

This is part II of an oral history interview with Mr. Robert S. McNamara, held in Washington, D.C., on May 22, 1986, at 4:00 p.m. Representing the OSD Historical Office are Drs. Roger Trask and Maurice Matloff.

Matloff: Mr. McNamara, at the end of our meeting on April 3, we had spoken about your perception of the threat facing the United States. We would like now to move on to discuss the role you played as Secretary of Defense in connection with strategic planning, with ways of meeting the threat. How did you view your role in this area, and what was your attitude toward nuclear weapons, both strategic and tactical—their buildup, their use, and control? How did you see your role and your contributions in this field?

McNamara: You will recall that one of the issues of the presidential campaign in 1960 was the alleged missile gap. One of my first acts after assuming the responsibilities of Secretary of Defense on January 20, 1961, was to determine the extent of the gap, since I believed that I should act immediately to close it. Mr. Gilpatric, my Deputy, and I, during the first three or four weeks in office spent a substantial percentage of our time viewing the evidence on which the gap estimate had been made. We learned that in 1960 there were at least two different intelligence estimates relating to the balance of the strategic nuclear forces in the U.S. and the Soviet Union. One of the estimates was prepared by the A-2 in the Air Force, and it indicated that the Soviets had a number of missile warheads greater than that possessed by the United States. Apparently a copy of that intelligence estimate had been leaked to members of the Congress, and that was the basis on which the campaign charges were made. We learned,

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however, that another intelligence estimate, prepared by the CIA, came to a different conclusion. After reviewing all of the evidence, we were convinced that the CIA's estimate was more correct than that of the Air Force. If a gap existed in strategic nuclear weapons, it was a gap in favor of the United States. I mention this incident because from the beginning of my term in office I felt a responsibility to determine the appropriate level of nuclear weapons for U.S. forces. Many of the men whom I recruited for senior positions in the Department, for example, Messrs. Nitze, Hitch, Enthoven, Rowen, and later Harold Brown, were experts or had had substantial association with studies in the field of nuclear strategy, and I drew upon their expertise to examine the nuclear strategy that the U.S. had followed in past years and to consider whether changes in that strategy were desirable. On the basis of those strategic studies, we then developed the appropriate force structures. Because the risks to our population of confrontation between the super powers in the nuclear age were much greater than in prior years and not well understood by the public, we made a special effort to acquaint both the Congress and the public with the results of our studies, to the extent that could be done without a serious violation of classification.

Matloff: Your administration is usually known for its changeover in strategic concept from massive retaliation to flexible response. What led you to become a strong advocate of flexible response?

McNamara: I think the massive retaliation strategy, whether it had ever been applicable or not, was bankrupt by January 1961, because by that

time the Soviets had a sufficient number of nuclear weapons deliverable upon the United States, following a strike by the U.S. on Soviet nuclear forces, to inflict unacceptable damage on us. Hence the assumption on which the massive retaliation strategy had been premised was no longer applicable.

Matloff: How about the backdrop of your espousing the counterforce doctrine, particularly the speeches both in Athens and Ann Arbor?

McNamara: Yes, particularly Ann Arbor. It was not intended as a shift to a counterforce doctrine, but rather a statement of policy which we hoped would influence the Soviets, were we and they ever to be involved in a nuclear exchange, to limit severely the initial launches of nuclear weapons in the hope that we would avoid destruction of our societies.

Matloff: To quote from your speech, ". . . principal military objectives, in the event of a nuclear war stemming from a major attack on the Alliance, should be the destruction of the enemy's military forces, not of his civilian population." You also went on to call for more non-nuclear capability of the European allies.

McNamara: That's correct. That was part of the proposal to shift to flexible response, which was the main subject of both the Ann Arbor speech and the Athens statement.

Matloff: I think that you also went on to oppose the weak national nuclear forces that some of the European powers were espousing as being costly and of questionable effectiveness.

McNamara: And also dangerous.

Matloff: Were you disappointed in the European reaction to those speeches?

McNamara: The Europeans were reluctant to shift from massive retaliation to flexible response, believing that it might increase the cost of the conventional forces or reduce the likely use of nuclear forces, which they considered to be the main deterrent to Soviet aggression, whether it be conventional or nuclear. I thought then that they were wrong, and, with hindsight, I think they were even more wrong than I thought at the time.

Matloff: After the Ann Arbor speech, did you tend to deemphasize the no-cities approach?

McNamara: I think people looking at that speech totally misjudged the main thrust of it, which was to put forward the shift from massive retaliation to flexible response. A secondary purpose was to take account of what existed for a very short period of time—a very large numerical advantage to the U.S. in strategic nuclear warheads. As I recall the figures—these are approximately correct, I think—we had on the order of 5,000 strategic nuclear warheads and the Soviets had on the order of 300. The 300 were large enough that if they unleashed them all massively at our cities, either before or after we struck them, it would be a devastating blow to our society. We recognized the possibility of one side or the other initiating the use of nuclear weapons, and recognized that whether the Soviets launched first or second, if they launched at our cities the blow would be devastating. We therefore wanted to suggest to the Soviets that, in the event of a nuclear exchange, we each direct our weapons at the other's military targets, thereby minimizing the damage to our civilian

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populations. I think, with hindsight, it was perhaps even a questionable doctrine then, although it was an indication of the recognition that we had of the great danger to civilian populations in a nuclear war and of the efforts we were making to reduce that danger. I never did believe in a counter-force strategy per se. What I was trying to suggest without labeling it as such was a damage-limiting strategy, premised on attacking military targets as opposed to population centers. It was only appropriate, I think, if it ever was appropriate, to that limited period when they had so few weapons *relative to ours*. ✓

Matloff: You brought a number of the Rand theorists into the government. How closely were you in contact not only with them, but also with the theorists who were still at Rand?

McNamara: My recollection is that when I came into the Department in January 1961, the Air Force had contracts with Rand under which Rand carried out studies paid for by the government, but the Air Force contracts prohibited Rand from delivering copies of those studies to any group other than the Air Force. I very quickly stopped that, because I was very definitely interested in the Rand studies and insisted that my office have access to those. We made great use of them.

Matloff: Had you done much studying of strategic theory before you became Secretary of Defense?

McNamara: No, I was quite inexperienced in strategic theory. I had served as an officer in the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II, in the bomber commands--initially the 8th Air Force, later the 58th Bomb

Wing, and then the 20th Air Force—and I had some experience in evaluating what air bombardment could and couldn't accomplish, but in terms of studying nuclear strategy, no, I was not at all familiar with it. However, as I suggested, since the election campaign in 1960 had in part been fought on the nuclear strategy, I considered it my first order of business to become familiar with it. It quickly became apparent to me that the risks associated with the strategy that had been followed by NATO up to that time were, I thought, quite unacceptable. They were not well understood, and when one understood them, I thought they were quite unacceptable.

Matloff: You remind me of Lincoln and Stanton during the Civil War reading up on strategy.

McNamara: That's exactly what I did. I just wrote an acknowledgement page in the book I'm writing, and in that I listed the names of all these people that I brought into the Department. I stated that they "tutored me" in how to understand the nuclear age and its implications for the strategy and risks to our people.

Matloff: Which theorists's writings particularly impressed you during this era?

McNamara: Certainly the ones I named a moment ago—Hitch, Enthoven, Rowen, Nitze, Brown—but there were a number of others as well.

Matloff: Did you agree with Brodie's notion that strategy had hit a dead end in the nuclear age?

McNamara: No, I don't recall that, but in any case I don't agree with it.

Matloff: Would you agree with Kissinger's, Osgood's, and Kaufmann's concepts of limited war?

McNamara: I don't recall exactly what Kissinger had written prior to that time, but my recollection is that he himself has changed about 180 degrees. So I don't know which concept we would be talking about, and I don't recall Bill Kaufmann's concept of limited war. I very quickly came to the conclusion that limited war wasn't possible. The Ann Arbor speech was designed not to fight a limited war per se, but rather to limit damage if we ever bungled into a nuclear war, which seemed to me to be possible, and very dangerous.

Matloff: Are you speaking about limited war with nuclear weapons, and also without?

McNamara: Normally the term limited war referred to limited nuclear war.

Matloff: That would have been Kissinger's notion. Kaufmann didn't go along with that, but rather the notion of limited war without nuclear weapons.

McNamara: I don't know what he would mean by limited war.

Matloff: How about in connection with the Presidents, did you find that both Kennedy and Johnson followed military strategy closely?

McNamara: They certainly weren't experts at military strategy. Partly as a result of the studies we presented to them, they became quite concerned about the risks that our society was facing in the nuclear age because of the strategy followed by NATO, where the strategy of massive retaliation would have led to very early use of nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union, almost immediately following any Soviet aggression, however slight.

Recognizing the number of nuclear weapons the Soviets had at the time, such an action by NATO would have led to totally unacceptable damage on the U.S. and its allies. It was that point which we made very clear to each of the Presidents shortly after he took office, and it was that which led to the proposal to change the strategy from massive retaliation to flexible response. I don't want to suggest that our studies were the first indication they ever had that unacceptable damage would be inflicted upon our nation by the application of our strategy. I don't recall how much either one of them knew about NATO strategy prior to the time he became President. I suspect not very much, because at that time there had been very little public discussion of the effects of applying NATO strategy or of a nuclear exchange. My recollection is that President Eisenhower had appointed a group of four 4-star officers, which I believe was known as the Net Evaluation Subcommittee. Only they had studied a dynamic exchange and evaluated the effect of such an exchange on our society, and the results of their analysis were so catastrophic and horrifying that only one copy of their report had ever been prepared and it had not been made available other than to the President. Having heard of that, when I came in as Secretary I insisted on obtaining a copy. The report was just what it had been portrayed to be—a horrifying evaluation of the effect of the nuclear exchange which would result from application of our existent strategy. What we concluded was that we should: a) change the strategy; and b) educate the public as to the effects of an exchange by, in effect, making available the conclusions of a report so highly classified that only one copy had been prepared.

In a very real sense, we introduced an equivalent analysis into the unclassified portion of my posture statement, and it was therefore published.

Matloff: Historians, of course, are going to be asking and trying to analyze what your strategic legacy was during your period of 7 years in the department. I came across two statements, which you may be familiar with—one is Bill Kaufmann's statement in his book The McNamara Strategy, in which he said that you brought about two major revolutions within the department. One was redesigning the military strategy and forces of the United States, and the other, installing a new method of decision-making within the Pentagon. In another, by Lawrence Freedman, who was part of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, writing in his book The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy, which came out in 1981, he stated, "Under McNamara the focal point for innovation in strategic concepts shifted back to the Pentagon (though to the civilian rather than the military officers), and away from the universities and institutes." Would you go along with those judgments?

McNamara: In general, I think so. As I state in this little book I have written (^{Blundering} "~~Blundering~~ Into Disaster"), and as I stated in an article published in Foreign Affairs, I had concluded that under no circumstances could we—NATO and the U.S.—benefit from initiating the use of nuclear weapons. Therefore I had recommended to each of the two Presidents that they never, under any circumstances, initiate the use of nuclear weapons. I recognized then, and I recognize now, that that was contrary to the proposed NATO strategy of flexible response. The proposed change from massive retaliation to flexible response was put forward in May of 1962 at Athens, and I don't

think it was accepted until some time in 1967. In the intervening years, in a sense, we were bound by the strategy of massive retaliation. But both massive retaliation and flexible response contemplated the initiation and the use of nuclear weapons by NATO in response to a Soviet/Warsaw Pact conventional attack under certain circumstances. In the case of flexible response, the nuclear threshold was to be raised very substantially. It was proposed to be raised to the point where there was very little likelihood that NATO would ever initiate the use of nuclear weapons. However, I went further than that in my discussions with the Presidents. Having examined the detailed plans for NATO initiating the use of nuclear weapons and the probable Soviet response, given the fact that they then had weapons they could respond with, I could see no circumstances under which it would be to NATO's advantage to initiate such use. I therefore recommended against it. I mention this because it is an illustration of how far we were going in our thinking to change the nuclear strategy. Our thinking went further in the direction of changing the nuclear strategy than the official proposals to NATO, which in turn were not accepted by NATO for some five years after they were put forward.

Matloff: In your book on The Essence of Security you wrote, "Every hour of every day the Secretary [of Defense] is confronted by a conflict between the national interest and the parochial interests of particular industries, individual services or local areas." How serious a problem was interservice rivalry for you?

McNamara: It was serious in the sense that unless the Secretary of Defense exerted control and direction over the decisions made by the services, the

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individual services would act in ways that were contrary to the national interest; not because they wished to subvert the national interest, but rather because in many cases they weren't in a position to be sensitive to or fully informed of the national interest or how their specific actions would relate to it. It was because of that and because the organization of the Joint Chiefs and the Joint Staff did not provide adequately for overruling or adding to the perception of the individual services that I set up such a strong component in the Office of the Secretary of Defense to assist me perform that function. I think that the law that is being put forward now that would strengthen substantially the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs is simply a recognition of the problem to which I am referring. Without a change in the law, I felt I could deal with it, and I think I did in the '60s, by strengthening the organization of the Secretary and by never hesitating to overrule the individual service secretaries and/or Chiefs of the services, or, for that matter, never hesitating to overrule the recommendations of the Joint Chiefs, if I felt that they were insufficiently taking account of the national interest as opposed to the service interest.

Matloff: Was anything done about mitigating the competition itself?

McNamara: You could mitigate the competition by strengthening the role of the Chairman, which I tried to do by appointing strong chairmen and by backing them and letting them know that I expected them to overrule services that they felt were acting contrary to the national interest and pursuing a service interest. The Chairman faced difficulties because frequently the Joint Staff wasn't equipped to probe as deeply as I would

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have liked to have seen them probe into individual service proposals and the Chairman was also handicapped because by tradition the Chiefs tended to support one another when pursuing a service interest. To give you an illustration of that, I was absolutely amazed by the behavior of the Chiefs in November of 1966 when we reviewed, with the President, the budget which was to go to the Congress the following January. The meeting, held in Austin, Texas, was attended by the five Chiefs plus Cy Vance, my Deputy, and Walt Rostow, the National Security Adviser. At the time one of the major issues was whether we should or should not recommend an anti-ballistic missile system to the Congress. The Congress had already authorized and appropriated funds for it, which we had refused to spend. I thought then, and I feel just as strongly now, that such a system would be a total waste of money. There was absolutely no question that if we went ahead with it, the Soviets would counter it either with countermeasures or an expansion of the offensive force. I was certain that if they went ahead with the system they had already started to deploy that we could penetrate it. I knew for sure that at least some of the Chiefs shared my view that there was no anti-ballistic missile system that the Soviets then had in prospect that we couldn't penetrate. There was every reason to believe that the Soviets would be equally capable of penetrating any system we deployed. Yet, when the President asked the individual Chiefs for their recommendation whether or not to proceed with the U.S. ABM system, the Air Force Chief and the Navy Chief, each of whom had weapons that he knew could penetrate the Soviet system and each of whom had every reason to believe the Soviets

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had weapons that could penetrate our system, nonetheless went along and supported the Army Chief in recommending an ABM system. This is just to illustrate that it was traditional for the Chiefs, under certain circumstances, not to take exception to recommendations of an individual service.

One further point on this conflict among the services or pursuit of individual service interests. I mentioned the way in which that was reflected in their recommendations on the ABM. But to understand how deep-seated the tradition was, you had to recognize that there was a lack of standardization throughout the Department. It extended into such things as individual service specifications for butchers' smocks, women's bloomers, and belt buckles. I mention this because if you can't get together on such a thing as a belt buckle or a butcher's smock, it's very unlikely you're going to get together and overrule one another or have a Chairman overrule on such fundamentals of the force structure as ABM systems.

Matloff: How serious a problem were the parochial interests of particular industries and local areas?

McNamara: There were very great pressures, but I didn't consider them serious problems. I had the full backing of the President to overrule the Chiefs or the industries in order to advance the national interest. I'll give you two illustrations of that. The Congress had authorized and appropriated funds for the B-70 bomber. But the President and I considered it was an unnecessary weapon and its production would waste billions of dollars. At the time we canceled the program there were

more than 40,000 people in 24 states working on the project. There was tremendous pressure from the congressional representatives of those states, corporate executives, and the labor unions to proceed with the weapon. But we canceled it nonetheless. The same thing was true of most weapon systems that we canceled—Skybolt is another illustration I could use. Lockheed was the manufacturer of the Skybolt missile. Lockheed put ads in Time Magazine boasting of the capabilities of the weapon and did everything it could to generate pressure to overrule us. But we held to our judgment and the weapon was canceled.

Matloff: On the subject of budget, could you summarize why you felt that changes were needed in the system?

McNamara: Because the system had many defects, one of the most important of which was that it did not extend the budgetary process over the period covered by the lead time of the decisions. If one were making a decision in 1961 to authorize the development and production of a new weapon system, the action following the decision might extend over a period of 5 to 8 years, but the budget would show only the first year's financial impact. It seemed to me that we should extend the budgeting process through the lead time of the decision so that one could see the full financial impact. We picked a rather arbitrary period of five years for that purpose, so we immediately extended the budgeting or financial planning period to cover a period of five years, as opposed to one year. There was tremendous opposition to that move. Many people said, for example, that we should not inform the Congress of the full financial impact of the decisions—to do so would reduce congressional

support for the action. That's exactly why I felt we should inform them, so they could see the full financial effect of the action. A host of other changes were made in the budget process. They were all designed to permit a greater understanding of the financial impact of the decisions that were being made, and a greater understanding of the financial impact of alternative decisions so one could choose more intelligently among alternatives and among options.

Matloff: Were you satisfied with Defense's share of the budget in both the Kennedy and the Johnson administrations?

McNamara: Yes. I never felt any limitation on money. It's hard to realize, but at that time the pressure from the Congress was to spend more.

Matloff: How about the constraints, was there any impact of domestic restraints in the Johnson period on the defense budget formulation?

McNamara: No. The reverse, in a sense, was the case. There was one very critical point at which we felt that to pursue a program recommended for Vietnam would result in very large additional expenditures, above those contemplated in the previously approved federal budget. We felt that if the decision were made to pursue the particular course of action associated with Vietnam, in recognition of the added budgetary expenditures taxes should be raised. I so recommended to the President. He accepted the recommendations relating to Vietnam, but he ruled against the recommended tax increase. He did so because he said that it wouldn't pass the Congress and that, rather than raise taxes, the Congress would cut back the Great Society.

Matloff: Do you recall what year that was?

McNamara: I believe it would have been the summer or fall of 1965.

Matloff: You've written in the same volume I quoted before, The Essence of Security, that the "uniqueness [of thermonuclear power] lies in the fact that it is at the same time an all-powerful weapon and a very inadequate weapon." Do you recall what you had in mind? I think you were thinking about the political leverage, or lack of it.

McNamara: I think that by the term "inadequate" I meant that I couldn't conceive of how to use a nuclear weapon militarily (other than to deter one's opponent's use). I never saw a plan that showed how we would benefit if we initiated the use of a nuclear warhead. There was no way that we could conceive of limiting the destruction to our society to an acceptable level following initial use of nuclear weapons. There was no such plan then, and I don't believe there's any such plan today. In this little book I've written I said that no human mind has ever conceived of such a plan. I have made that statement in the last year or two in the presence of senior civilian and military authorities and no one has ever taken exception to that.

Matloff: You mentioned that your administration had a number of controversies over weapons and weapon systems. ABM was one; TFX-111, B-70, nuclear carriers were others. Was there any aspect of your positions on those weapons that you would like to talk about or expand on?

McNamara: I think we won on every controversy we engaged in, in the sense that our decision was upheld by the Congress or the President. I think on every one of those not only were we right, but the controversy

ultimately led to action in the national interest, except possibly with respect to the TFX. In that case I think we were right in principle. The services should have agreed upon a single aircraft to perform their bombing operations. That was entirely possible, and would have been very much in the interest of the nation. As evidence, I submit the fact that the Air Force was able to use the fighter, the F-4, that had been designed specifically for the Navy. If they could do that, each service, the Navy and the Air Force, should have been able to use a plane that took account of the other's needs at the time of design. In the case of the F-4—the Air Force, as I remember, had a plane called the F-110, which for a variety of reasons didn't appear to me to be optimal. Therefore, over the objections of the Air Force, we canceled production of the F-110 and required the Air Force to adopt the F-4, the Navy aircraft. The Chief of Staff of the Air Force, LeMay, was very much opposed to it. After it was done, the Commanding General, Tactical Air Command, I believe it was Sweeney, was absolutely ecstatic about the F-4. The Air Force used it for 10 or 15 years thereafter and was very pleased with it. I mention this to say, with hindsight, that I believe that we were absolutely right in pursuing commonality of aircraft. However, because of the way in which the TFX was handled by the services, we did not achieve commonality and we fought a bloody battle that took a tremendous amount of time and effort.

Matloff: On the ABM, is it true in late 1967 you did decide to go forward with a thin ABM deployment, the "Chinese-oriented system?"

McNamara: What had happened was that Congress had passed legislation authorizing and appropriating funds for an extensive ABM system, which, it was believed, would develop into a "thick" system. There was tremendous pressure within and outside the Department to go ahead with the thick system. To avoid that, after having made a speech in San Francisco stating that there was no rationale whatsoever for any ABM system, we nonetheless proposed going ahead with the thin system, or so-called "Chinese-oriented system."

Matloff: Your administration also became involved in plans for reorganizing the reserves and merging the reserves with the National Guard. Why did you want to merge them?

McNamara: Because they were "hollow." Both the Guard divisions and the reserve divisions were understaffed, underequipped, and undertrained. We were spending a lot of money and not buying usable power for it. So we proposed to reorganize them, merge them together, and reduce the total number of paper divisions and replace them with divisions that had some combat potential. My recollection is that we were going to eliminate 20 to 30 divisions; I've forgotten exactly the number. I guess most of them were National Guard; I'm not absolutely sure of that. In any case, there were 20 to 30 of these reserve and Guard divisions that were going to be eliminated. All hell broke loose, because the Guard divisions that were going to be eliminated were the playthings of the governors and their adjutants-general and there was tremendous political pressure for us to change our recommendations. President Johnson said, "Bob, there's going to be a meeting of 50

governors in Hershey, Pennsylvania, and you'd better get yourself up there and convince them that there's merit in your proposal to eliminate the Guard divisions. There is tremendous opposition and it's going to be very difficult to proceed in the face of that." I went up to Hershey—I'll never forget it. There were 50 governors present, but not one single governor supported the elimination of these Guard divisions, including such rational, responsible, strong individuals as Nelson Rockefeller. Every one was opposed, but we went right ahead and did it anyhow. We eliminated the divisions.

Matloff: While we're talking about the reserves, may I jump ahead to the area problems? In connection with the crisis in Berlin in '61 and '62 and later on in Vietnam, did you favor the calling up of the reserves?

McNamara: Very much so, in both cases. In the case of Berlin, I favored calling up the reserves for two reasons: (1) we needed to make clear to the Soviets our determination and will to apply force if necessary to prevent them from taking over West Berlin, which was their objective, and (2) if we were going to apply force, we needed to have that additional force available. In the case of Vietnam, I felt we should call up the reserves for both reasons. I so recommended to the President. He did not believe it wise to do so and therefore we didn't.

Matloff: Did he ever give reasons why?

McNamara: Yes, his reason, an objective that I strongly supported, was to avoid war hysteria, or fueling the fires of emotion in the nation. We did everything we could during those years to avoid development of national pressures and feelings that might lead to the application of

power in ways that were contrary to our national interest—for example, in ways that would draw China and/or Russia into the war. With hindsight, I think that was a well chosen policy; however, I think it is one of the policies to which historians should give most attention. There is certainly a lot of controversy today about whether we failed to unleash the military and therefore lost the Vietnamese War. I think we were wise not to unleash our power. I don't believe that we could have changed the result of the war in Indochina, and the escalation of the conflict might well have triggered a confrontation with the Chinese and/or the Soviets.

Matloff: On this point historians have a lot of trouble trying to find the President on the record on this question of not calling up the reserves.

McNamara: You can't find him on the record because I submitted a draft memorandum (one of the reasons I called my memoranda to the Presidents drafts was so that I could submit the recommendation and if they didn't choose to follow it, I could withdraw it, and there would be no way that the press or anybody else could drive a wedge between the President and me). After all, I had no independent power base. Many of the people today don't seem to understand that. Presidential appointees aren't elected; this is not a parliamentary system. As a minister of government, I had power only to the extent that the President appointed me and delegated me the power. Many in our government today operate as though they were independently elected, and members of a parliamentary system. They will take to the press their recommendations to the President,

when he disagrees with them and overrules them. I did not believe that was proper then; I don't believe it is proper today. To avoid that circumstance ever developing, I labeled my memoranda drafts. In the seven years I was Secretary, I don't think there were two memoranda from which either President failed to accept the recommendations. I can think of one, the one referring to this subject of calling up the reserves. In the same memo, I had recommended both an increase in taxes and calling up the reserves.

Matloff: Historians will appreciate this information very much, I can assure you. Let's turn now to some of the area problems and crises. Was it your impression that the European allies were pulling their weight in NATO, or did you feel that the problem of burden sharing needed more looking into?

McNamara: We always engaged in discussions with Europeans, Germans in particular, about contributing more. Their economy was advancing rapidly. We had a balance of payments problem at the time; we pressured the Germans to purchase more from us and reduce the net foreign exchange costs of our operations in Germany. I mention that as an illustration of the fact that we were constantly involved in burden-sharing discussions.

Matloff: This is a period when the principle of the MLF came up. Did you agree with the principle, and with Norstad's view?

McNamara: I don't remember what Norstad's views were, but there was a basic political problem for which the MLF was put forward as a solution. I didn't believe that it was a very satisfactory solution, but I did recognize the problem. If the Europeans were willing to

accept the MLF as the solution to the problem, then I was willing to support the MLF, and I did so on that limited basis. It turned out the Europeans weren't willing to support it, and therefore we withdrew it. But the problem existed, and we ultimately came forward with another solution which I will mention in a moment. The problem was that the Europeans felt that we were secretive in our nuclear strategy. We had put thousands of nuclear warheads on their soil; NATO had officially adopted a nuclear strategy; we had war plans and tactics to carry out that strategy; but we had refused to disclose to the Europeans the numbers of warheads, the characteristics of the warheads, and the tactics and the war plans under which they would be applied. Our allies were, in effect, totally ignorant of our plans for utilizing nuclear weapons in defense of Europe. For two decades we had withheld all such information from the Europeans. At that time there was no intention to change the policy, so those who favored the MLF did so because it was a means of introducing the allies into a limited participation in nuclear strategy in support of the alliance. That failed. Then, after discussion with John McNaughton, my Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, I proposed to the president that we reverse our policy completely and fully inform the Europeans on all aspects of nuclear weapons and strategy. That led to the formation of the Nuclear Planning Group.

Matloff: Were you disturbed by the role of DeGaulle in this period, particularly his departure from military integration in 1967?

McNamara: I surely was. I thought that it was contrary to the interests of the alliance and quite irresponsible for France to: (a) force us out

of France (our logistical bases were on French soil for only one reason, and that was to support NATO and its defense of Western Europe); and (b) withdraw French forces from the NATO military command.

Matloff: Did you favor the Harmel Report, in 1967, the one that talked about NATO being used as an instrument of negotiation with the other side, the forerunner to the whole notion of detente? How did you view the future of NATO, particularly the American military role in it? Did you see it, or any part of it, as permanent?

McNamara: I don't know that I ever really examined the question of whether the role was permanent or not, but I certainly felt that it would extend over a substantial period. I didn't think it was likely to end in three, five, or seven years. I didn't think so then, and I don't think so today.

Matloff: Some have argued that when he originally proposed the military commitment, Eisenhower never viewed it as a permanent American military commitment. As for major crises, what role did you play in the Bay of Pigs affair, right at the start of the Kennedy administration?

McNamara: I was in the room at the White House when Kennedy asked all his advisers what their views were as to whether we should or shouldn't proceed with the Bay of Pigs. Because it was a CIA operation and not a Defense Department operation, the Department personnel were not experts with respect to the operation. And those of us who had just come in to the government 60-some days before were inexperienced in that or any other kind of military operation. Nonetheless, I deeply regret that at that time I didn't recommend against it. There wasn't a single member

of the administration who recommended, when Kennedy went around the room, that he not proceed with the operation. There were some of us—Dean Rusk was probably one and I was certainly one—who were less than enthusiastic about it, but we didn't recommend against it. The only person in the room who recommended against it was Bill Fulbright, not a member of the administration.

Matloff: What was the role of the JCS in this? Some of the members, one in particular I know of, raised questions whether its views were really sought, or whether it was adequately informed.

McNamara: The JCS were as well informed as anybody, outside of CIA. They were deeply involved, their people were deeply involved in the planning of it, military officers were on secondment to the CIA, and the Joint Staff and the Chiefs were fully informed. There were Chiefs in the room, certainly their representatives were in the room, on the occasion I mentioned, and their opinion was asked. They said, just as I, that they didn't recommend against it. There is no reason for anybody to try to weasel out of that. We were all there. After it was over, Kennedy, with great courage and political perception, assumed full responsibility for the debacle on national TV. After he did that, I went over to him and said, "Mr. President, I know where I was when you asked for the opinions of your advisers. I was in the room and I didn't recommend against the operation; I was wrong. I know very well what happened and I am fully prepared to say that publicly." He said, "Bob, I'm grateful to you for your willingness to assume some responsibility, but I was President, I didn't have to do what all of you recommended.

I did it, and therefore I assume full responsibility." My point simply is there is no use trying to walk away from that one. Every one of us was there, including the Chiefs.

Matloff: How about the decision to call off the air strike?

McNamara: That's another point. I am hazy on all of the details of this now, and therefore I don't want to get into it. In the first place, the operational responsibility was not ours, and secondly, my memory is not clear on the details. My recollection is that the President's decision to authorize the CIA to move ahead with the operation was with the qualification that they would not call upon or receive additional military support beyond that which was part of their initial plan. Then, my recollection is, they went ahead; certain events occurred that had not been anticipated; they felt the need for additional military support, and there was some feeling in the military that they should be provided that support, but the President ruled against it. Finally, with hindsight, it was said, and I think absolutely incorrectly, that had such additional air support been provided, the operation would have been a success. I don't believe it.

Matloff: There's at least one former Chairman who believes that had the air operation been pulled off it might have made a difference, and has said that the JCS were not informed when the decision was made to cancel the air strike.

McNamara: I don't think that the air strike was ever authorized.

Trask: When did you first become aware of this Bay of Pigs operation, or when was it contemplated? Was that right after you came into office?

McNamara: I don't recall, but what was the date of it--April, '61? My point is that it was less than 90 days after we came in and I was worried about the missile gap, and a hundred other things. I don't know when I heard about it.

Trask: Do you recall any discussion about this before that day of decision?

McNamara: There was some discussion, but not a great deal. It was a CIA operation. We were not deeply involved. It was becoming quite a political problem. My recollection of it was more as a political problem rather than an operational problem. It was alleged that these Cubans had been led to believe that a decision had been made in the Eisenhower administration to support them in their desire to free Cuba. They had been sent to Central America to train for that purpose, and were ready to go. They believed the Kennedy administration was reversing a decision that had been made. I'm pretty clear that Eisenhower hadn't made a decision to authorize the landing, but others had thought so. The Free Cubans were then threatening to demonstrate in the streets of Miami against this Communist administration which was withholding them from freeing their country. So there was that kind of a problem. But that doesn't justify the approval of it. It was a foolhardy venture. It is a good illustration of the foolhardiness of combining the intelligence function with the operating function. So many times I found that intelligence estimates that came from the unit that was associated with operations were tainted--not consciously, but just tainted by the biases that we all have in evaluating our own operations.

Matloff: That answers the question I have about conclusions or lessons for national security policy, planning, and operations drawn from that operation.

McNamara: Yes, separate intelligence collection and evaluation from operations. Recognize that military operations can achieve certain objectives, but not others. Liberating people and governments is not likely to be achieved by military operations in circumstances such as existed in Cuba or Vietnam or Nicaragua.

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Erratum:

McNamara's book
is entitled Blundering
Into Disaster.