1963, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense, Vol. IV, January-June 1963, Box 274, JFKL.

⁷⁹ Memorandum (Draft), Robert McNamara to the President, 30 September 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense: Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

⁸⁰ Memorandum, Robert McNamara to the President, 5 July 1962, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense, Vol. IV, July-August 1962, Box 274, JFKL.

status; the Army would be organized into 14 divisions, 7 brigades, and include a personnel strength of 929,000 for fiscal 1963. This proposal was 2 divisions, 1 brigade, and 163,700 men short of the Army's recommendation for the same time period, and 71,000 below the Berlin crisis manpower level.⁸¹

Maxwell Taylor, the President's Special Advisor for Military Affairs, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and Carl Kaysen (McGeorge Bundy's special assistant on national security issues and, seemingly, Bundy's representative in this instance), all expressed apprehension about the McNamara recommendations. In terms of the strategic nuclear forces, Taylor stated that "[his] overall impression [was] that the force levels remain high if one considers the tremendous megatonnage represented by the delivery capability;" Carl Kaysen specifically told the President that Minuteman and Polaris production could be slowed somewhat without any threat to American national security.⁸² While Rusk generally supported McNamara's overall approach and specific decisions concerning nuclear forces, he questioned whether appropriate attention was being paid to the Nike-Zeus program. "We seriously doubt," Rusk argued, "that so limited a program, coming into operation as much as four years after the Soviets may have their own much more ambitious program operational, satisfactorily meets our objective.

⁸¹ Memorandum, Robert McNamara to the President, "Recommended Department of Defense FY'63 Budget and 1963-67 Program," 6 October 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense: Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

⁸² Memorandum, Maxwell Taylor to Robert McNamara, 14 October 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense: Defense Budget FY 1963, January-October 1961, Box 275; and, Memorandum, Carl Kaysen to the President, 22 November 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense: Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

Either a substantial increase in this program should be decided upon or other alternatives explored."⁸³ Taylor, Rusk, and Kaysen all expressed serious doubts about the cuts in conventional forces; their views were representative of the internal Administration division concerning certain aspects of flexible response, which in turn demanded effective, forceful direction and management from Kennedy himself. They argued that the Berlin crisis force levels had been long overdue, were necessary for preventing and/or addressing similar crises in Berlin and elsewhere in the future, were essential for convincing the NATO allies to make comparable conventional force increases, and, finally, were crucial for maintaining overall flexibility in national defense policy and for raising the nuclear threshold as well.⁸⁴

Yet, as Budget Director David Bell pointed out to the President, McNamara's October 6 memorandum only represented his "tentative [emphasis added] recommendations for the 1963 defense budget."⁸⁵ Moreover, Bell implied that subsequent staff analyses and disagreements (he mentioned Theodore

⁸³ Letter, Dean Rusk to McGeorge Bundy, 29 October 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense: Defense Budget FY 1963, January-October 1961, Box 275, JFKL. Rusk told Bundy that he had sent identical letters to McNamara and Budget Director David Bell.

⁸⁴ Memoranda, Maxwell Taylor to Robert McNamara, 14 October 1961, and Dean Rusk to McGeorge Bundy, 29 October 1961; Memoranda, Maxwell Taylor to Director, Bureau of the Budget [David Bell], 13 November 1961 & 21 November 1961; NSF: D&A: Department of Defense Budget FY 1962, November-December 1961, Box 275; Memoranda, Carl Kaysen to McGeorge Bundy, 13 November 1961; Carl Kaysen to the President, 9 December 1961; Maxwell Taylor to the President, 22 November 1961 [Re: Support of Conventional Forces in the 1963 Budget] & 22 November 1961 [Re: Nike-Zeus Program, FY 1963 Budget]; Maxwell Taylor to the President, 9 December 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

⁸⁵ Memorandum, David Bell [Budget Bureau Director] to the President, "FY 1963 Defense Budget Issues," 13 November 1961, NSF: D&A: Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December, 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

Sorensen and Jerome Wiesner in addition to those that were mentioned above) had been anticipated and were particularly important and necessary for defining the President's role in the process. As a result of staff analysis, Bell told the President, "[i]t is our common judgement that there are...major issues which require your consideration at this stage." Those questions included determining the proper size of the general (nuclear) war forces, the development and deployment timetable for the Nike-Zeus system, the political and military appropriateness of the Defense Secretary's conventional force recommendations, and the overall balance between conventional and strategic nuclear forces.⁸⁶ Presumably, the preliminary efforts taken by the staff would enable the President to execute more effectively his responsibilities in this matter, and to finalize an Administration position that could then be followed by the other areas of the government.

The President's follow-through was, in fact, almost immediate. A 9 December 1961 McGeorge Bundy memorandum confirmed that the research and development aspects of the Nike-Zeus system would be continued but the "procurement of long-lead production items" would await further testing. The Minuteman would be procured at a slower rate than recommended by McNamara, but production would still progress to meet the original target of having 900 missiles by 1967; production of additional Polaris submarines would be

⁸⁶ Ibid.

a rate of three per year instead of McNamara's six.⁸⁷ Moreover, Kennedy opted to maintain active Army strength at 960,000 men, to preserve a strong American presence in Europe as well as to ensure a strong deployable Strategic Army Force (STRAF) in the United States. Reservists that were activated to address the crisis in Berlin would, however, be deactivated.⁸⁸

McNamara was not entirely pleased with Kennedy's decisions, but it had been the President's responsibility to make the ultimate decisions concerning the Administration's defense budget and, thus, a flexible response; the leader and follower positions were firmly set. The President did, however, keep the door open for further discussion on these issues and wanted McNamara's continuous advice.⁸⁹ This difference in opinion did not deter McNamara from presenting the most persuasive representation of the President's position in subsequent defense authorization and appropriations testimony on Capitol Hill. Again, it was abundantly clear to McNamara who the leader was; he, therefore, saw it as his responsibility to ensure that the leader's program was implemented effectively. His personal judgment would not interfere with the overall process of implementing a flexible response, on which he and the President were in total

⁸⁷ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 9 December 1961, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense, Vol. II, November-December 1961, Box 273, JFKL.

⁸⁸ Memorandum, John F. Kennedy to Robert McNamara, 22 January 1962, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense, Vol. III, January-March 1962, Box 274, JFKL.

⁸⁹ Memoranda, Carl Kaysen to Maxwell Taylor, 23 January 1962, and Carl Kaysen to Director, Bureau of the Budget [David Bell], 23 January 1962, NSF: D&A: Department of Defense, Vol. III, January-March 1962, Box 274, JFKL. Attached to Kaysen's memos was the President's 22 January 1962 memorandum to McNamara.

agreement. In fact, the discussion about the proper nuclear-conventional balance would persist throughout the remainder of the Kennedy administration, and cost-benefit analysis would keep different members of the staff on different sides of this issue. Not only did flexible response continue to demand effective management and direction--and, thus leadership--of the Administration itself, but strong marketing skills were necessary for ensuring flexible response's implementation. Robert McNamara's expertise remained a crucial factor, particularly to the marketing of the flexible response.

CHAPTER V

On the White House Decision Making Circle

Since the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki nearly fifty years ago, nuclear strategy has been a central issue around which, and about which, defense and foreign policy decisions have been made. No American president since World War II, particularly none of those who were elected during the Cold War, has been able to escape the frightening possibility of nuclear destruction; each administration has been obliged to design policies concerning American nuclear capabilities. Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense for two Cold War administrations, described rather dramatically the problems with which national officials must cope because of the incredible instruments of power that are part of the American military arsenal:

In a complex and uncertain world, the gravest problem that an American Secretary of Defense must face is that of planning, preparation and policy against the possibility of thermonuclear war. It is a prospect that most of mankind understandably would prefer not to contemplate, for technology has now circumscribed us all with a horizon of horror that could dwarf any catastrophe that has befallen man in his more than a million years on earth....No sane citizen, political leader or nation wants thermonuclear war. But merely not wanting it is not enough. We must understand the difference among actions which increase risks, those which reduce them and those which, while costly, have little influence one way or another.¹

¹ Robert S. McNamara, The Essence of Security: Reflections in Office, pp. 51-2.

Very simply, while the development and implementation of nuclear strategy is indeed an extraordinarily difficult, multifarious, and serious process, it is crucial to the survival of the world.

John F. Kennedy brought to the Presidency a straightforward strategic vision. He had argued consistently that American national security and the security of the American allies could not rest solely on the nuclear deterrent, which had been the foundation of Dwight Eisenhower's massive retaliation strategy. Instead, United States defense needed a flexible response--both nuclear and conventional options--so that any type of adversarial aggression could be confronted, at any time, at any place, and on any level. Yet, taking flexible response as a theory and making it an actual policy was far more difficult than snapping one's fingers. It demanded making hard choices about complicated issues, such as general and limited war; actual nuclear and conventional weapons systems and force structures; the management of specific flash points and crises; and, the administration of the defense establishment.

In fact, the development and implementation of nuclear strategy in general is very much about making the proper decisions in the context of a particular decision making process. Moreover, the decision making process can greatly affect the translation of a policy idea into reality. The final outcome is often seriously influenced by the means through which a specific goal is secured. Furthermore, that process is usually as unique as the presidential administration in which it actually occurs and the president himself. More often than not, the

process takes on a life of its own and is as fascinating in its own right as the policy that is being determined. This was no less the case for the development and implementation of flexible response than it is for other national strategies or policies.

This chapter analyzes a particular segment of the decision making circle in the Kennedy administration in order to bring greater understanding to the formulation of flexible response in particular and national decision making in general. What, therefore, is a decision making process and what types of issues are explored in order to understand that process more completely? First, and foremost, one is reminded that policies and strategies are not defined and executed in a political vacuum. Consequently, mono-causal theories about decision making rarely, if ever, adequately assess the inherent complexity of the process of decision making. In fact, a wide variety of actors and circumstances, operating within ever changing domestic and international political environments, can significantly influence the formulation and implementation of a national policy or strategy--in this case, the flexible response.

As has been suggested in earlier chapters, flexible response demanded making difficult choices concerning the nuclear and conventional defense capabilities, of both the United States and the NATO allies. Part of its development also entailed responding to specific international crisis, such as that in Berlin in mid-1961. Moreover, numerous people and factors influenced the way in which those choices and responses were determined--far more than just the

President, the Secretary of Defense, the Whiz Kids, or even the Pentagon's traditional decision making machinery. Because the previous chapters of this dissertation have already clearly underlined the roles of Kennedy, McNamara and his staff, and the Congress in the development and implementation of flexible response, those individuals will not be the primary focus here, although the weight of their influence should never be underestimated in any discussion of flexible response. Instead, this chapter will emphasize the roles and often subtle influence of other actors and variables in the Kennedy decision making circle that also affected the development of flexible response.

Specifically, the influence of McGeorge Bundy, of his national security staff, and of key non-administration advisors (Richard Neustadt, Dean Acheson and Henry Kissinger, for example), will be emphasized in order to understand more fully the construction and use of the decision making circle in the Kennedy White House, as well as the formulation of national defense strategy during this administration. The identification of these particular actors, of the positions that they held, of the personal "baggage" that they brought to their jobs, and the stances they took on certain issues are crucial elements of this miniature case study. The chain of command within this decision making circle also must be examined and, moreover, how these actors interacted within that chain. Finally, the broader political environment and various outside political circumstances will be analyzed and understood as well; this will, in turn, help to underscore the importance of certain factors that are particularly endemic to the international

political arena, such as basic Cold War politics, in the development of American national security policy.

Uncovering the ins and outs of a particular decision making process is akin to good detective work, and these questions and issues will help to structure this investigation. One is reminded throughout, however, that a decision making process can never be perfectly recreated because influences unknown even to the policy makers themselves might drive the process. This study is, therefore, an educated estimate of one of the more visible parts of the decision making process that produced the flexible response. If nothing else, it illustrates the enormous complexity of this particular defense strategy, of nuclear strategy in general, and of any decision making process.

Creating a National Security Decision Making Circle in Kennedy's White House

The Historical and Political Context

No presidential administration takes control in a political and historical vacuum, and the Kennedy administration is no different than any other in this regard. By the time that John F. Kennedy took office in January 1961, the United States and the Soviet Union were well into the second decade of a Cold War. In fact, during the preceding administration, particularly the rhetorical harshness of this relationship had escalated to its greatest extreme. Moreover, this rhetoric was underpinned and fueled in the United States by the fear that had developed because of the McCarthy communist 'witchhunts' of the early 1950s and Soviet

military developments throughout the entire decade. Furthermore, the United States was not that far removed from the experiences and trauma of World War II in which virtually nothing had been spared to stop Adolf Hitler's attempt to dominate the international system.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that most of the individuals who comprised the Kennedy administration approached foreign policy with the same Cold War fear and skepticism as those who had preceded them--and many Americans as well. As Robert McNamara has recently noted, these officials were part of the World War II generation who viewed communism as a political, ideological, military threat that had to be contained, as George Kennan had warned in 1947, just as German Nazism and Japanese imperialism were stopped in World War II.² Further, this new administration, being the Democratic Party's representative in government, also carried the burden of China having fallen to the Communists under the last Democratic administration and the residual fear of again "losing" any other country or being labeled as "soft" on communism. In many respects, the Kennedy administration's approach to Latin America, Laos, Cuba, Berlin, and Vietnam (among other areas) clearly reflected its determination to remain strong and steadfast in the face of any perceived communist threat. More importantly, flexible response was specifically designed to provide the military

² Robert S. McNamara, In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam, with Brian VanDeMark (New York: Time Books-Random House, Inc., 1995), p. 30. Also see Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, pp. 211-12.

means that were essential for responding to any adversarial aggression in any place, on any level, and at any time.

The first major international crisis of the Kennedy presidency, the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion by CIA-trained, anti-Castro Cubans, came within the first one hundred days of the new administration; it was trying to handle news of intermediate communist victories in Laos at the same time. This Bay of Pigs debacle is a perfect illustration of the prominence of the anti-Communist sentiment in this administration, as well as the pressure that career government officials, particularly in the CIA and the military, could exert by playing off of that sentiment. It was reported, in fact, that CIA Director Allen Dulles and Deputy Director Richard Bissell not only *briefed* the new administration on the invasion plan, which had been developed under Eisenhower, but actually actively and consciously *sold* it to Kennedy and his advisor, purposely downplaying the risks and fragility of the operation.³ Later, numerous Kennedy advisors, including Robert McNamara, Arthur Schlesinger, and Dean Rusk, readily admitted that they failed the President by not ensuring that the policy making process was more discerning and effective in analyzing the information that the CIA and military had presented.⁴ In this particular case, the mere fact that the Soviets had a satellite that was only ninety miles off the American coast was what seemingly

³ Michael R. Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960-1963* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 130.

⁴ McNamara, *In Retrospect*, p. 25-7; Schlesinger, p. 255-9; Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It*, as told to Richard Rusk, ed. Daniel S. Papp (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 209-212.

controlled and untied the decisions of Kennedy and his staff. Further, the sheer newness and looseness of the Administration's policy making organization only helped to exacerbate the ideological pressure that clearly dominated this crisis.⁵

The details of the Bay of Pigs policy making process, as well as its failure, have been scrutinized by many; therefore, little more needs to be said here in that regard. Yet, one cannot ignore, particularly in the context of this study, the impact that this early failure had on John Kennedy and the decision making process in his administration from that point forward. First, Kennedy advisors and analysts have noted that from the earliest days of the Administration that the new President had a keen interest in arranging a personal meeting with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, in order to develop a working relationship and "to define the framework for future American-Soviet relations."⁶ In fact, Kennedy sent a letter to Khrushchev via American Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson in late February 1961, in which he formally proposed a meeting between the two leaders. According to Thompson, Khrushchev also seemingly was interested in such a meeting, although he did not respond to Kennedy's letter immediately.⁷

There was fear within the Administration, however, as result of the Bay of Pigs incident, that Khrushchev would perceive Kennedy as incompetent, weak, and ineffective; thus, Khrushchev might use a meeting to pressure Kennedy on areas

⁵ Schlesinger, p. 233-66; Rusk, p. 207-16; Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 294-309; Beschloss, 69-95; Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), pp. 69-95.

⁶ For instance, see: Schlesinger, p. 348; and, Beschloss, pp. 68-70, 77.

⁷ Beschloss, pp. 80-83.

that were vital American interests, such as Berlin and Southeast Asia.⁸ Secretary of State Dean Rusk, in particular, had advised against a meeting unless there would be an actual, substantive agreement or treaty that would be negotiated.⁹ Yet Kennedy apparently maintained that the failed invasion "provided all the more reason for the Soviet Chairman to be disabused of any misapprehension that Kennedy was either reckless or weak of will."¹⁰ In other words, the meeting was more important than ever. Khrushchev, however, had still not responded to Kennedy's initial letter, and the Administration presumed that the Bay of Pigs incident had rendered a meeting impossible. It, therefore, was extremely surprised when Khrushchev sent his acceptance in early May; only then were arrangements made to have the two leaders meet in Vienna in early June immediately after Kennedy's previously scheduled meeting with French President Charles de Gaulle.¹¹ It is important to note that the June 1961 meeting initiated the acceleration of that summer's crisis in Berlin.

The other major consequence of the Bay of Pigs failure concerned the organization of the Kennedy advising team and policy making circle. In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, Kennedy ordered General Maxwell Taylor

⁸ Michael Beschloss has argued that this was the perspective that some Soviet advisors had advanced to Khrushchev in preparation for the Vienna meeting. Beschloss maintained that Khrushchev did not immediately commit to a meeting precisely because he wanted to see what might transpire in Cuba. Beschloss, pp. 87-88, 231-33. Also see Schlesinger, p. 344.

⁹ Rusk, p. 219-20. Schlesinger, p. 348, reported that Kennedy understood "that progress was entirely conceivable on Laos and on the test ban."

¹⁰ Sorensen, p. 542. Also see Schlesinger, pp. 344-8; Beschloss, pp. 158-9.

¹¹ Schlesinger p. 344; Beschloss, pp. 154-5, 158-63.

and Robert Kennedy to conduct a thorough investigation about what had gone wrong in the Bay of Pigs policy process, obviously to try to ensure against the possibility of such a failure in the future. It was also at this juncture that Taylor became the President's special advisor for military affairs, and Robert Kennedy and Theodore Sorensen--neither of whom had participated in the Bay of Pigs planning--were pulled into the foreign policy decision making circle. Clearly, Kennedy wanted his most trusted advisors to play a more active and prominent role in international affairs. McGeorge Bundy and his staff were moved from the Old Executive Office Building to the White House basement in order to be physically closer for advising purposes and access to the President. Again, their eventual prominence in the decision making circle was practically preordained by this move. Furthermore, more informal and ad hoc meetings were held among key White House staffers to discuss various policy issues, and Kennedy apparently began to solicit more frequently the views of his advisors on a less formal and more individualized basis (such as the State Department's Roger Hilsman). Finally, both Dulles and Bissell would eventually be replaced at the CIA.¹²

All of these moves were unquestionably designed to spare Kennedy and the administration similar failures and embarrassment in the future that they had brought upon themselves in the Bay of Pigs affair. These changes also ostensibly made the President the center of a decision making circle in which formal policy making organization and structure became haphazard in many cases, and in which

¹² Schlesinger, pp. 292-7; Beschloss, pp. 146-7; Reeves, pp. 104-5.

true 'insiders' (Bundy, for example) had the greatest personal access to the President--and, thus, the greatest impact on the decision making process. What is particularly interesting is that all of these moves seemed necessary despite the fact that Kennedy had been given detailed advice on staff organization even prior to his election; moreover, the administration would continue to be plagued by similar organizational problems for much of its first year. Nonetheless, the impact of these changes would be felt almost immediately, specifically in the planning for a possible crisis in Berlin during the summer of 1961.

The Transition

The advice that John Kennedy received from Richard Neustadt concerning the assembly of a personal staff was quite clear: "After Election Day the President-elect will need a small personal staff to operate through the transition period and to take office with him." That group would include a press secretary, appointments aide, a special assistant for day-to-day operations (referred to by Neustadt as the "Number-one Boy," for several of which there might be a need), a message-and-program aide (possibly called a special counsel or consultant if that person had a legal background), a personnel consultant, and a personal secretary. After that group came the designation of the executive office aides--the most important being the Budget Director. On the other hand, Neustadt maintained that as far as a special assistant for national security affairs was concerned there would be no outside pressure to make an immediate appointment, particularly before the Inauguration; in fact, the National Security Council could continue to

operate without one for the time being. However, "if...the President-elect wants to make an appointment," said Neustadt, "both the title and the duties should be considered, in advance, with particular regard for the intended role of the Secretary of State, vis-a-vis NSC."¹³ This advice is particularly fascinating in hindsight when one considers the type of role that Kennedy's national security advisor, McGeorge Bundy, would play, and the magnitude of Bundy's influence on the decision making process that surrounded the flexible response.

An often recognized characteristic of the Kennedy administration, and one which its critics seem particularly keen on emphasizing, is the power and influence of the 'East Coast Establishment': the Ivy League educated, upper class that served as the breeding ground for numerous Kennedy aides and appointees and which also had a tradition of service to government. McGeorge Bundy fit that mold perfectly. He was born and raised in Boston, attended Groton and Yale and was a Junior Fellow at Harvard, and would serve as a civilian post-war analyst on the Marshall Plan as well as a political analyst for the Council of Foreign Relations. After World War II, he helped Henry Stimson, former Secretary of State and Secretary of War, publish Stimson's memoirs. In 1949, he returned to Harvard as an undergraduate lecturer in government (his freshman U.S. in World Affairs course was apparently quite popular) and eventually was

¹³ Memorandum on Organizing The Transition. A Tentative Check-List for the Weeks Between Election and Inaugural, Prepared by Richard E. Neustadt, 15 September 1960, POF: Special Correspondence: Neustadt, Richard E., 9/15/60-10/11/63, Box 31, JFKL.

appointed Dean of the College. Journalist and Pulitzer Prize winner David Halberstam has described Bundy during his Harvard days as follows:

In an atmosphere sometimes distinguished by the narrowness of professional discipline, Bundy was a generalist, in touch with the world at large, and he brought a sense of engagement of energy and vitality to his work. He loved taking on students, combating them and their ideas, challenging them, bright wits flashing back and forth, debate almost an end in itself.¹⁴

It is hardly surprising that on occasion he would overshadow more well-known and highly respected academic colleagues.

In terms of intellectual and political persuasion on American national security, Bundy apparently was known to support intervention and the use of force in the appropriate place and at the appropriate time. Halberstam indicated that Bundy's lecture about the 1938 Munich agreement was notorious at Harvard precisely because of the high drama he inflicted into its conclusion: "...his voice cracking with emotion as little Czechoslovakia fell, the German tanks rolling in just as the bells from Memorial Hall sounded."¹⁵ The lesson was that early intervention on the part of the Allies could have prevented this particular tragedy and, perhaps, the ensuing war. Halberstam placed Bundy within a school of thought that he suggested was popular at Harvard and in other East Coast political science departments in the 1950s:

This [school] was known as the ultrarealism school. Its proponents believed that they were tough, that they knew what the world was really like, and that force must be accepted as a basic element of

¹⁴ David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest, (New York: Fawcett Crest Books, 1972), p. 71.

¹⁵ Ibid.

diplomacy. Toughness bred toughness; Stalin had been tough in Eastern Europe, so the West would be tough somewhere else. The Communists legitimized us; force met force. John Kenneth Galbraith...later remembered that he and Bundy always argued at Harvard and later in Administration days about the use of force, and Bundy would tell Galbraith with a certain element of disappointment, "Ken, you always advise against the use of force--do you realize that?" Galbraith would reflect on that and then note that Bundy was right, he always *did* recommend against force, in the belief that there were very few occasions when force can be used successfully.¹⁶

This perspective on the use of force was not dissimilar to the flexible response strategy that limited war theorists were promoting during the same period.

Bundy's brightness, quickness, and administrative abilities, as well as his position on national security, would serve him well as Kennedy's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs.¹⁷

McGeorge Bundy's Organization For National Security Affairs

During the Eisenhower administration, the National Security Council had been a major forum for the discussion and formulation of major national security issues, especially nuclear strategy. As Richard Neustadt reported, in his transition advice to John Kennedy, "Eisenhower surrounded [NSC] meetings with elaborate paper-work and preparatory consultations" and "[s]taff [had] been created in each

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 72.

** Author's Note: It is this writer's presumption that the ultrarealism to which Halberstam referred is synonymous with, or very similar to, what most international theorists know as political realism, which is most often associated with Hans J. Morgenthau.

¹⁷ Halberstam indicated that Arthur Schlesinger introduced Kennedy and Bundy and that the two worked well together from the start. Ibid., p. 75.

department to assist with preparations and follow-up."¹⁸ Not surprisingly, the NSC had developed into a large bureaucratic organization,¹⁹ and Neustadt warned that "[p]ast procedures will be carried on by career staffs unless they are deliberately interrupted." He, therefore, suggested that "none of these procedures and arrangements continue, except as Kennedy specifically desires, after a chance to get his own feel for the uses of...the NSC."²⁰

Special Assistant for National Security Affairs McGeorge Bundy concurred with Neustadt's advice in a memorandum to the President shortly after Inauguration Day. "Everyone who has written or talked about the NSC agrees that it would be what the President wants it to be [and] this is right," he said.²¹ Moreover, he maintained that the Planning Board, the Operations Coordinating Board (which was almost immediately abolished by Kennedy), and the staff were "ripe for reorganization," but that the Council still could be useful to the president:

My suggestion is that the Council can provide a regular and relatively formal place for free and frank discussion on whatever major issues of national security are ready for such treatment. I believe such discussion can do two things for you and one for your associates. For you it can (1) open a subject up so that you can see

¹⁸ Memorandum on Organizing The Transition, Prepared by Richard E. Neustadt, 15 September 1960.

¹⁹ There technically are four elements of the NSC: the formal meeting, of which the President is the chairperson; the Planning Board of Assistant Secretaries; the Operations Coordinating Board of Under Secretaries; and, the staff for each of these three groups.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 24 January 1961, NSF: D&A: NSC: Organization & Administration, 1/1/61-1/25/61, Box 283, JFKL.

what its elements are and decide how you want it pursued; and (2) present the final arguments of those principally concerned when a policy proposal is ready for your decision....The special service the Council can render to your associates is a little subtler: it can give them confidence that they know what is cooking and what you want.²²

Yet, Bundy also noted that these functions could be handled differently--and should be--especially during emergency situations. In fact, as political scientist I. M. Destler asserted in a study on organizational politics of foreign policy decision making, the importance of the National Security Council was diminished during the Kennedy administration; moreover, Bundy and his personal national security staff essentially usurped many of the functions that previously had been carried out under NSC auspices.²³ As was previously discussed, the Bay of Pigs crisis was impetus actually to relocate Bundy to the White House itself. Very simply, Bundy and his staff became a miniature National Security Council in the basement of the White House, but without the bureaucratic structure that plagued the formal NSC.

In fact, the Bundy staff consisted of a core group of less than a dozen people, although there were others on the White House staff and several special assistants who regularly interacted with the Bundy group. By early April 1961, Walt Rostow, the Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, had made a list of issue areas and had suggested certain assignments for the various

²² Ibid.

²³ I. M. Destler, President, Bureaucrats, and Foreign Policy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp, 96-104.

staffers, the actual work being executed under the direction of either him or Bundy. Assignments essentially would help the staff to work more systematically.²⁴ While these particular suggestions did not necessarily hold true throughout the administration, the basic idea of issue assignments did.

As far as defense-related issues were concerned, Henry Owen handled Berlin, Robert Komer was responsible for some NATO questions (among others), David Klein specialized in European affairs, and Carl Kaysen (who formally joined the staff in late 1961) was responsible for several nuclear and conventional force issues (again, among others). Outside experts, such as Dean Acheson and Henry Kissinger, were also brought in from time to time to lend their expertise in certain areas. In fact, within the first several months after the Administration took office, Acheson prepared major reports on the problems that were confronting the North Atlantic Alliance as well as on the crisis in Berlin; Kissinger was particularly influential in handling the specifics of the Berlin crisis as they were developing.²⁵ Kaysen actually became Bundy's Deputy Special Assistant after Rostow was transferred to the Policy Planning Staff in November 1961, and Bromley Smith served as the Executive Secretary of the NSC. Not unlike other

²⁴ Memorandum, Walt W. Rostow to McGeorge Bundy, 4 April 1961, NSF: D&A: White House Administration Matters, 3/1/61-5/15/61, Box 290, JFKL.

²⁵ The Acheson reports can be found in NSF: Regional Security: NATO: Acheson Report, 3/61, Box 220, and NSF: Country: Germany: Berlin-General, Box 81. The former has been sanitized, and while the later is supposedly declassified, it was unavailable for Kennedy Library researchers' use as of January 1993. Boxes 81 and 82 of the Berlin-General files have a plethora of memoranda to and from Henry Kissinger about the situation in Berlin. There is also a fair amount of declassified data, which clearly indicates the extent of Kissinger's advice, in NSF: Meetings & Memoranda (M&M): Staff Memoranda: Henry Kissinger, Box 320 (Files 1/61-4/61 to 9/61-10/61).

governmental decision making structures, the Bundy staff seemed to thrive on memoranda, and they often did their own summary and analysis for Bundy--which would then be forwarded to the President--of papers, reports, issue papers, and recommendations that came to the White House from other offices and departments (in this case, both the Defense and State Departments).²⁶ As far as the relationship between Bundy's staff and the President was concerned, it has been noted that Bundy, Kaysen, and Komer all had unhindered access to the President; they apparently were on a small list of advisors/staffers who could walk in and talk with Kennedy, whenever he was free, without a prior appointment.²⁷ They clearly were in Kennedy's inner most circle of advisors.

Yet, knowing responsibilities and having access to the principal decision maker did not guarantee that they could operate the process smoothly. In fact, about a month after the Bay of Pigs debacle, Bundy suggested to Kennedy that there was a decision making management problem in the White House, despite the fact that key White House staffers were physically located in the White House and trusted advisors were now in the primary policy making circle. Moreover, Bundy maintained that the problems had been precipitated by the way the President himself had been handling and directing the process. Bundy argued that

²⁶ The Preliminary Register of the Working Files of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs that the John F. Kennedy Library makes available for its researchers provides an excellent list of Bundy staffers and their assignments. It also estimates that this particular collection includes more than 450 boxes of documents, is divided into nine different subsections, and measures approximately 230 linear feet. It is one of the most widely used collections in the library.

²⁷ Destler, p. 101.

Kennedy was not using his own or his staff's time effectively. He urged that regular, daily national security discussions be scheduled, that the President meet with his national security advisor on a regular schedule (for more than a few minutes at a time, that is), that the President organize and prioritize his own interests better, that the President keep more closely to his schedule, and that the President communicate his wishes more effectively to his staff members so they would know that they were doing what they were supposed to be doing. All of these suggestions were meant to improve the system under which the President would give orders and receive advice.²⁸ Furthermore, Bundy raised similar organizational matters in another memorandum barely a month later.

In that later 22 June 1961 memorandum, Bundy suggested to the President that "[t]he President's staff is at present about two-thirds of the way toward a sound and durable organization for his work in international affairs." Bundy maintained that the purpose of the President's staff was "to serve as an extension of himself--as his eyes and ears and his source of nondepartmental comment." Essentially, "[t]he President's staff is his own instrument," he said.²⁹ While Bundy reported that there were a number of things that were going well, such as the President's ability to assign immediate issues to the proper person and the good communication among the President's White House staffers, improvements still

²⁸ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, "White House Organization," 16 May 1961, NSF: D&A: White House: General, 1961-1962, Box 290.

²⁹ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, "Current Organization of the White House and NSC for Dealing with International Matters," 22 June 1961, NSF: D&A: White House: General, 1961-1962, Box 290, JFKL.

needed to be made. The timing and procedural rules of the NSC needed to be clarified and restructured, the staff actually needed to be located all in one place (preferably in the White House), interdepartmental coordination should be increased--albeit sparingly--and "above all, the White House-NSC group need what the whole executive branch needs, a renewal of strength in the operating departments."³⁰ Again, while Bundy clearly was asserting that the staff role was that of assisting the President in the decision making process, it was also dependent upon the President to set the structure of the process so that the process could run smoothly.

It is, however, unclear whether any major changes were ever made in that regard. The process seemed to be rather chaotic for much of the Administration, and rather ad hoc. The Bay of Pigs disaster in April 1961 had precipitated some early changes in the policy making process; further reorganization occurred in what was to become known as the "Thanksgiving massacre" in late 1961, which involved staff changes in both the White House and State Department. Yet, as is often the case, the organization of the decision making process is a direct reflection of the person who is in charge of that process, and in this case that person ultimately was John F. Kennedy.

³⁰ Ibid.

*The Decision Making Circle in Operation*Making Nuclear and Conventional Choices

The influence of McGeorge Bundy and his staff was much subtler and more indirect than that of Robert McNamara, the Whiz Kids, Budget Director David Bell, or the President. While Bundy did not often urge the President directly to take one position or another as others did, he did use meeting agendas, weekend reading packets, memoranda for the record, and speech preparations-- among other things--as ways to ensure that the President was reviewing certain aspects of national defense policy at the appropriate times. Bundy's approach was made abundantly clear from the very early days of the administration.

In preparation for the first formal National Security Council meeting on 1 February 1961, Bundy not only briefed the President about the substantive issues that would be discussed; he also suggested how the meeting could be structured effectively so that Kennedy could capitalize on the expertise that was being made available. What Bundy seemed to be implying was that the appropriate use of these meetings would, in turn, help the President to make good decisions. He told Kennedy that the Council's purpose was merely "advisory" and that "it [did] not decide [anything]." He stressed that "[y]ou will decide -- sometimes at the meeting, and sometimes in private after hearing the discussion." In fact, he explained that "[f]ormal meetings of the Council are only part of its business." The

President, he said, would "be meeting with all its members in other ways, and not all decisions or actions [would] go through this one agency."³¹

Nonetheless, he did suggest to Kennedy that the meetings could be an extremely valuable tool for decision making, particularly if members were encourage to speak openly about the issue at hand, no matter what it might be:

Members should feel free to comment on problems outside their "agency" interest. It's not good to have only State speak to "politics" and only Defense speak to "military matters." You want free and general advice from these men (or you don't want them there).³²

Yet, Bundy maintained that how the President organized and operated the NSC was "[his] private business" but that "[t]he essence of it [was] that...[it] should reflect you style and methods." If the President did so effectively, Bundy was confident that it could accomplish two important functions: first, to present important policy issues; and, second, to help the President "keep in touch with operations that you personally want to keep on top of."³³ While Bundy clearly had specific ideas about the NSC's organization and procedures, he emphasized that those decisions were the President's responsibility alone--even though he urged Kennedy to make some choices before the first meeting.³⁴ In this case, Bundy's style of advice was rather sophisticated, albeit indirect, especially when

³¹ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 31 January 1961, NSF: M&M: NSC Meetings, 1961, Meeting 475, Box 313.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid. Bundy did note in this memorandum that he wanted to share his specific ideas with Kennedy, but that he thought it would be easier to do so in a personal conversation than to present them in writing.

compared to the frank and direct style of, perhaps, Robert McNamara. Bundy did not necessarily *tell* Kennedy exactly *what* to do; he very simply put the President on a particular path.

As far as the substance of this first National Security Council meeting was concerned, Bundy was equally as subtle. He clearly stated that there were previously approved NSC policies that needed review, the most urgent being basic military policy. Such an evaluation would entail larger questions about U.S. continental defense, strategic and limited war forces, and overall NATO strategy--all important elements of flexible response. Bundy also told Kennedy that debate about particular aspects of these issues (eg., strategic versus limited war forces, first-strike versus second-strike planning, crisis management versus long-term planning) would also probably occur, precisely because many of Kennedy's civilian advisors had particular concerns about these matters. Yet, Bundy's foremost interest was ensuring that "you [Kennedy, that is] satisfy yourself, as President, on these basic matters."³⁵ After all, it was the President who ultimately was responsible and who would be held accountable by the public, although Bundy's goal clearly was to see that the best possible decisions were made.

Bundy was concerned about getting the military policy studied so that the President could actually formulate the conclusions that were necessary for developing specific aspects of flexible response. He was aware that interested and

³⁵ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 30 January 1961, NSF: M&M: NSC Meetings, 1961, Meeting 475, Box 313.

potentially biased parties, such as the Air Force, would try to pressure the President, as had been the case in the past. He, therefore, suggested that Kennedy launch "[a] NSC staff study under your own direction" and in consultation with trusted civilian advisors, such as Jerome Wiesner, James Killian, Henry Kissinger, and James Gavin (among others).³⁶ He noted that Robert McNamara also wanted his civilian staff at Defense to conduct a study, and he told Kennedy that having two studies could be advantageous to the President.

Yet, again, it was the President's decision to make and he needed the best possible, as well as the most impartial, information that could be collected. Nonetheless, Bundy also realized that the expertise of the military could not be totally ignored:

The matter is of literally life-and-death importance, and it also has plenty of political dynamite in it, so that the more advice you get, the better off you will be....Whatever method you choose, it will be essential (and new) that your men-in-charge have full and candid information about existing plans and thinking in the armed services, and instruction to this effect could be given by you to McNamara and Lemnitzer [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs] at the first NSC. (Both of these, as individuals, are in favor of such communication, as far as I know.) And while in my judgment the initial studies should not be made by JCS, there should be full consultation with the military at all stages and a fully military comment to you before you decide anything.³⁷

In essence, while the military necessarily had to be involved, the military could not be allowed to control the process. This seemed paramount in Bundy's mind; if he could convince the President of that point, then he would ensure that the

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

President was on what he seemed to think was the proper decision making path, which also implied that the proper decisions would be made. The primacy of civilian influence in the Kennedy administration's revision of national security policy is well-known and documented (in this and other studies). While McGeorge Bundy generally has not been thought of being primarily responsible for this component, he certainly did little to discourage it. How decisions are made is often as important as what decisions are made, and Bundy tried to ensure that decisions were made in a certain way and by whom he deemed the appropriate persons.

Meeting briefings were but one of many vehicles that Bundy consistently used to exert his influence on the development of the flexible response's nuclear and conventional elements. Within two months of the Administration's commencement, Kennedy presented to Congress a detailed revision of the nation's defense budget; this was also the Administration's first major opportunity to present a formal argument for a transformation of the nation's defense strategy.³⁸ During the defense message's preparation, Bundy provided Theodore Sorensen with a lengthy memorandum concerning nearly all aspects of the message--from the larger, overall themes to the specific details of the Administration's new defense strategy to the kinds of reactions and/or opposition

³⁸ See Kennedy, "Special Message on the Defense Budget," pp. 902-6, for the official text of the message.

that the Administration might encounter as a result of this particular presentation.³⁹ He stated very clearly that "the President is right in thinking that the question of the size of the military budget is important, but wrong in thinking that it is all-important." He sensed that Congress would not object to the moderate net increases in obligational authority that the Administration was requesting, and that what should be emphasized in turn were "the more important underlying questions of military posture which are implied by these first changes." Very simply, in Bundy's mind, a flexible response that was based on "sensible choices" had to be the primary theme of the message, not the actual increase or redistribution in defense expenditures.⁴⁰

He maintained that the arguments concerning the relationship between various budgetary items and the overall need for flexibility could be easily made. He specifically promoted much needed improvements in command and control, the further development of state-of-the-art nuclear and conventional forces, and major advancement in non-conventional (guerrilla and anti-guerrilla) forces.⁴¹ Yet, any revision of the nation's basic military posture, on the other hand, was a far more delicate venture and would demand avoiding certain issues that were "currently enshrined in national security policy papers" (the alleged missile gap, for instance). He told Sorensen that it was crucial, therefore, that the

³⁹ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to Theodore Sorensen, 13 March 1961, NSF: D&A: DoD Vol. I, March 1961, Box 273, JFKL.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Administration's purposes and the subsequent means for defense policy implementation be extremely clear. "[T]he President," he said "may find it easier to change all of this by public language than by a complex renewal of the theological argument within the government."⁴² Finding "fresh words" was the key to this problem, and Bundy, not surprisingly, had several suggestions that he was willing to "put forward for discussion and not for definite acceptance," that obviously were based on his prior conversations with Kennedy:

The nut of what the President wants, as I understand it, can be described in the following four requirements:

a. That our military capability be such as to prevent general atomic aggression. Our own strength should protect us against such an attack upon ourselves, and the strength which we share with our allies should prevent any such attack upon them.

b. That our ability to act effectively with conventional weapons in situations which do not involve [a] general atomic attack should be substantially increased.

c. That we should maintain the necessary strength, in all arms, to take appropriate action, short of general strategic warfare, in the event of a major aggression that cannot be thrown back by conventional forces. (This is the hard one, but I think it cannot be swept under the rug; the suggested language is cool and unthreatening, as [much] as possible.)

d. That in the terrible event of a general atomic war, we retain the capability to act rationally to advance the national interest by exerting pressure and offering choices to the enemy. (This one need not be public at this stage [because of the scenario].)⁴³

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

Bundy also suggested that the President stress that the United States would not undertake a preemptive first-strike, but remained committed to arms control negotiations.⁴⁴

McGeorge Bundy was also not oblivious to the importance and value of the specific forum in which the new strategy was being presented, particularly in terms of the potential headaches that the Administration would be avoiding as a result. He was extremely confident that if the Administration took this kind of approach that it would garner necessary public support that would, in turn, translate into easier policy implementation, especially in terms of the reformulation of national military posture and redistribution of budgetary funds. Trying to negotiate first among various internal interests would necessarily be cumbersome and time-consuming; the Administration might never be able actually to construct its flexible response. This is not to say that Bundy was underestimating or downplaying the seriousness of rewriting Eisenhower's defense policy, and he recognized Kennedy's need to make such a decision "only after considering the alternatives." Instead, he was looking to secure what he saw as a desired and beneficial outcome with as little pain as possible:

What I like about this notion [of presenting a new posture in the Defense Message] is that if the President says something of this sort, he will, I think get strong public support and we can then proceed quite painlessly to the revision of the appropriate policy documents. If we do it the other way around, by revisioning the policy documents first, we will get one of these terrible guerrilla wars in

⁴⁴ Ibid.

which calculated leaks about our desire for appeasement mess up the picture before we have a chance to paint it our own way.⁴⁵

While he admitted to Sorensen that his suggestions might be of little or no use, he did request that Sorensen share the draft message with him. In actuality, all of Bundy's recommendations were incorporated into the message in some form, either directly or indirectly. Moreover, Congress was explicitly told that the budget modifications that Kennedy was requesting were "designed to implement [current strategic] assumptions as we now see them, and to chart a clear, fresh course" for American national security.⁴⁶ Again, Bundy had used subtle and indirect means for affecting the decisions that surrounded flexible response.

The FY 1963 defense budget process provides yet another example of how McGeorge Bundy executed his duties as an important presidential advisor. The FY 1963 budget was the first opportunity for the Administration to present a complete budget that specifically reflected the adoption of a flexible response strategy. Prior to Inauguration Day, 1961, Kennedy had ordered Defense Secretary Robert McNamara to conduct a comprehensive reappraisal of the defense establishment. That process had continued throughout 1961 even though some of the preliminary results were incorporated into early Administration decisions and actions, such as the March special message to Congress on defense, the May special message on urgent national needs, and the management of that summer's crisis in Berlin. The underlying motivation of this kind of evaluation

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Kennedy, "Special Message on the Defense Budget," p. 902.

had been to ensure that defense policy objectives and the means for implementation were in balance; the preparation of the FY 1963 budget was the culmination of this lengthy and complicated process. By early November 1961, McGeorge Bundy was actively engaged, in combination with other key advisors such as Budget Director David Bell, who also had been a Harvard colleague, and McNamara, in preparing the data that was necessary for advising the President on various aspects of the new defense budget.

In early October 1961, McNamara had submitted to Kennedy a report on the anticipated major elements of the his upcoming defense budget recommendations (to be submitted on December 1) that was based upon his "preliminary review of the Department of Defense's FY '63 budget and a projection of the Department's Programs for the years 1963-67."⁴⁷ Within a week of McNamara's report, Maxwell Taylor, Kennedy's Special Advisor for Military Affairs, had forwarded to Bundy a copy of a memorandum that Taylor had sent to McNamara concerning the budget recommendations. In that memo, Taylor expressed his concern about McNamara's proposed maintenance of a high level of strategic missile forces and cutbacks in conventional (general purpose) forces. Bundy made a specific notation to keep Taylor's memo filed with the materials for the FY 1963 military budget.⁴⁸ By the end of October, Secretary of

⁴⁷ Memorandum, Robert McNamara to the President, "Recommended Department of Defense FY'63 Budget and 1963-67 Program," 6 October 1961, NSF: D&A: DoD: Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

⁴⁸ Memorandum, Maxwell Taylor to Robert McNamara, 14 October 1961, NSF: D&A: DoD: Defense Budget FY 1963, January-October 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

State Dean Rusk also had provided Bundy with a copy of an evaluation that he had sent both to McNamara and David Bell. Rusk also expressed concern about conventional force cuts as well as potentially inadequate funding for the Nike-Zeus anti-missile program.⁴⁹ By the end of the first week of November, Bundy had seemingly concluded that he needed more complete information; he, therefore, drafted, with urging from his special assistant Carl Kaysen, a memorandum to Central Intelligence Agency Director Allen Dulles in which he requested "a current evaluation of Soviet strategic military posture and policy."⁵⁰

Bundy specifically told Dulles that he was requesting this information in anticipation of the President's upcoming decisions concerning the FY 1963 budget.⁵¹ Yet the guidelines that he provided for Dulles also seem to suggest that he expected an internal debate about strategic nuclear and conventional force levels, which was hardly surprising particularly if one considers both Taylor's and Rusk's appraisals:

The estimate [of Soviet military posture and strategy] should deal explicitly with an analysis of the extent to which the available information indicates a probable Soviet choice among the policies of deterrence and first and second-strike counterforce.

This estimate should of course reflect a large volume of background information we now possess on the nature and deployment of Soviet military forces, including strategic aircraft, air defenses, and AICBM development, as well as information on Soviet doctrine. This

⁴⁹ Letter, Dean Rusk to McGeorge Bundy, 29 October 1961, NSF: D&A: DoD: Defense Budget FY 1963, January-October 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

⁵⁰ Memoranda, Carl Kaysen to McGeorge Bundy, and McGeorge Bundy to Allen Dulles, 7 November 1961, NSF: D&A: DoD: Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December 1963, Box 275, JFKL.

⁵¹ Ibid.

estimate should also take into account whatever information bearing on these questions has been yielded by recent Soviet nuclear tests.⁵²

While Bundy did not request specific information on Soviet conventional force strength, he clearly knew that Soviet nuclear strength would undoubtedly underpin any discussions in which funding choices for American nuclear force levels were debated *in opposition to* conventional force strength. In fact, Taylor had emphasized the "tremendous megatonnage represented by the [recommended] delivery capability" and he had specifically questioned "How much is enough?". Yet, he also had urged "that the size of the forces should be reviewed in the light of our latest intelligence of the Soviet missile forces," and Bundy obviously agreed.⁵³ Bundy also knew that he needed the most up-to-date information that was available because he would be engaged in such a discussion, and he would, in turn, have to steer the President down the appropriate path.⁵⁴

Yet the collection of data did not stop there. By November 13, Bundy had a copy of Budget Director Bell's analysis for the President of the basic defense budget issues for FY 1963, of Maxwell Taylor's memorandum to David Bell concerning the balance between strategic and conventional forces, and of Carl Kaysen's assessment of McNamara's recommendations that he had prepared

⁵² Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to Allen Dulles, 7 November 1961.

⁵³ Memorandum, Maxwell Taylor to McGeorge Bundy, 14 October 1961.

⁵⁴ Unfortunately, this researcher did not uncover a response to McGeorge Bundy's request, although one could reasonably presume that Allen Dulles replied in some fashion. Data in subsequent memoranda in this particular NSF file does indicate that Bundy had received answers to his questions. For instance, Carl Kaysen does refer to Soviet strategy in a 22 November 1961 memorandum to the President, NSF: D&A: DoD: Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

specifically for Bundy. An additional Taylor memorandum to Bell concerning what he perceived as excesses and deficiencies in McNamara's proposals was forwarded to Bundy a week later. All four of these evaluations underlined the complexity of achieving overall flexibility in theory and in practice--of finding the appropriate balance between strategic and conventional forces without harming the quality of either force in the process.⁵⁵ Similar additional memoranda were submitted by Kaysen and Taylor on November 22, the same day that Bundy prepared and presented to the President a Thanksgiving weekend reading packet concerning the FY 1963 defense budget.⁵⁶

McGeorge Bundy did not, however, give Kennedy every memorandum, evaluation, or letter on this subject. Only a choice few were forwarded to Kennedy, with minimal, but telling, commentary from Bundy. Directly underneath Bundy's memo, on the right side of the folder, came McNamara's October 6 analysis and two appendices--the first on recommended long-range nuclear delivery forces for 1963-67 and the second on the program for deployment of the Nike-Zeus anti-missile system.⁵⁷ On the left side of the folder were four tabs,

⁵⁵ Memoranda, David Bell to the President, Maxwell Taylor to David Bell, & Carl Kaysen to McGeorge Bundy, 13 November 1961; Maxwell Taylor to David Bell, 21 November 1961, NSF: D&A: DoD: Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

⁵⁶ The withdrawal sheet that the Kennedy Library staff prepared for this particular folder indicates that Kennedy actually conducted a meeting about the FY 1963 budget over that Thanksgiving weekend.

⁵⁷ This first appendix, dated 23 September 1961, had not been declassified as of February 1993; in the second appendix, McNamara presented his argument for only proceeding with production support funding for Nike-Zeus (as opposed to actual deployment) in FY 1963 in order to "make possible its limited deployment in the near future." He told Kennedy that "a recent technical analysis has confirmed that NIKE ZEUS will not provide soft targets an effective defense against large scale or sophisticated ICBM attacks," which is why deployment would be only on a limited scale. See Memorandum (Draft),

each containing four individual staff memoranda: first, David Bell's November 13 analysis; second, a November 22 Maxwell Taylor memorandum on Nike-Zeus; third, a November 22 Maxwell Taylor memorandum concerning conventional force budget recommendations; and, fourth, a November 22 Carl Kaysen memorandum concerning the balance between strategic nuclear and conventional forces.⁵⁸ Bundy did not provide personal observations about either McNamara's or Bell's contribution, although the placement of these items clearly indicated their importance. However, with regard to the Taylor and Kaysen memoranda, Bundy does supply discriminating direction for the President.

In the first memorandum, Taylor argued vehemently for the maintenance of whole-hearted Administration support for the Nike-Zeus program, both in terms of actually "embark[ing] upon a limited initial production program...and...accelerat[ing] research and development on the radar and missile improvements." He asserted that because there was no similar American anti-missile system on the horizon, that deemphasizing Nike-Zeus would translate into a monetary as well as psychological advantage for the enemy. Maintaining support for Nike-Zeus, however, would make Americans feel safer, and it would "at a minimum...drive the USSR to a decoy programs that will be both expensive

Robert McNamara to the President, "Program for Deployment of NIKE ZEUS," 30 September 1961, NSF: D&A: DoD: Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

⁵⁸ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 22 November 1961, NSF: D&A: DoD: Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December 1961, Box 275. This folder's withdrawal sheet was also a useful guide for recreating the exact placement of each memorandum.

and restrictive upon the useful payload of their missiles warheads."⁵⁹ While Bundy told Kennedy that he included this memorandum because the argument was "interesting," he pointed out that "[m]ost of the rest of us do not agree with it."⁶⁰ That being said, Taylor therefore was automatically put on the defensive; moreover, the onus would be on him alone to convince the President otherwise-- that is, if the President was willing to listen to such argument at this point.

Taylor's second memorandum laid out an extensive argument for greater increases in various categories of conventional force funding, precisely because the levels of conventional force expenditures under Eisenhower defense budgets was so profoundly low. Taylor stated that a "drastic reversal of former...patterns" was absolutely essential in order "to compensate for this past neglect."⁶¹ In this case, Bundy relayed to Kennedy that Taylor's "argument here seems much stronger."⁶² Bundy's reaction to Carl Kaysen's memorandum was similar. In that piece, Kaysen presented a strong case for a smaller nuclear strategic force than what McNamara had recommended. First, he claimed a smaller force would achieve the Administration's goals; second, he maintained that "the risks of having higher forces are considerable" when one considered those levels in light of "the

⁵⁹ Memorandum, Maxwell Taylor to the President, "NIKE-ZEUS Program, FY 1963 Budget," 22 November 1961, NSF: D&A: DoD: Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

⁶⁰ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 22 November 1961.

⁶¹ Memorandum, Maxwell Taylor to the President, "Support of Conventional Forces in the 1963 Budget," 22 November 1961, NSF: D&A: DoD: Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

⁶² Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 22 November 1961.

possibility of interaction between the size of our force and the size of the Soviet force."⁶³ Again, Bundy specifically told Kennedy that Kaysen's evaluation was "well worth attention because the argument is not developed anywhere else in your papers."⁶⁴ As was discussed above, Kaysen had agreed with Bundy's November request to Allen Dulles concerning Soviet force strength because the impact of that kind of information on American planning. While Kaysen did not refer to the Dulles information in his November 22 evaluation, he did note that he had based his analysis on new Defense Department estimates of anticipated Soviet strategy, capabilities, and reactions.⁶⁵

In these two subsequent cases, gaining Bundy's endorsement naturally meant that the actual burden of presenting potentially controversial and divisive positions--both of which were contrary to McNamara's recommendations⁶⁶--would be lessened simply because Bundy was again trying to direct Kennedy down a certain avenue. Bundy clearly had completed his homework and had particular positions in mind. Nonetheless, he refrained from stating them in writing, except in the Nike-Zeus instance; yet even there, he did so only in the context of a group's position. He did little more than present the documents in a certain order with the least amount of commentary possible (even though his few choice

⁶³ Memorandum, Carl Kaysen to the President, 22 November 1961, NSF: D&A: DoD: Defense Budget FY 1963, November-December 1961, Box 275, JFKL.

⁶⁴ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 22 November 1961.

⁶⁵ Memorandum, Carl Kaysen to the President, 22 November 1961.

⁶⁶ Memorandum, Robert McNamara to the President, 6 October 1961.

comments could have tremendous impact). Moreover, when budget decisions were being finalized in early December, Bundy confirmed with Kennedy in writing a discussion that apparently had occurred during a car ride, in which questions concerning Nike-Zeus, the Skybolt missile program, the Minutemen ICBM procurement schedule, and the Polaris submarine program were deliberated and resolved (issues that were critical to flexible response implementation).⁶⁷ Again, Bundy did not directly tell Kennedy in this particular memorandum what to think or do; he simply presented a very brief interpretation of a conversation, which would, in turn, help to remind Kennedy of--and perhaps shape--a particular line of thinking on these matters.

In fact, there is, perhaps, no more subtle means for exerting influence on a president than being personally responsible for the way in which the president actually reviews any particular issue. The sheer quantity of paper that surrounds any presidency demands an equally discerning staff. There are so many issues, problems, and questions on any particular day that staff assistance is absolutely necessary. It is simply impossible for any president to read and remember every page of analysis or conversation on a particular issue, let alone every issue; choices, therefore, must be and are made. Interpretations and summaries are often presented as if they were unbiased facts.

⁶⁷ Unsigned Memorandum for the President (JFKL staff has identified Bundy as the originator), 9 December 1961, NSF: D&A: DoD, Vol. II, November-December 1961, Box 273, JFKL. Theodore Sorensen and David Bell were also part of this conversation.

Yet who actually makes those determinations, what those determinations are, and how those determinations are presented very simply translate into power and influence. Furthermore, the order in which the president reviews documents as well as a simple phrase or comment in a particularly crucial place, or a summary of a conversation, can have as significant an effect as a more lengthy, brilliantly-argued memorandum. This discussion has concentrated on a few specific, albeit critical, decision making examples during the first year of the Kennedy administration. Yet McGeorge Bundy's approach in these particular instances certainly underscores quite powerfully the very subtle means in which a presidential advisor can influence the formulation of a particular policy--in this case, the allocation of funding for the nuclear and conventional forces that were necessary for a flexible response.

Decisions Concerning Berlin

There is, perhaps, no greater symbol of Cold War politics than Berlin. In 1948, 1958, and again in 1961, major international crises were sparked by American-Soviet clashes about the post-war agreements concerning Berlin. At the end of World War II, Berlin--like the entire German state--was divided into four zones to be administered by each of the four Allied victors. Yet Western access rights to Berlin, which lay geographically in the Soviet zone, were never clearly defined in the negotiated settlements concerning Berlin and Germany. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that as American-Soviet relations deteriorated in the first

couple of decades following the war, threats to Western rights in Berlin exacerbated Cold War tensions.

In 1948 Soviet attempts to cut off Western access to Berlin were overcome by a year-long airlift of food, fuel, and raw materials to the western half of the city. In 1958 Khrushchev pressed for a negotiated peace treaty amongst the former allies to settle finally the war's unresolved 'German Question.' Again, Western rights in Berlin were threatened because such a treaty would necessitate, from the Soviet perspective, recognition of the German Democratic Republic's (East Germany) sovereignty. The 1958 crisis never escalated to 1948's level, and the Eisenhower administration did try to ease tensions by encouraging East-West negotiations. Yet, relations again soured as a result of the downing of the American U-2 spy plane and Khrushchev's tumultuous exit from the May 1960 summit in Paris.⁶⁸ This deterioration in East-West relations was once again impetus for renewed tensions and pressure concerning the status of Berlin.

Both Theodore Sorensen and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., have indicated that John Kennedy anticipated further threats from Khrushchev regarding Germany and Berlin, precisely because of the 1958 crisis and the failure of the 1960 Paris meeting.⁶⁹ In a December 1959 interview with John Fischer, Editor-in-Chief of

⁶⁸ James Joll, *Europe Since 1870: An International History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 431, 454-55; A.W. DePorte, *Europe Between the Superpowers: The Enduring Balance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 175-6.

⁶⁹ Sorensen, p. 583, 584; Schlesinger, pp. 302-4, 346-7.

Harpers Magazine, Kennedy himself had recognized Berlin as the symbol of the balance of power struggle in Europe between the United States and Soviet Union:

I think the importance of Berlin--the peculiar geographic location of Berlin--the necessity for the East German government to have increased status--the importance of East Germany to the Soviet economy and its political system--its relations with Poland: all these mean that this is really a great area for a power struggle. The difficulties we have in Germany, in Berlin, are there because of the importance of Germany, and the importance of West Germany to us, to the defense of Western Europe. All these mean that great pressure will be brought to bear over the question of Berlin.⁷⁰

It is understandable, as well, that Berlin was on the Kennedy administration's agenda from the beginning and would help to set the stage for the implementation of a flexible response.⁷¹ In that light, it also serves as an important and one of the most intense illustrations of the ways in which McGeorge Bundy and his staff influenced the decision making process that surrounded the flexible response strategy. They, again, very effectively gathered pertinent data and filtered that information to the President at the appropriate places and times.

It is important to remember, however, that Berlin was but one of several national security problems that demanded Kennedy's attention in the first several months of the administration, some of which, like the Bay of Pigs invasion and situation in Berlin, he had inherited from his predecessor. In mid-February 1961,

⁷⁰ Kennedy, The Strategy of Peace, pp. 212-13.

⁷¹ As was discussed in Chapter 3, on 6 January 1961, Nikita Khrushchev gave his famous 'war of national liberation' speech, in which reasserted his commitment to resolving the "German Problem." This speech served to remind the new Kennedy administration that Berlin would remain as a potential source for tension between the superpowers.

the Soviets threatened to intervene in the Congo as a result of Patrice Lumumba's assassination, and communist forces had been so successful in Laos in February that by early March the administration was considering its own intervention in that country. Late in March, Soviet demands during ongoing negotiations in Geneva concerning on-site inspections brought nuclear test ban and disarmament talks to a standstill; shortly thereafter, they orbited the first man in space, thus demonstrating their rocket booster capability. In the early part of April, both British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer were in Washington to establish working ties with the new administration. A few weeks after the Bay of Pigs, Vietnamese communists boasted that they anticipated winning the guerrilla war by year's end, and in mid-May a U.S.-sponsored government in South Korea was overthrown by an internal military coup. On May 30, the day on which Kennedy flew to Paris to meet Charles de Gaulle, and ultimately Khrushchev in Vienna, the Dominican Republic's dictator, Rafael Trujillo, was assassinated in a CIA-sponsored operation.⁷² While none of these events individually seem that drastic, as a successive group they served as a powerful backdrop of international tension that surrounded Kennedy's meetings with Khrushchev in Vienna in June 1961 and the ensuing crisis in Berlin during that same summer.

Yet, even before Inauguration Day, McGeorge Bundy's staff--and, thus, Kennedy--was already receiving advice about how to handle Soviet pressure, and

⁷² Sorensen, pp. 292-3, was particularly helpful in compiling this list.

specifically the pressure that the Soviets might bring to bear in Berlin. For example, a December 1960 RAND Corporation report to Walt Rostow (Bundy's deputy special assistant until November 1961) described "Soviet pressure against West Berlin since 1958" as "diplomatic blackmail--in which the Soviet Union has tried to use its strength against the West to make political gains."⁷³ This report urged the new administration to use strong rhetoric as well as forceful actions to demonstrate its determination to defend Western access rights to Berlin:

An important requirement for inducing the blackmailer to modify or abandon his demands is to convince him that the defending side has strong, complex, and compelling reasons for holding on to what it is asked to give up, and that its resolution to resist is much stronger than the blackmailer anticipated....Above all, the defender must make it clear to the blackmailer that the conflict cannot, and will not, be confined to the small chessboard on which the blackmailer wants to play.⁷⁴

Such an approach would, in turn, persuade the Soviets to back down on the Berlin issue.

Because Khrushchev seemingly had issued at one point an April 1961 deadline for resolving the Berlin question, the Kennedy administration immediately began planning for a possible confrontation over Berlin. Moreover, an early January 1961 State Department report suggested that the Soviets had postponed any further "unilateral action pending the inauguration of a new

⁷³ Report, A.L. George [RAND Corporation] to Walt Rostow, 26 December 1960, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin-General Vol I: Military Power and the Cold War: The Case of West Berlin, Box 81, JFKL.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

American administration."⁷⁵ The implication was that Soviet pressure would undoubtedly be renewed in the near future; furthermore, the history of the crisis gave little hope for a "lasting settlement" that "[would] prove acceptable to both East and West."⁷⁶ The Administration was afforded some breathing room when Khrushchev agreed to meet with Kennedy in Vienna in June, thus postponing any deadline at least until after the Vienna talks. Yet, again, the tension within the international arena, particularly in the wake of the Bay of Pigs debacle, was high, and thus kept the Administration focused on containing any potential Soviet aggression or pressure, especially in Berlin.

The deadline extension, therefore, did not mean a lessening of concern or a delay in planning inside the White House, particularly among Bundy's staff. In late March, Bundy received from George McGhee, the head of the Policy Planning staff at the State Department, a detailed paper on various political and military aspects of the Berlin problem, which had been prepared by the Department's European Affairs Bureau. That paper in particular discussed "the various proposals for a Berlin solution which have been advanced, or might be advanced, in negotiations with the Soviets and also certain aspects of Western contingency planning."⁷⁷ McGhee told Bundy that he would forward other

⁷⁵ "The Berlin Problem in 1961," 10 January 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 1/61, Box 81, JFKL.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Memorandum and Paper on "Problem of Berlin, George C. McGhee to McGeorge Bundy, 24 March 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General: "The Problem of Berlin," 3/24/61, Box 81, JFKL.

ongoing department studies on the Berlin question to Bundy as they were completed, including those on "the extension of the time period in the Western Peace Plan and other all-German approaches, possible European security arrangements, and UN solutions for Berlin."⁷⁸

Additionally, Harvard Professor Henry Kissinger, well-known for his work on nuclear strategy and balance of power politics, had been recruited as a part-time advisor to the White House on Berlin policy formulation and broader national security questions. In fact, arrangements were made for Kissinger to consult with various executive department personnel (in both the State and Defense Departments as well as in the Central Intelligence Agency) who were also working on the Berlin question.⁷⁹ Former Secretary of State Dean Acheson's assistance had also been enlisted to help plan for possible crisis in Berlin. In early April 1961, Bundy in fact forwarded to Kennedy an Acheson memorandum on the Berlin situation, in which Acheson apparently warned that a "crisis is likely this year" and that the United States "must be ready to use force in substantial amounts."⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Letter, McGeorge Bundy to Henry Kissinger, 9 March 1961, NSF: Meeting & Memoranda (M&M): Staff Memoranda: Henry Kissinger: 5/61, Box 320, JFKL; Memorandum, R.W. Komer to Henry Kissinger, 10 March 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 3/61, Box 81, JFKL. Who was primarily responsible for recruiting Kissinger is somewhat unclear, although any early February 1961 memorandum from Bundy to Kennedy highlights Bundy's influence; presumably, Bundy knew Kissinger personally because of the Harvard connection. See: Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 8 February 1961, NSF: Meeting & Memoranda: Staff Memoranda: Henry Kissinger: 1/61-4/61, Box 320, JFKL.

⁸⁰ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 4 April 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General: 4/16, Box 81, JFKL.

Bundy also took that particular opportunity to guide the President on how to approach the Berlin question with a primary American ally--the British. Bundy stressed that the British must be convinced of the American commitment to Berlin as well as warned about being lured into a compromising position when dealing with the adversary. British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's visit to Washington during the first week of April was impetus for Bundy's remarks:

With respect to Macmillan's visit: It seems to me that there is every reason to press strongly upon the British our determination to stand firm. Attempts to negotiate this problem out of existence have failed in the past, and there is none which gives promise of success now. We should of course be willing to look at any new schemes they dream up, but in return we should press hard for British firmness at the moment of compromise....Berlin is no place for compromise and our general friendliness and eagerness for improvement on many other points really requires strength here in order to be rightly understood.⁸¹

To Acheson's call for military force Bundy added the strength and support of American allies. It was being made clear that the West must be prepared to act swiftly and convincingly in response to any Soviet pressure concerning the Berlin question. Moreover, Konrad Adenauer followed Macmillan to Washington just a couple of weeks later, thus keeping Berlin at the forefront, despite the fact that Adenauer's visit preceded the Bay of Pigs invasion by a mere three days.⁸²

Yet, some administration advisors were fearful of Acheson's perceived preoccupation with the application of military force in a possible Berlin crisis. Arthur Schlesinger would later report that Adlai Stevenson, the United States

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Beschloss, p. 133.

Ambassador to the United Nations, had argued that a military confrontation should be absolutely the last conceivable alternative for handling adversarial aggression in Berlin, such as a possible blockade of Berlin, coming after all other alternatives had been explored and exhausted.⁸³ Henry Kissinger realized the importance of remaining firm; yet, as he suggested to Walt Rostow, firmness need not necessarily, nor even be interpreted as, war:

[W]e might even go so far as to say that neither side should press demands which can be achieved only by war.... We should not give the impression that we are panicked at the prospect of a Soviet peace treaty with Eastern Germany.... Our position should be much more relaxed and to the effect that a peace treaty with Eastern Germany cannot affect the obligations of the U.S.S.R. It is a way to precipitate a crisis, not to justify it. And it will evoke counterpressure on our part against the GDR. There is no doubt that we should avoid actions which lead to dangerous situations. But is not clear how we are provoking a Berlin crisis by standing firm.⁸⁴

Kissinger's approach left the door open for diplomacy, but it was the type of diplomacy that had the United States negotiating from a position of strength and controlling the diplomatic strings. Clearly such a position depended upon the acquisition of a flexible response--both politically and militarily.

In a similar vein, Henry Owen, a member of the Policy Planning Staff at the State Department whom McGeorge Bundy borrowed during the spring and summer of 1961 to work on the Berlin question and East-West issues in general, urged that the same type of firmness be applied to conventional force planning.

⁸³ Schlesinger, p. 381.

⁸⁴ Memorandum, Henry Kissinger to Walt Rostow, 4 April 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 4/61, Box 81, JFKL.

Specifically, Owen maintained that serious efforts had to be made to enhance American conventional strength in Berlin if piecemeal adversarial aggression was to be deterred there.⁸⁵ In other words, the primary goal of improvements in conventional force capability would be to demonstrate American resolution to defend Berlin as well as any point in Western Europe. Reconfirming that commitment would, in turn, eradicate the antecedents that might actually induce a military confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, particularly over the Berlin question.⁸⁶ Owen's advice would not go unnoticed as the Administration continued with its planning for a possible crisis in Berlin, nor would he be alone in advocating major increases in conventional strength.

In fact, a May 1961 Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) report on Berlin contingency planning, which Robert McNamara had the JCS prepare in response to a mid-April request from McGeorge Bundy,⁸⁷ seemed to support the perspective that Kissinger, Owen, and others were advancing. In an appendix to that report, which assessed the problems and obstacles to free access to Berlin, the JCS reemphasized a rudimentary point: that both the United States and the

⁸⁵ Memorandum, Henry Owen to McGeorge Bundy, 17 May 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 5/61, Box 81, JFKL.

⁸⁶ The March 1961 State Department paper on the problem of Berlin that George McGhee had sent to Bundy also made this assertion. In fact, that paper took the argument one step further by saying that "[a] warning...that continuation of the Soviet threat to Berlin will inevitably bring the kind of massive mobilization of American resources for defense of which Khrushchev, but which neither we nor he basically desire, might add to our deterrent." See Memorandum and Paper on "Problem of Berlin," George C. McGhee to McGeorge Bundy, 24 March 1961.

⁸⁷ Memorandum, Robert McNamara to McGeorge Bundy, 5 May 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: Report of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part I, 5/5/61, Box 81, JFKL.

Soviet Union had the thermonuclear power to destroy each other and Europe. As a result of this fact, they said, "the question [with regard to Berlin] is still less the military power to use the full force available than the political judgement whether it is in the national interest to do so."⁸⁸ Moreover, any American pre-crisis preparations would not only serve "to improve our military capability" and "to warn and deter the Soviets," but they would help "to prepare Western populations psychologically" as well.⁸⁹

While this perspective did not necessarily rule out a nuclear exchange, it delayed any such exchange until all other options had been explored. In fact, the JCS maintained that by putting the nuclear option at the very top of the ladder of escalation, they would provide the time that was necessary for gaining public support for the possibility of nuclear options, thus adding another dimension of pressure on the Soviets.⁹⁰ Yet, the JCS also concluded that a door must always be available for the Soviet Union to back down and to protect its prestige, which coincided with Henry Kissinger's advice.⁹¹ Very basically, the JCS were arguing

⁸⁸ Report of the Joint Chiefs of Staff [on Military Planning for a Possible Berlin Crisis], Appendix A [on Non-Nuclear Military Actions to Reopen Access to Berlin, 5 May 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: Report of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part I, Box 81, JFKL.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid. It should be noted that Henry Kissinger also emphasized planning for a potential nuclear exchange. In fact, in a March 1961 report that he prepared for the President on major defense options and which he forwarded to McGeorge Bundy in the beginning of May, he asserted that "[w]e must prepare to use both nuclear and conventional weapons, though we will make every effort to shift the responsibility for initiating the use of nuclear weapons to the other side. See: Letter, Henry Kissinger to McGeorge Bundy, 5 May 1961, attaching Memorandum, Henry Kissinger to the President, 22 March 1961, NSF: M&M: Staff Memoranda: Henry Kissinger, 5/61, Box 320, JFKL.

that appropriate military preparations would strengthen both the military as well as the diplomatic power of the United States.

One can clearly see, therefore, that even before the Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting in Vienna, that a mixture of views was being presented to and discussed among the Bundy staff about preparations for a potential crisis in Berlin and about what options should be considered in case such a confrontation actually were to occur. Moreover, the level of tension in the international system in general had risen and had been exacerbated by the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Vienna meeting itself was a tense and harsh affair, as Kennedy and Khrushchev debated American and Soviet views on a wide range of issues: the differences of the two political systems; the threat of thermonuclear destruction; the Soviet-Cuban and Sino-Soviet relationships; American support for reactionary governments (e.g., in Iran); the situation in Laos and Southeast Asia in general; the nuclear test ban; and, finally, Berlin. While no specific negotiated treaty or agreement was reached during these discussions (Kennedy had thought that there might be some substantive movement on a nuclear test ban and on Laos), they did afford each leader to hear the other's perspective directly, especially on the situation concerning Berlin.

On Berlin, and on Germany in general, Khrushchev insisted that a permanent peace treaty should be signed by all of the former allies. Yet, the effect of such a treaty would be the nullification of existing administrative institutions and occupation and access rights. West Berlin would remain a free

city, argued Khrushchev, but access to the city could be under East Germany's jurisdiction. Kennedy, however, refused to accede to Khrushchev's demands, arguing instead that the United States neither would nor could accept Soviet attempts to alter the international balance of power. He stated firmly that West Germany and Berlin had become symbols of the United States' commitments to its allies; further, he maintained that Khrushchev's proposition was insensitive to the United States' relationship with Western Europe. Khrushchev, nonetheless, threatened to sign a peace treaty with East Germany by December 1961 unless a six-month interim agreement was reached with the Western allies. The choice that United States seemed to face, if the Soviet Union used military force in Berlin in order to elicit compliance with its demands, was between a massive nuclear response or an inadequate conventional counterattack. The Kennedy administration had little time to act; moreover, there was enormous fear that the problems in Berlin might precipitate a direct military confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union.⁹²

From that point forward, preparations within the Bundy staff moved at a frantic pace, and the incoming and outgoing studies, questions, concerns, and advice were as varied as they had been before the Vienna talks. The Joint Chiefs of Staff were involved in broad contingency planning for Berlin and had evaluated the military and civilian supply levels in Berlin in preparation for a possible

⁹² For a detailed discussion of the two-day meeting between Kennedy and Khrushchev, including the Berlin debate, and various analysis of both Kennedy's and Khrushchev's perceptions of the impact of this meeting, see: Schlesinger, pp. 866-74; Sorensen, pp. 584-86; Rusk, pp. 220-1; Reeves, 157-71; Beschloss, pp. 194-236.

emergency. In fact, that evaluation had uncovered a severe deficiency in the civilian gasoline stockpiles in West Berlin, which would create serious problems if an adversarial blockade were to occur.⁹³ Kennedy ordered that immediate actions be taken to eradicate that deficiency.⁹⁴ Yet, concerns were also being raised regarding the broader implications of a possible crisis in Berlin for other aspects of the Soviet-American conflict, with specific fears being raised within the Administration concerning the American position in Vietnam.⁹⁵

Specifically, Chief of Naval Operations Arleigh Burke forwarded to McGeorge Bundy a memorandum that he had prepared for the Joint Chiefs of Staff in which he stressed his fear that Khrushchev was using the situation in Berlin to gain concessions for the Soviet position in Southeast Asia. Burke also warned the administration about the impact of losing sight of simultaneous Soviet intervention in other areas of the world:

As tensions mount in Europe, there will be an increasingly strong tendency to focus our concern on Berlin. The Joint Chiefs of Staff and others responsible for planning and the formulation of national security policy should bear in mind that faced with an impasse on Berlin, the Soviets may seek to obtain advantage elsewhere. U.S. acceptance of such an alternative would perhaps be less dramatic

⁹³ Memorandum, L.L. Lemnitzer, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to the President, 14 June 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 6/17/61-6/22/61, Box 81, JFKL.

⁹⁴ Memorandum, Brigadier General C.V. Clifton [Military Aide to the President] to General L.L. Lemnitzer, 21 June 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 6/17/61-6/22/61, Box 81, JFKL. Clifton also told Lemnitzer that while the memorandum was being prepared that "Mr. McGeorge Bundy suggested that I add a note that the President's comment on the supply levels should in no way curtail the broader contingency planning for Berlin in which he knows you are already engage."

⁹⁵ McNamara, *In Retrospect*, pp. 35-8.

than a Berlin defeat in undermining U.S. leadership of the Free World, but the end result would be no less certain.⁹⁶

Bundy told Burke that the memorandum had addressed "an important aspect of the problem" and that he appreciated Burke bringing it to his attention.⁹⁷

Burke's concerns were reinforced by McGeorge Bundy's deputy special assistant, Walt Rostow, who told the President that Khrushchev might push the United States as close as possible to an actual nuclear exchange in the Berlin situation to force the United States to accept a Soviet-sponsored 'compromise' in Southeast Asia. According to Rostow, the administration had to undertake both a nuclear as well as a conventional force buildup to ensure that "we [can] find ways of putting pressure on Khrushchev's side of the line (with conventional forces or by other means) which will offset the pressure on our side of the line."⁹⁸ Rostow argued that the proper military preparation might compel Khrushchev to "leave the status quo ;" if Khrushchev chose otherwise, the United States would at least be negotiating on a level playing field. "Put another way," Rostow said, "we must make Khrushchev share the burden of making sacrifices to avoid nuclear war."⁹⁹ Rostow would reemphasize his recommendation about linking the preparations

⁹⁶ Memorandum, Admiral Arleigh Burke to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 19 June 1961: and, Letter, Admiral Arleigh Burke to McGeorge Bundy, 19 June 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 6/17/61-6/22/61, Box 81, JFKL.

⁹⁷ McGeorge Bundy to Admiral Arleigh Burke, 20 June 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 6/17/61-6/22/61, Box 81, JFKL.

⁹⁸ Memorandum, W. W. Rostow to the President, 26 June 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 6/23/61-6/28/61, Box 81, JFKL.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

for a Berlin crisis to the maintenance of American interests in Southeast Asia in yet another memorandum to Kennedy in mid-July.¹⁰⁰ While it is unclear, however, just how much weight and attention was given to Burke's and Rostow's specific concerns in terms of the immediate crisis in Berlin, it is clear that the development of the Administration's Vietnam policy was well on its way, and that Administration fears concerning both Berlin and Vietnam were naturally connected because of the overall goal of flexible response to contain Soviet aggression in any place. In fact, the situation in Vietnam, like that in Berlin, was everpresent from the earliest days of the Administration; stopping communist advances in Vietnam and Southeast Asia in general was as crucial as protecting American interests in and access to Berlin in the Administration's mind during its first year in office.¹⁰¹

In late June, Dean Acheson submitted a special report on the crisis in Berlin that he had prepared for the President, and, in fact, it was the primary discussion topic at the June 29 National Security Council meeting.¹⁰² The sensitivity of that particular report was so great, as were the general preparations concerning Berlin, that Kennedy "expressed his great concern about leaks of information...and expressed his displeasure at the number of copies of the

¹⁰⁰ Memorandum, W.W. Rostow to the President, 14 July 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 7/14/61, Box 81, JFKL.

¹⁰¹ McNamara, *In Retrospect*, pp. 29-41.

¹⁰² Memorandum for the Record, Discussion at NSC meeting June 29, 1961, NSF: M&M: NSC Meetings, 1961, No. 486, 6/29/61, Box 313, JFKL. While the Acheson report had been declassified as of February 1993, it was unavailable at the Kennedy Library. See Sorensen, pp. 583-84, and Schlesinger, pp. 380-83, for additional background on Acheson's position.

Acheson report [that were] in circulation."¹⁰³ Acheson continued to emphasize the importance of a major military buildup, in which "that force must be large enough to carry the clear conviction to the enemy that if the fighting continues, nuclear weapons will be used."¹⁰⁴ Acheson urged the President to focus the public debate on the United States commitment to the people of Berlin and to American allies in general. He argued that "Khrushchev [was] a false trustee [to Berlin] and a war monger, and [that] these themes should be hammered home" in public discussions.¹⁰⁵ Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon also raised the question in this particular meeting about whether legislative steps should be taken to ensure that the President had the necessary powers to handle the mounting crisis, particularly in terms of the domestic economic implications of the crisis. Kennedy asked Dillon to investigate this issue, and he directed Bundy "to prepare a list of departmental assignments which might be carried forward in preparation for further discussion and appropriate decision in two weeks."¹⁰⁶

Within a few days, McGeorge Bundy had organized an interdepartmental working group for the planning operations in Berlin, which would be headed by Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Foy Kohler and would incorporate other staffers from the State, Defense, and Treasury Departments as

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

well as the Directors of the CIA and the United States Information Agency. Bundy, General Lemnitzer, General Taylor and Henry Owen would also be involved.¹⁰⁷ The State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research had also forwarded to Bundy two studies: one on a possible sequence of events should an airlift be needed in Berlin, and another on American military expenditures and Soviet allocations problems.¹⁰⁸ Henry Owen had urged that Bundy propose to the President a meeting between Kennedy and former President Dwight Eisenhower to demonstrate bipartisan support for the administration's handling of the Berlin situation. Moreover, such a meeting would help to counteract attacks that were coming from Richard Nixon who was suggesting that the Kennedy administration's approach to Berlin demonstrated the fundamental weakness of the administration.¹⁰⁹ Finally, Bundy had relayed to the President concerns that had arisen in a Berlin planning meeting (which he had had with Kissinger, Owen, and Carl Kaysen) concerning the possibility of a nuclear explosion during a crisis in Berlin. Specifically, Bundy warned Kennedy about a Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan that had been handed down by the Eisenhower administration:

[We agree that] the strategic war plan is dangerously rigid and, if continued without amendment, may leave you very little choice as to how you face the moment of thermonuclear truth. We believe that you may want to raise this question with Bob McNamara in order to

¹⁰⁷ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 6 July 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 7/1/61-7/6/61, Box 81, JFKL.

¹⁰⁸ Memoranda, Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research to McGeorge Bundy, 30 June 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 6/30/61, Box 81, JFKL.

¹⁰⁹ Memorandum, Henry Owen to McGeorge Bundy, 5 July 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 7/1/61-7/6/61, Box 81, JFKL.

prompt review and new orders if necessary. In essence, the current plan calls for shooting off everything we have in one shot and it is so constructed as to make any more flexible course very difficult.¹¹⁰

Planning for a confrontation in Berlin demanded thinking about the unthinkable; yet that could only be accomplished by establishing the proper ladder of escalation that would then afford the administration the flexibility it needed to do so.

As planning for a Berlin crisis continued during July, McGeorge Bundy remained at the center of the decision making process, often serving as a vital link between the President and other members of the advising team. He consistently relayed to Kennedy what the staff was thinking about and debating, and the team of advisors apparently realized the necessity of presenting individual perspectives to Bundy because they also were in constant consultation with him. Between July 10 and July 13, he had informed Defense Secretary McNamara of certain questions that Kennedy had concerning the possibility of conventional force mobilization in the event of a Berlin crisis and McNamara quickly responded with a Joint Chiefs of Staff memorandum.¹¹¹ On July 14 and July 15, Henry Kissinger submitted two memoranda to Bundy: the first emphasized the need to keep diplomatic channels open despite a supposed Acheson recommendation

¹¹⁰ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 7 July 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 7/7/61-7/12/61, Box 81, JFKL.

¹¹¹ Memoranda, McGeorge Bundy to the Secretary of Defense, 10 July 1961, Robert McNamara to McGeorge Bundy, 13 July 1961, and L.L. Lemnitzer [JCS Chairman] to the Secretary of Defense, 13 July 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 7/13/61, Box 81, JFKL.

against pre-crisis negotiations; the second argued against a build-up of reserve forces, which would also demand the declaration of a national emergency. Kissinger continued to stress "the need for a flexible response," meaning a conventional force buildup, but such a response should not come at the expense of diplomacy.¹¹² A memorandum from Arthur Schlesinger just a couple of days later seemed to reinforce Kissinger's point about the importance of diplomatic channels, particularly when one considered the crisis from the adversary's perspective:

In our planning on Berlin, should not explicit attention be given to the problem of providing an escape hatch for Khrushchev? We must not shove him against a closed door; we must figure out a way by which he can back down from the more extreme implications of his present course without inviting an an unacceptably large political humiliation. Our plans should therefore include a sketch as to how we think Khrushchev is going to get out of the hole he has dug for himself.¹¹³

Bundy also continued to present Kennedy with memoranda of discussions of NSC meetings, the interdepartmental coordinating group's meetings, as well as the meetings of a special steering group on the Berlin situation, whose membership was comprised of Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, Douglas Dillon, Robert Kennedy, Allen Dulles, Edward Murrow, General Lemnitzer, General Taylor, and

¹¹² Henry Kissinger to McGeorge Bundy, 14 July 1961, NSF: CO: Berlin: General, Box 81; Henry Kissinger to McGeorge Bundy, 15 July 1961, NSF: D&A: DoD Vol. II, June-July 1961, Box 273, JFKL.

¹¹³ Memorandum, Arthur Schlesinger to McGeorge Bundy, 18 July 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 7/18/61, Box 81, JFKL.

Bundy.¹¹⁴ Collecting and disseminating a variety of perspectives would remain the cornerstone of this decision making process.

Moreover, McGeorge Bundy performed the same, subtle form of "advising" the President that was discussed earlier in this chapter. For example, in a 19 July 1961 memorandum to Kennedy concerning that afternoon's Berlin steering group meeting and a NSC meeting, Bundy directed Kennedy toward particular memos and clearly summarized the agendas for those meetings. He warned the President about a State Department conclusion "that there [would] not be a strong allied response to requests for parallel action" in terms of military alternatives. He also urged Kennedy to review an attached memorandum from Maxwell Taylor, concerning military aspects of the crisis, as well as one from Theodore Sorensen, concerning standby controls and taxes.¹¹⁵ While one may not see anything unusual about Bundy's actions in this particular case, they do again clearly illustrate the powerful form of advising that Bundy successfully implemented and the crucial role that he played in Kennedy's policy making circle.

¹¹⁴ For example: Memorandum of Meeting on Berlin, 17 July 1961, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 17 July 1961, NSF: M&M: Meetings with the President, 7/61-8/61, Box 317; Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 24 July 1961, NSF: M&M: NSC Meetings, 1961, Meeting 487, Box 313; Memoranda, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 19 July 1961 and 25 July 1961, NSF: M&M: NSC Meetings, 1961, Meeting 488, Box 313; National Security Action Memorandum 62 (Berlin): NSF: M&M: NSAM 62, Box 330; Minutes of Meeting of Inter-Departmental Coordinating Group on Berlin, 26 July 1961, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 31 July 1961 and Unsigned Record of Meeting of the President, the Secretary of State, and Mr. Owen, 3 August 1961, NSF: M&M: Meetings with the President, 7/61-8/61, Box 317, JFKL.

¹¹⁵ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 19 July 1961, NSF: M&M: NSC Meetings, 1961, Meeting 488, Box 313, JFKL.

Furthermore, he explained to the President that while the Secretary of State had submitted a talking paper on the political aspects of the crisis, the Secretary's view on several important questions was not addressed and, therefore, the President would probably want to raise those questions directly with the Secretary.¹¹⁶ As far as the subsequent NSC meeting was concerned, Bundy told Kennedy that he would prepare an agenda based on what occurred at the steering group meeting, although he did present a preliminary list of issues that he thought would probably be considered, such as: the level of military buildup, the national emergency declaration question, the upcoming presidential speech, the possibility of economic sanctions, and possible political actions. This was not to say that some other issues were not important or needed consideration; yet, Bundy offered simple direction in that regard:

Some other matters which we are concerned with can be discussed at a slower tempo and should probably be explicitly deferred. Among these are the military operations plan in the event that access is blocked, the Defense Department's recommendations for a long-run defense build-up, [and] details of the civil defense program. This is probably the most important NSC meeting we have had, and there is no reason why it cannot be continued tomorrow if you wish.¹¹⁷

Very simply, Bundy had once again set the stage for the decision making process.

The preparation of Kennedy's 25 July 1961 speech to the nation on the Berlin crisis provided yet another vehicle for McGeorge Bundy to influence the development of national security policy, particularly the *public presentation* of that

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

policy. In a July 22 memorandum to Theodore Sorensen, who was primarily responsible for drafting the President's speech, Bundy forwarded several items--with effective commentary--that he thought would be "useful background material" for the speech.¹¹⁸ First, he directed Sorensen to what he considered to be "the most significant," a cable from American Ambassador to the Soviet Union Llewellyn Thompson, in which Thompson apparently urged that the United States take the lead in any negotiations process. Bundy suggested to Sorensen that the President need not present a specific negotiating position in the speech; instead, all that had to be stated was that the U.S. intent on beginning fruitful negotiations.¹¹⁹ He then urged Sorensen to review two memoranda from Henry Kissinger, in which Kissinger apparently underscored Thompson's position and stressed "the difference between merely stating a position and framing a workable process of communications." In doing so it would become clear that "[o]ur policy is to seek serious understanding without giving away the rights of free men." Yet, Kissinger had also continued to emphasize the importance of a balanced, conventional and nuclear force buildup so that a threat actually to use force would be credible.¹²⁰

Bundy also directed Sorensen's attention to "a useful outline" that Henry Owen had prepared, even though Sorensen was probably already familiar with its

¹¹⁸ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to Theodore Sorensen, 22 July 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 7/19/61-7/22/61, Box 81, JFKL.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

substance, because he thought "[would] be helpful because of [Owen's] unusually full grasp of what we really have and have not done so far. He enclosed as well "an interesting possibility...from a bright Soviet expert named John Keppel," who was a member of Roger Hilsman's Intelligence and Research division at the State Department.¹²¹ He told Sorensen that he asked the State Department for other supplementary material that would be useful. This accounted for a paper from the Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, Foy Kohler, which Bundy admitted to not having read; nonetheless, he suggested that it probably contained material of which Sorensen was already aware.

Yet, Bundy did alert Sorensen to "some very thoughtful stuff" in the first four pages of an enclosure from Harlan Cleveland, the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, concerning a discussion of Berlin and the United Nations.¹²² Specifically, Cleveland argued that military preparations and political negotiations should not be viewed as *conflicting* alternatives; instead, he stressed the importance of including both as part of a *single* policy:

If you make significant military preparations (necessarily public in our political system), you equally need to negotiate to demonstrate that you are not spoiling for a war. In fact if you do not start the negotiations [until after a buildup, as Acheson was advocating], you will be dragged into talks by the pressure of that very widespread and influential opinion which comes to bear on any Power that presumes to prepare for war without being willing to talk at convincing length every step of the way toward war....The presence of military moves in the [foreign policy] package does not make it "an unconditional surrender policy" or an "all-or-nothing" policy.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

Participation in boring, interminable talks does not make the diplomats soft on Communism. Both are parts of a national security policy. In isolation from each other, neither talking nor military preparations constitute a policy at all.¹²³

Cleveland's perspective obviously reinforced that of Thompson, Kissinger, as well as others in the administration, and, thus, its inclusion was hardly surprising.

McGeorge Bundy, again, did not have to present a persuasive argument himself in this instance; his emphasis on three different presentations--each stressing the same theme--made his own perspective abundantly clear. Bundy also reconfirmed with Sorensen their apparent agreement about the basic objective of the speech: it was a prime opportunity for Kennedy to provide detailed information about the administration's approach to the Berlin situation; yet, such a presentation would also serve to reassure the American public and reinforce the prestige of the American presidency and the United States in general. He concluded that "the President will do well in a quite literal sense to speak softly while he described his new big stick."¹²⁴ Bundy, of course, was referring to the development and implementation of a credible, flexible response, which was the Kennedy administration's approach to American national security.

Kennedy's 25 July 1961 speech to the nation concerning the crisis in Berlin did, in fact, incorporate much of what had been discussed and debated by McGeorge Bundy, his staff, the interdepartmental coordinating group, the NSC,

¹²³ Memorandum, Harlan Cleveland to the Secretary [of State Dean Rusk], Berlin and the United Nations, 18 July 1961, NSF: CO: Germany: Berlin: General, 7/18/61, Box 81, JFKL.

¹²⁴ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to Theodore Sorensen, 22 July 1961.

and the President in the months leading up to that summer's crisis. What is particularly noteworthy, however, is the extent to which Bundy's July 22 recommendations were also included. Kennedy did stress the overriding American commitment to maintaining free access rights to Berlin, and said that the United States "must be prepared to defend those rights and those commitments."¹²⁵ Yet, that defense would consist of both negotiations and military force, precisely for the reasons that Thompson, Kissinger, and especially Cleveland had outlined previously:

We will at all times be ready to talk, if talk will help. But we must also be ready to resist with force, if force is used upon us. Either alone would fail. Together, they can serve the cause of freedom and peace.¹²⁶

Kennedy explained that the military force buildup that he was proposing in direct response to the situation in Berlin was actually part of long-term reformulation of national defense strategy that the administration had initiated upon taking office. The restructuring was designed "to meet a world-wide threat...which stretches far beyond the present Berlin crisis." Furthermore, he emphasized that "[o]ur primary purpose is neither propaganda nor provocation--but preparation."¹²⁷ That kind of preparation would allow the United States to respond to adversarial aggression at any place or time and at the appropriate level because of the flexibility in the American defense structure.

¹²⁵ Kennedy, "Report to the Nation on Berlin," p. 927.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Specifically, Kennedy requested \$3.2 billion in supplemental defense appropriations for an immediate conventional force buildup. That request would parallel the approximately \$2 billion that he had requested in March 1961 for a major enhancement in strategic nuclear forces.¹²⁸ Kennedy provided explicit details about the improvements in the conventional force structure, including: major increases in Army, Navy, and Air Force active duty strength; the mobilization of National Guardmen and reservists; the activation of National Guard divisions, ready reserve units, and Navy and Air Force air squadrons; and, major allocations for conventional weapons, ammunition, and equipment. Approximately \$207.6 million of the supplemental defense budget would also be set aside for the Administration's civil defense program.¹²⁹ Again, the perspective of Bundy, Kissinger, Owen (among others) concerning conventional force preparedness was readily apparent, as was Bundy's and Sorensen's conclusion that the speech needed to "be full of information" so that "the American people...[would] know where they are and why" in terms of American national security.¹³⁰

As was suggested above, Kennedy maintained that a military force buildup would not come at the expense of diplomacy and negotiations. In a rather lengthy

¹²⁸ See Congressional Quarterly, "Congress Increases Kennedy Defense Budget," in Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1961 (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1961), pp. 142-47, for a good summary of these supplemental budget requests.

¹²⁹ Kennedy, "Report to the Nation On Berlin," p. 927-8.

¹³⁰ Memorandum, McGeorge Bundy to Theodore Sorensen, 22 July 1961.

section of the speech, which immediately followed the military force discussion, Kennedy laid out the American position concerning a possible negotiated settlement for the predicament in Berlin and Germany. One is again reminded of the perspective that Bundy chose to forward to Sorensen a few days earlier:

[I] must emphasize again that the choice is not merely between atomic holocaust and surrender. Our peace-time military posture is traditionally defensive; but our diplomatic posture need not be. Our response to the Berlin crisis will not be merely military or negative. It will be more than merely standing firm. For we do not intend to leave it to others to choose and monopolize the forum and framework of discussion. We so not intend to abandon our duty to mankind to seek a peaceful solution. As signers of the UN Charter, we shall always be prepared to discuss international problems with any and all nations that are willing to talk--and listen--with reason....While we are ready to defend our interests, we shall also be ready to search for peace--in quiet exploratory talks--in formal or informal meetings. We do not want military considerations to dominate the thinking of either East or West....And Mr. Khrushchev may find that [other nations will invite him] to join the community of peaceful men, in abandoning the use of force, and in respecting the sanctity of agreements.¹³¹

Despite intense pressure from some advisors, such as Dean Acheson, to forego negotiations with Khrushchev until after a decisive military response, Kennedy formally recognized the importance of simultaneous American leadership in diplomatic channels. Llewellyn Thompson's advice, as relayed through McGeorge Bundy and Theodore Sorensen, had been embraced.

This flurry of activity--meetings, memoranda, questions, discussion, debate--continued for the first two weeks of August, and the same emphasis was placed on maintaining the proper balance between a military response and the possibility for

¹³¹ Kennedy, "Report to the Nation on Berlin," p. 928.

a negotiated settlement. Yet, no threat of nuclear reprisal, nor promise or actual mobilization of conventional force, nor willingness to exercise diplomatic leadership could stop the construction of the Berlin Wall, which began on 13 August 1961. The wall's erection not only was the culmination of that summer's crisis in Berlin; it essentially marked the end of the crisis as well. This physical division between East and West Berlin would continue for twenty-eight years, and it would serve as a primary symbol of the Cold War division between the United States and the Soviet Union. Only with the collapse of the Soviet political structure in 1989 would that symbol disappear as well.

In all that McGeorge Bundy did in the planning and preparations for this crisis (and, in a broader sense, the formulation of a flexible response), there never was any indication on his part--or anyone else's, for that matter--that such a Soviet response was anticipated or even being contemplated by the Soviets. Moreover, there seemingly was little that Bundy or anyone else in the Administration--including the President himself--could have advised or actually done to deter the building of the wall. There were few guarantees in this particular decision making process, as was the case in all the processes that surrounded the formulation of the flexible response, except that some decision would be made and subsequently be implemented. There was no absolute guarantee that any particular aspect of the new strategy would necessarily be effective or successful, although proponents always presented their best case scenerio. This realization does not, however, deter presidential advisors, such as McGeorge Bundy, from using a wide variety

of, and often extremely subtle, methods to influence a particular decision making process. That process sometimes seems as important, and at times more important, than the actual policy itself. In that light, the development of flexible response is no different than the development of any national security policy.

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion: A Critical Reassessment

The underlying presumption of this dissertation is that because states continue to be preeminent in the international system, one must therefore consider three subsequent, crucial factors in order to understand fully how states approach systemic problems and what solutions they choose to promote. Those critical elements--the national interest, national leadership, and the national decision making process--have been studied individually within the context of a case study: the development of American nuclear strategy and national defense policy during the Kennedy administration. This approach to nuclear strategy is better known as flexible response, and this study has featured many of the intricacies of flexible response as well.

One should take from this examination a much better understanding about how flexible response was supposed to protect a certain perception of American sovereignty and legitimacy, who was in charge of its development and definition, and who was held accountable by the American public, and of how certain individuals and numerous other political factors and events greatly influenced the various decisions that led to flexible response's implementation. More importantly, it should be quite apparent that interpreting the national interest in context is necessarily contentious--at the very least, that the boundaries of leadership and followership in terms of national policy are not necessarily neatly drawn, and that how national decisions are made is often as important as what

those decisions may actually be. Yet, while the individual studies of the national interest, of national leadership, and of national decision making have been illuminating, and such studies have allowed the details of flexible response to be unearthed, the picture could be even clearer and more powerful, particularly if these three concepts were examined as one. Moreover, the problems and possible inadequacies of flexible response could also be highlighted more effectively if these concepts were meshed together.

It is abundantly clear from the very beginning of this study forward that national leadership is precisely about understanding, defining, and implementing the national interest in context. Yet, there may be several individuals or groups that are trying to establish or maintain a leadership position, and thus competing definitions of the national interest may emerge at the same time. Various individuals, each with different experiences and perspectives, and the actual circumstances of the international system as a whole also contribute to this competition precisely because they affect why the national interest is defined in a certain way. Additionally, different groups use varied means and processes to promote their version of the national interest and to establish their leadership positions (Congressional hearings and debates, party publications, presidential rhetoric and press conferences, to name just a few). As a result, implementing the national interest in context almost automatically demands being able to sell one's position effectively.

In terms of the flexible response, this sales process began in the 1950s, and, thus, the struggle for national leadership in national security affairs did as well. The fear of communism in any of its nationalistic forms, the fear of potential Soviet expansionism, and major Soviet military developments and advancements--especially the Sputnik launching--naturally precipitated questions about American nuclear and defense preparedness. These questions, in turn, placed American defense policy at the forefront of national policy debates. Yet, national defense policy--or any national policy, for that matter--is not developed and implemented in a political vacuum. Representative democracy, which is comprised of a system of checks and balances and of a sharing and blending of Constitutional powers and jurisdictional boundaries, ensures that nearly all national policy making will be a slow, deliberate, and oftentimes political, process. As a result, flexible response, which was initially developed in theoretical and academic circles, was embraced by several national groups to serve very parochial and political purposes as well.

It is hardly surprising that Army personnel, such as Lt. General James Gavin and General Maxwell Taylor, were among the first in the American military establishment to press for changes in President Eisenhower's approach to national defense, the "New Look," which emphasized massive retaliation combined with fiscal conservatism. After all, the Army had suffered severe budget cuts under Eisenhower's "New Look," particularly in its conventional capability; both Gavin and Taylor argued that American security interests, therefore, could not be

adequately protected and that American national security overall was in jeopardy. Gavin specifically advanced allegations of a missile gap in his 1958 book, War and Peace in the Space Age, and Taylor actually introduced flexible response formally to the public in The Uncertain Trumpet in 1960. While the Army was not alone in its criticism, it is important to keep in mind that especially its conventional force programs as well as its industrial contractors would benefit far greater under a flexible response strategy than under massive retaliation.

The better part of the 1950s was marked by divided party government: the Republicans controlled the White House from 1952 until 1960, and the Democrats controlled Congress (with the exception of the Republican-controlled House from 1956-58). Quite naturally, Congressional Democrats seized any opportunity to counter the Republican White House, particularly when it was politically expedient to do so or when circumstances allowed them opportunities to promote to the American public their version of what was in the American national interest. This especially was the case with national defense policy. In fact, the Congressional Democrats had independent reports, namely the Gaither Committee Report and the Rockefeller Brothers Report, to substantiate their claims that Eisenhower defense policies were not effective in protecting American national security. In addition, the Democratic Congressional leadership effectively used the branch's constitutional powers, such as its appropriations responsibility, to frame its criticism of Eisenhower's national security policy.

A prime example of the Congressional Democrats' approach was the plethora of late 1950s hearings and investigations concerning American defense preparedness that followed the Soviet Sputnik launching, and the subsequent condemnation of White House defense policies that flowed from these debates--all under the auspices of appropriating funds for national defense purposes. It is interesting to see that several Senate Democrats who were prominent in those debates, such as Lyndon Johnson, Stuart Symington, and John Kennedy, eventually ran for their party's presidential candidacy in 1960; furthermore, they also used a confusing intelligence data situation to their advantage in order to bolster their arguments. Moreover, all of this occurred in the name of protecting the national interest and ensuring American power and prestige in the international system. The political game was as important in this case as any altruistic interpretation of what was in the national interest.

However, there was not even consensus among the Democrats themselves. In fact, the Democratic National Party formed its own "presidential wing"--the Democratic Advisory Council (DAC)--even prior to Sputnik to serve as a counterforce to the Republican White House and to counteract Congressional conservatives who were stymieing a more progressive and liberal policy agenda. The national party's overall goal was to articulate to the American public, on a day-to-day basis, the Democratic perspective on prominent domestic and foreign policy themes and issues of the day; thus, the foundation would be laid on which it could regain the White House in the 1960 election. A series of reports and

pamphlets were published on numerous national issues to advertise the party's version of what was in the national interest.

The DAC did participate in the national debate about American national security, particularly after the Sputnik launching, that culminated in the DAC's publication of "The Military Forces We Need and How to Get Them"--the party's official policy pamphlet on national defense that would, in turn, serve as the foundation for the party's 1960 platform position on national security. Its 1960 platform essentially embraced a flexible response strategy as the primary means for securing American power and prestige in the international system. Again, the national party's goal was purely political: to establish its leadership position on national defense in order to win a presidential election. Yet, to do so demanded effectively defining and selling its interpretation of the national interest.

The Republicans, however, were not totally exempt from the political games that surrounded nuclear strategy and national security policy in the 1950s. Admittedly, the Republicans--and President Eisenhower in particular--were in a difficult position because secret U-2 intelligence data proved that the American defense position vis-a-vis the Soviet Union was far stronger than many were arguing. That information, however, necessarily was unavailable for public consumption because of the national security concerns that surrounded the U-2 program. Soviet military developments had, however, precipitated public questions and fears about American power and prestige in the international system. Furthermore, Eisenhower administration defense policies had seemingly

been ineffective in addressing adversarial aggression in several areas in the 1950s, such as Indochina, Hungary, the Suez, Berlin, and Laos. Not surprisingly, other elected public officials could not just ignore those concerns.

On several instances, nonetheless, Eisenhower used his political position and his professional background to chide Democrats who had legitimate questions about American national security and who were trying to address the concerns of the American public in that regard. Moreover, the Republican Party tried to use Eisenhower's leadership reputation to bolster Richard Nixon's presidential campaign chances in 1960. Yet, disorganization and disagreement within the Eisenhower administration itself, as well as instances of political ineptitude, had actually helped to fuel the public and Congressional debates about American national security. The Administration and the Republican Party tried to cover those mistakes with an exceptionally positive picture of American defense, which was very difficult to sell especially in light of a confusing intelligence data situation. Furthermore, they used harsh political rhetoric to try to delegitimize the Democrats' leadership ability. After all, the politics of a national presidential election absolutely demanded that such measures be taken. Yes, Eisenhower knew the right answer to the national security controversy; yet selling the Republican version of what was in the national interest was just as important precisely because the political stakes were so high.

It did not seem to make any difference to either national party if its political actions helped to exacerbate the fear within the American public

concerning national defense. Yet establishing one's national leadership position in the United States necessarily entails articulating and selling one's definition of the national interest within the context of a highly charged, politically driven national elections process. This is, therefore, exactly what political parties and political candidates had to do with regard to nuclear strategy and national defense policy in the 1950s and during the 1960 presidential campaign.

While being elected to national public office, particularly to the presidency, provides the foundation for establishing national leadership, it does not necessarily mean that one actually is able to lead or that the competition for leadership ever stops. In fact, as this study has shown, John F. Kennedy had a far simpler time defining the national interest within the context of a national campaign than he did refining and trying to implement his perspective once he was elected to the presidency. Why is that the case, one may ask? The answer to this question is quite simple, at least in theory. Leadership of a political campaign differs from leadership and governance as a national political office holder because while both positions demand the effective marketing of one's definition of the national interest, the latter also entails the actual implementation of one's campaign rhetoric. To do so necessarily demands adept leadership of a complex and multifaceted national policy making process. The office holder's responsibilities are extensive and the pressure in terms of accountability to the American public is great; they are virtually nonexistent for the presidential campaigner. President John F. Kennedy came to office in January 1961 having

sold the American public on his leadership capability and on the need to revise American national defense according to his interpretation of the national interest. Yet, that was only the beginning of what he would have to do.

Once in office, Kennedy was compelled to follow through on campaign promises to develop and implement a flexible response strategy so as to preserve American power, prestige, sovereignty, and legitimacy in the international system. Just as there is a difference between campaigning for the presidency and actually governing in that capacity, so too is there a significant deviation between organizing and building a policy making structure and then using that structure effectively to implement one's political ideas successfully. Once again, the intricacies of defining the national interest, of exercising national leadership, and of managing a decision making process are readily apparent--and are all very much operating together. Yet, policy implementation necessarily demands a forceful sales person to manage and negotiate among the various actors and parochial interests of the broader national and international political arena. This is no less the case for Kennedy's flexible response strategy than it is for other national public policies.

Organizing and structuring the national security policy process in the Kennedy administration was a priority even prior to Inauguration Day, 1961. By mid-September 1960, political scientist and special advisor, Richard E. Neustadt, had submitted to Kennedy an extensive memorandum on organizing the transition period to ensure that an effective policy making structure was in place upon the

president's taking office. Neustadt's report stressed the importance of choosing the proper staff members and advisors, of addressing the proper issues and problems, and of using task forces to study particular policy areas. In fact, there were two subsequent defense-related task forces during the transition, and both stressed the importance of strong presidential leadership and efficient management of the national defense system. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that John Kennedy extended an extraordinary amount of responsibility to his secretary of defense, Robert McNamara, and that McNamara was immediately ordered to conduct a thorough investigation of the entire defense establishment. This, in turn, resulted in McNamara's reorganization of the Defense Department, of the defense budgetary system, and of the redistribution and reallocation of national defense funds. These actions were taken under the guise of ensuring the implementation of Kennedy's interpretation of the national interest, the flexible response strategy.

Building a flexible response demanded that certain nuclear, conventional, unconventional, and non-military options be developed so that the United States could respond to any adversarial aggression at any place, at any time, and on any level. A crucial means that was used by Robert McNamara and Budget Director David Bell for evaluating national defense was systems analysis, which in very basic terms meant that costs and benefits of specific defense programs and policies were weighed quantitatively to determine how defense funds would be allocated. Soviet military developments necessitated that the Kennedy

administration place immediate emphasis on new, state-of-the-art strategic nuclear forces, particularly intercontinental ballistic missile systems. As international tensions mounted in 1961 and as the administration recognized the possibility of a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union, efforts were made to develop an effective civil defense program, in order to quell public fear of the effects of a possible nuclear exchange. The crisis in Berlin during the summer of 1961 served as a backdrop for a major buildup in U.S. conventional forces, and the ever-expanding use of guerrilla warfare, especially in Southeast Asia, demanded that American limited and guerrilla warfare capabilities be strengthened as well. Two FY 1962 supplemental defense budgets and the FY 1963 defense budget reflected the Administration's position that these types of programs would help to achieve a flexible response, which would, in turn, protect the sovereignty and legitimacy of the United States.

It was Kennedy, as the President of the United States, who ultimately would be held accountable by the American public for the national defense strategy that was developed by his administration. After all, special messages and budget requests to Congress for defense purposes, as well as speeches to the public on national security, came directly from him and bore his name. He was responsible for choosing his advisors and directing them to take certain actions with regard to the development of national defense policy. Yet, it is also interesting to note that the Administration's defense policy also became known as the "McNamara Strategy." This very simply and quite clearly indicates the

powerful role that McNamara played in designing, implementing, and selling the flexible response during the course of the Administration. Yet, the Administration did pay a price because of the extent of McNamara's involvement, particularly in terms of the contention that was precipitated by McNamara's management of the defense establishment and his handling of the defense budgeting process.

McNamara's heavy reliance on systems analysis and on his young civilian advisors in the department--the Whiz Kids--came at the expense of the military's professional expertise, which had been a prominent ingredient in national defense planning during previous administrations. Very simply, McNamara and his staff alienated many in the military, such as Air Force Generals Thomas White and Curtis LeMay, precisely because of the arrogance that permeated McNamara's Defense Department and particularly his civilian staff. This negative perception of the civilian-directed defense organization made it that much more difficult for McNamara and Kennedy to reallocate and redistribute defense funds in order to implement a flexible response. The reallocation of budgetary funds under the most favorable circumstances is often a difficult marketing process; political and parochial interests naturally rear their ugly heads when some programs are supported and others necessarily lose financial resources. Furthermore, there may be fundamental differences about how the national interest should be defined and implemented in context. McNamara and Kennedy were in an even worse predicament when they reduced and then impounded funds for the B-70/RS-70

intercontinental strategic bomber program, not only because it was a pet project of the Air Force, or that there were competing versions of the national interest, but because the military-civilian conflict in the Pentagon was so profound.

The B-70/RS-70 case also clearly demonstrates that presidential leadership cannot necessarily be presumed or easily established, even if an administration's marketing capacity is extensive, as it certainly was in the Kennedy administration with Robert McNamara's as secretary of defense. One must remember that McNamara effectively sold to Congress a major portion of the flexible response, particularly in the Administration's first year. Problems arose, however, when Carl Vinson and the House Armed Services Committee perceived that the Administration was ignoring or too arrogant to see their Constitutional responsibilities in national security affairs. The Armed Services Committee's interpretation of the national interest also did not necessarily concur with that of the Administration; moreover, the Committee feared constituent backlash should national defense policies fail. Further, it was appalled that military experience and expertise seemingly had been so easily pushed aside by relatively inexperienced, young civilians. Not surprisingly, therefore, Carl Vinson's Armed Service Committee refused to be relegated to a followership position.

Establishing leadership and implementing the national interest in the international arena is much more difficult than in the domestic sphere, particularly when it comes to national security affairs. The most fundamental element of a state's sovereignty is being able to defend its national interest

militarily; rarely is a state willing to relinquish that right--or responsibility--to another, even to one's most trusted ally. While the Kennedy administration understood from the beginning that the NATO alliance and its European members would be crucial factors in American defense policy, it was naive and arrogant in assuming that they, too, would be quiet followers of Kennedy's interpretation of American interests--as well as European interests--in the international sphere. In many respects, Administration marketing techniques would prove to be inadequate as well.

Flexible response demanded that major improvements be made both in nuclear as well as conventional force capability; yet, the financial stress of such a strategy was also apparent. As far as the NATO alliance was concerned, the Administration's presumption was that the United States would continue to be responsible for the nuclear umbrella, and thus maintain control over the NATO nuclear force, while the Europeans would be encouraged to pick up the slack in terms of NATO's conventional force structure. Such an approach would help relieve American balance of payment problems that were a result of the large U. S. conventional commitment to NATO; another corollary was that individual national nuclear force would be unnecessary. The Europeans, however, considered flexible response to be a misinterpretation of their national interests and a reflection of the lack of American commitment to the defense of Europe. Therefore, particularly the French and the British refused to accept wholeheartedly American leadership in this case.

American nuclear strategy would have undermined French President Charles de Gaulle's foreign policy, which emphasized independence, flexibility, and the restoration of French glory; its centerpiece was the French force de frappe. According to de Gaulle, a national nuclear force was a fundamental element of the French national interest precisely because of the power, prestige, and influence that it would afford France in the international system. Moreover, it absolutely would be pursued despite the enormous expense and the lack of any American support; there was little that Kennedy could say or do that would change that fact. Furthermore, de Gaulle was furious at the American promotion of Great Britain as the leader of the West Europeans, which again flew in the face of de Gaulle's approach to West European affairs. While Charles de Gaulle was not the easiest international leader with whom to work, the Kennedy administration also never seemed to grasp fully the French perspective, or many of its specific aspects. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that French-American relations during the Kennedy administration were difficult and often sour. American insensitivity to--and, perhaps, disregard of--the French national interest was at the heart of French unwillingness to follow the United States' lead in international security affairs at this point.

The British, too, shared the French perspective on the importance of developing national nuclear forces as well as their skepticism of the United States' commitment to European defense. The British acquisition of a nuclear force, like French efforts, had been severely hampered by the 1946 MacMahon Act, under

which the United States forbade sharing its information on nuclear production. This had been a sharp blow to Anglo-American relations, particularly because British scientists had been active participants in the Manhattan Project; the British would, in turn, be forced to carry the entire economic burden of its own nuclear project. In fact, British economic constraints deemed that the British conventional force structure be kept at its most efficient and absolutely bare minimum.

American efforts to repair this bilateral relationship, particularly after the 1956 Suez debacle, resulted in an amendment to the MacMahon Act; that change eventually led to the British purchase of the American Skybolt air-to-surface ballistic missile system in 1959. Skybolt missiles would be launched from the British V-bombers, and thus became the fundamental component of the British national nuclear deterrent. When the Skybolt program was eliminated from the Administration's FY 1964 budget proposal in late 1962, as a result of Robert McNamara's cost-benefit analysis, another Anglo-American crisis naturally ensued. Not only did the British nuclear force hinge on Skybolt, but the stability of the Macmillan government as well.

The British had virtually ignored Kennedy administration pronouncements that the Europeans should provide a larger portion of NATO's conventional forces and that American nuclear power rendered other national nuclear forces unnecessary. The seemingly insensitive way in which the announcement of Skybolt's cancellation was initially handled (a press leak actually revealed the decision to the British government) was yet another reflection of American

indifference to the interests of its allies. The Macmillan government, in turn, refused to accept the Kennedy administration's decision in a calm, subservient manner; American leadership was essentially dismissed. While McNamara did presume that an alternative could be negotiated with the British in due course, Macmillan made it clear that an alternative would need to be negotiated immediately.

The Nassau agreement that Kennedy and Macmillan negotiated in December 1962 resolved this specific crisis. A similar settlement was offered to de Gaulle and the French, but it was refused. While Anglo-American relations improved as a result of the Nassau accords, French-American relations remained a trying obstacle for Kennedy national security policy. A simple yet fundamental assessment can be drawn from these two instances, however. That the American national interest, as opposed to either French or British interests, took precedence in the Kennedy administration's efforts to implement certain elements of the flexible response is hardly surprising. What is remarkable about these cases is that the Kennedy administration seemingly approached alliance relations as it did relations with the military or Congress, and this was a mistake.

It presumed that its interpretation of the national interest would ensure both American national security as well as European security. Therefore, everyone else, including the British and French, should follow its lead in terms of the implementation of flexible response, despite any adverse effects. The Administration failed to comprehend fully the serious consternation that certain

aspects of flexible response would cause for both the French and British, or that, as a result, neither could nor would readily accept American leadership in this case. After all, national nuclear forces were not simply favorite projects of a particular branch of the American military; instead, they were military programs that were critical to the power, prestige, and security of other national governments. Not even the best marketing and public relations skills--which the Administration did not necessarily have either--would have altered those basic facts.

As was suggested above, flexible response was not designed and implemented in a political vacuum; in fact, numerous political actors and circumstances affected the policy process. The Kennedy administration tried to devise an effective policy making organization so to manage the various perspectives and interests in other areas of the national government as well as on the international front. Maintaining control of, and thus leading, the process was crucial to flexible response's implementation. Yet, managing the broader domestic and international spectrum was not the only matter of concern for the Administration. The organization and policy making structure within the White House itself also had to be controlled.

Because the day-to-day paperwork of the national policy making process is so extensive, it is clear that a president cannot review every piece of information on any given issue--and that certainly was the case for flexible response.

Therefore, deciding who should have access to John Kennedy and what materials

and arguments should be presented to him concerning defense-related issues or problems were crucial steps in the policy making process. Moreover, the people who made those decisions also were furnished with a unique and powerful avenue for influencing the President, and thus the definition and implementation of flexible response as well. The prominent role that McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy's special advisor for national security, and his staff played in this regard leaves one wondering whether Kennedy was actually leading his staff or whether his staff was leading him. The implications of the latter are profound, particularly when one considers the issue of responsibility and accountability of national leaders in the American political system.

McGeorge Bundy, like many members of the Kennedy administration, brought to his job a certain perspective on national defense as well as a keen understanding of how to exert his influence, and thus fulfill his job responsibilities. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Budget Director David Bell, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and even members of Congress were far more direct in expressing their positions to the President. McNamara, in particular, was incredibly persuasive in his presentations to the President, although he did not win every battle, such as his attempt to cut some conventional forces from the FY 1963 defense budget. Bundy, on the other hand, employed much more subtle means to affect the policy making process that surrounded flexible response.

McGeorge Bundy was responsible for directing particular memoranda--on everything from the defense budget to Berlin crisis planning to various meeting

agenda and summaries--to Kennedy's attention, often with poignant and telling commentary. He used the speech writing process to ensure that the right perspective was expressed publicly and, thus, that the policy hopefully was sold effectively. He also advised the President when the White House policy making organization had gone awry, and he used his office location in the basement of the White House to his advantage. Immediate and direct access to the President clearly was a crucial element in determining the extent of his influence on Kennedy. For example, Bundy and his small staff were particularly influential in planning for a possible American-Soviet confrontation in Berlin, which served as the impetus for decisions concerning many elements of the flexible response strategy. Yet one must question whether McGeorge Bundy's approach necessarily served Kennedy, the Administration, or even the American public well.

Bundy's promotion of certain memoranda, as well as his personal commentary, virtually guaranteed that the President's decision making process and the selling of the President's program were often controlled by the subjectivity of particular non-elected staff members. Other viewpoints and avenues of advice within the Administration were necessarily closed off. Many things had to go through Bundy first if they were to have any chance of reaching the President at all. This may be a fairly typical picture of the process of presidential advising in general. Nonetheless, one would think that on an issue pertaining to the definition of the national interest, such as national security policy, that the president would clearly be the dominant figure and that the broadest range of

perspectives would be made available to him, precisely because of the serious implications of that issue. This was not, however, the approach that Bundy took on numerous decisions concerning the definition and implementation of the flexible response.

In all fairness to McGeorge Bundy, he did what John Kennedy seemingly expected him to do. Kennedy's decision making structure and organization, like any such process in either the public or private sphere, was a direct reflection of the person for whom it was created. If McGeorge Bundy detected a disorganized, chaotic, or possibly ad hoc decision making process, it was a reflection of Kennedy's style, not of his own. One must still ask, however, whether Bundy's approach was what the American public anticipated when it elected a new administration into office in 1960, even if it ultimately would hold the President accountable for such policies as flexible response. In other words, did the average American voter expect that John Kennedy would be the leader, or the follower, within his own administration? Even an educated guess would probably rest with the former and not the latter. One, therefore, might be frustrated with the extent of McGeorge Bundy's influence as well as that of others, such as Robert McNamara.

John F. Kennedy was elected to the Presidency in 1960 because he had convinced a majority of the American electorate that he was capable of leading the United States--and, thus, understanding, defining, and implementing the American national interest in context. In terms of American defense policy,

Kennedy maintained that the national interest demanded that a flexible response be achieved so as to protect American sovereignty and legitimacy and to ensure American power and prestige in the international system. What is abundantly clear from this study is that numerous actors as well as other political factors and international circumstances affected dramatically how Kennedy's interpretation of the national interest was actually defined and implemented during his administration. Yet, despite this knowledge, it is still difficult to determine the success or failure of his vision or even of his leadership.

The Kennedy administration struggled on several occasions in budgeting for its national defense strategy, failed to keep the Berlin Wall from being built, and suffered from serious setbacks with major allies. Its management of the political process that necessarily surrounded the flexible response was at times naive, shortsighted, inept, and arrogant. Its policy making structure and organization seemed to be at some points chaotic and ad hoc at best--a clear reflection of the President himself. While the now famous Executive Committee (ExCom), which was responsible for handling the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962, was not examined specifically in this particular study, it would, nonetheless, be considered the exception and not the rule. Moreover, the continuation of the Kennedy's flexible response strategy during the Johnson administration failed miserably in Vietnam. All of these factors would naturally cause one to condemn Kennedy's leadership, particularly in hindsight, and to question his very interpretation of the national interest as well.

If, however, one puts oneself in the shoes of people of the time, damnation might not be so outright. Yes, all of the actors that were involved in developing the flexible response during the Kennedy administration clearly failed at points. Yet, would anyone else have been any more successful, particularly if one considers the other political factors, circumstances, and events--domestically and internationally--that in many respects literally drove the process and the policy makers themselves? Defining and implementing the national interest is extraordinarily difficult in theory, let alone in practice. It demands leading a process as well as marketing a policy effectively at every turn. While there may be some presidential administrations that did one or the other--or both--more effectively than the Kennedy administration, there are some that have done much worse. None, however, have escaped such a process without any conflict at all, and that is more a reflection of the very nature of the task than anything else. Perhaps only time and history will determine more clearly how the Kennedy administration should be judged in this regard.

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