The Skybolt Missile Cancellation: An Analysis of Foreign Policy Decision Making in the Kennedy Executive

by

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HISTORY

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THE SKYBOLT MISSILE CANCELLATION: AN ANALYSIS OF FOREIGN POLICY DECISION MAKING IN THE KENNEDY EXECUTIVE

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Committee Chair: Dr. Burton I. Kaufman

(ABSTRACT)

In December 1962 the Kennedy administration canceled the Skybolt missile program. Skybolt was an air launched ballistic missile being developed by the United States for use by both the US Air Force and the British Royal Air Force. Its abrupt cancellation caused a short “crisis” in Anglo-American relations. The Tory government of Harold Macmillan accused the Kennedy administration of canceling Skybolt to force an end to their independent nuclear deterrent. The American government countered that the decision was based solely on technical and financial grounds.

This thesis expands on the questions addressed by previous authors of why Skybolt was canceled and why its cancellation became a “crisis.” The present author maintains that the cancellation resulted primarily because of changing military policy instituted by the Kennedy administration and because of heightened disarmament efforts. It is also argued that the mechanics of decision making within the Kennedy executive contributed to the crisis atmosphere.
Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my gratitude and sincere appreciation to Dr. Burton I. Kaufman. As both a professor and committee chair, Dr. Kaufman guided and promoted my development as a student of History. I would also like to offer my thanks to the other members of my committee, Dr. Ronald J. Nurse and Dr. J. Dean O’Donnell for their advice and guidance in the completion of this thesis.

I would also like to offer special thanks to my future wife, Maureen Walsh, for giving incessant encouragement and support to me to push forward with this project. She demonstrated tireless patience by listening for countless hours about a forgotten missile.

I would also like to thank my family for their support throughout my extended academic career. I would especially like to thank my mother, Loretta Webb, and father, Joseph D. Webb. Their love and principles provide the foundation from which I carry on.
The Skybolt Missile Cancellation: An Analysis of Foreign Policy Decision Making in the Kennedy Executive.

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Skybolt's Cast of Characters

Acheson, Dean  Secretary of State during the Truman administration and Chairman of the President Kennedy’s advisory Committee on NATO.


Alphand, Herve  French ambassador in the U.S.

Amery, Julian  British Minister of Aviation; Macmillan’s son-in-law.

Ball, George  Under Secretary of State.

Bell, David  Director, Bureau of the Budget, January 1961 - December 1962.

Bligh, Timothy  Macmillan’s Principal Private Secretary.


Bohlen, Charles  American Ambassador to France from September 1962.

Brown, George  Defense spokesman for the British Labour Party.

Brown, Harold  Director, Defense Research and Engineering, Department of Defense.

Bruce, David K. E.  American Ambassador to the United Kingdom.

Bundy, McGeorge  Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.

Cary, Michael  Acting Cabinet Secretary for Macmillan.

Charyk, Joseph V.  Under Secretary of the Air Force.

DeGaulle, Charles  President of France.

de Murville, Couve  French Foreign Minister.

DeZulueta, Philip  One of Macmillan’s Private Secretaries.

Dillon, Douglas C.  Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs July ’58 - June ’59; thereafter Under Secretary of State In the Kennedy Administration Dillon served as Treasury Secretary.

Dulles, John Foster  Secretary of State under Eisenhower until April 1959.

Eisenhower Dwight D.  34th President of the United States.

Enthoven, Alain  Charles Hitch’s deputy controller at the Pentagon.

Fessenden, Russell  Deputy Director, Office of European Regional Affairs, Bureau of European Affairs, Department of State, Sept. 58 - Sept. 60, thereafter Director.
Finletter, Thomas

Gaitskell, Hugh
A leading member of the British Labour Party.

Gates, Thomas
Last Secretary of Defense under Eisenhower, from December 1959 until January 1960.

Gavin, James
American ambassador to France from March 1961 until October 1962.

Gilpatric, Roswell
Deputy Secretary of Defense from January 24, 1961.

Grimmond, Jo
British Liberal Party leader.

Hawthorne, Will

Heath, Edward
British Lord Privy Seal.

Herter, Christian
Secretary of State after the death of Dulles.

Hilsman, Roger
Director of State Department Bureau of Intelligence.

Hitch, Charles
Controller of the Pentagon.

Hockaday, Arthur
Thorneycroft's private Secretary.

Holifield, Chet
Democratic Representative from California, Vice Chairman of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy.

Home, Lord Alexander
British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs until October 10, 1963, thereafter Prime Minister.

Johnson, U. Alexis
Deputy Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs from May 2, 1961.

Jones, David
General, USAF, in charge of Skybolt development.

Kaysen, Carl
President's Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs.

Keeny, Spurgeon
Member of National Security Council Staff from January 1961; White House adviser on Disarmament.

Kennedy, John F.
35th President of the United States.

Kennedy, Robert F.
Attorney General of the United States.

Kitchen, Jeffrey
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Political - Military Affairs from May 16, 1961.

Klein, David
Member of the National Security Council Staff from January 1961.
Kohler, Foy

Tyler's predecessor as Assistant Sec. of St. for European Affairs. Ambassador to the USSR thereafter. Also Asst. Secretary of State for European Affairs from Feb. 58 - Dec. 59.

Khrushchev, Nikita S.

Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers and First Secretary fo the Central Committee of the Communist Party or the Soviet Union.

Kuznetsov, Vasilay

First Deputy Soviet Foreign Minister.

Legere, Col. Laurence

McGeorge Bundy's Assistant in NSC. Assistant to the President's Military Representative.

LeMay, Curtis

General, USAF; Air Force Chief of Staff.

Lemnitzer, Lyman

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff until October 1962; thereafter Supreme Allied Commander, Europe.

Macmillan, Harold

Prime Minister of Great Britain.

McCloy, John J.

Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

McCona, John

Director of the CIA.

McNamara, Robert S.

Secretary of Defense.

Neustadt, Richard E.

Professor; Special adviser to President Kennedy.

Nitze, Paul


Norstad, Lauris

Supreme Allied Commander, Europe until October 1962.

Ormsby-Gore, David

British Ambassador to the United States from October 26, 1961.

Owen, Henry

Rostow's assistant in Policy Planning Council.

Rostow, Walt W.

Presidents Deputy Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, January 1961 until November 1961; Counselor and Chairman, Policy Planning Council, Department of State, from November 29, 1961.

Rowen, Henry (Harry)

One of Nitze's assistants in the ISA. He was a civilian out of RAND.

Rubel, John

Harold Brown's deputy assistant in Defense Research and Engineering.

Rusk, Dean

Secretary of State from January 1961 until January 1969.

Sandys, Duncan

British Commonwealth Secretary, former Defence Minister.

Schaetzel, Robert

Special Assistant to the UnderSecretary of State for Economic Affairs until September 1962; thereafter Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Atlantic Affairs.

Scott, Sir Robert

Permanent Under Secretary in British Defence Ministry.
Stikker, Dirk Secretary General of NATO.
Strauss, Franz Joseph German Defense Minister.
Symington, Stuart Senator from Missouri. First Secretary of the Air Force under Truman.
Taylor, Maxwell General, United States Army. Special advisor to JFK and Chairman of JCS after October 1, 1962.
Thorneycroft, Peter British Defence Minister from September 1962.
Tyler, William Assistant Secretary of State of European Affairs from September 1962.
Tuthill, John W. U.S. Representative to the European Communities from October 1962.
Watkinson, Harold British Defence Minister, October 1959 - September 1962.
Weiss, Seymour Special Assistant to the Secretary of State. Kitchen’s deputy in the Office of Politico Military Affairs.
White, Thomas D. General, USAF. Chief of Staff of the Air Force until June 30, 1961.
Wiesner, Jerome Presidents Special Assistant for Science and Technology and Director of the White House office of Science and Technology.
Wilson, Harold A leading member of the British Labour Party; British Prime Minister after Home.
Yarmolinsky, Adam Assistant to the Secretary of Defense.
York, Herbert Director of Defense Research and Engineering under Eisenhower.
Zuckerman, Sir Solly Britain’s Chief Scientific Adviser to the Minister of Defence.
"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 new cooperative ventures. Divided, there is little we can do--
-for we dare not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder."

- John F. Kennedy

Introduction

The abundant literature about the Kennedy Presidency contains divergent views on Kennedy’s foreign policy. Much of this literature pertains to the major crises of his administration (the Bay of Pigs, Berlin, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Vietnam), and Kennedy’s leadership has been largely evaluated on the handling of such events. Burton I. Kaufman, in “John F. Kennedy as World Leader: A Perspective on the Literature,” examines the historiography of Kennedy’s foreign policy and divides authors into three categories: apologists, revisionists, and those who suggest “a more complex figure whose personality embraced elements of both” apologists and revisionists. Kennedy apologists are responsible for the image of the Kennedy of Camelot, depicting Kennedy “as a leader of almost heroic dimensions: a consummate pragmatist with an ironic sense of detachment, more concerned with protecting and promoting the national interest than with questions of ideology, yet an agent of world wide social reform.” Kennedy apologists often explained the difficulties and crises faced by Kennedy as a result of a legacy of flawed policy left over from the Eisenhower administration.¹

Kennedy revisionists offer a contradictory depiction of Kennedy, seeing a “shallow, cynical, passionless, and vainglorious politician, a traditional cold warrior, a weak and vulnerable president, not always in control of his own foreign policy.” Some revisionists have accused Kennedy of attempting “to assert control over not only the

American global establishment, but also the course of events around the globe.”

The most recent literature, Kaufman writes, embraces “elements of both” apologists and revisionists, “but more of the latter than former.” The latest biography of the Kennedy Presidency, by Richard Reeves, President Kennedy: Profile of Power, which post-dates Kaufman’s study, takes a very critical look. Reeves finds Kennedy decisive, but adds that “he never made a decision until he had to, and then invariably he chose the most moderate of available options,” tending to always choose the minimum political risk. “His most consistent mistake in governing, as opposed to politics, was thinking that power could be hoarded for use at the right moment - but moments and conditions defied reason.” Reeves describes Kennedy as “a compartmentalized man with much to hide, comfortable with secrets and lies. He needed them because that was part of the stimulation: things were rarely what they seemed.”

The Skybolt missile program, a short lived strategic initiative that was canceled by Kennedy in late 1962, offers an excellent case study of how foreign policy was conducted during Kennedy’s Presidency. Skybolt was an air-to-surface ballistic missile, capable of carrying nuclear warheads, which would be launched from under the wings of manned strategic bombers. The missile was designed to fly one thousand miles from the point of launch to the point of impact utilizing a complex guidance system based on stellar navigation. Robert McNamara, Kennedy’s powerful Secretary of Defense, characterized Skybolt as “a highly complex system operating in a new environment.” The Air Force was “putting a ballistic missile on an airplane” exposing it to an “environment of vibration and temperature range that we have not experienced before in connection with our long range

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2 Ibid., 469; 451.
missiles.” In early 1960 the Eisenhower administration agreed to sell Skybolt to Great Britain if and when it became operational.

Skybolt makes an excellent case study for several reasons. First, the program spanned two administrations allowing for an evaluation of the “apologist” claim that Eisenhower’s policies were somehow responsible for the Kennedy administrations problems. Skybolt’s cancellation caused a short-lived political crisis between the United States and its staunchest ally. Some “apologists”, maintain that this crisis in Anglo-American relations was rooted in a basic flaw in Eisenhower’s defense policies.

Second, Skybolt illustrates problems associated with the implementation of “New Frontier” nuclear philosophy which differed greatly from that of Eisenhower’s “New Look.” The purpose of this analysis is not to compare, contrast or judge the two philosophies, but to offer an illustration as to why the Kennedy administration and a historical ally behaved as they did. Eisenhower promoted limited nuclear sharing with allies. Kennedy attempted to withhold nuclear weapons from allies, offering them instead symbolic roles in areas such as targeting decisions.

Third, the Skybolt episode was not a crisis in the classic sense. There was no threat of war, only of political repercussions. There was no need for a decision making structure conducive to crisis management. Therefore, Skybolt, as a case study, should provide a more normal view of foreign policy decision making. The crisis also prompted a special report, at the request of Kennedy, by Richard Neustadt, a Harvard Professor, and personal friend of the President. This report provides a rare look into how policy was generated and implemented during the Kennedy administration. In preparing his report, which was declassified in April of 1992, Neustadt accessed documents, many of which are

still classified. Neustadt finished his report on November 15, 1963, and was scheduled to discuss his findings with the President when he returned from a campaign trip to Dallas. An assassin’s bullet kept this meeting from taking place.

Fourth, although most literature about Skybolt’s cancellation focuses on Anglo-American relations, the decision was not independent of U.S. - Soviet relations. Kennedy’s military and foreign policies, especially his Grand Design for Europe, were aimed toward East-West reconciliation. The Skybolt cancellation figured in a wide range of objectives directed toward stabilizing the globe. Understanding these aims bears on the question of whether Kennedy was the staunch anti-communist that some have claimed. According to Kaufman, most accounts of the Kennedy administration show that the Cuban Missile Crisis had a sobering effect on the President, leading him to tone down his rhetoric and to seek an accommodation with the Soviet Union. Kaufman concludes that “the impact of the missile crisis on Kennedy was real but modest and [h]is foreign policy continued to be unpredictable.”7 This study suggests that efforts were underway to seek an accommodation with the Soviet Union well before the Cuban Missile Crisis, but it also suggests that the missile crisis reinforced the desire for accommodation. In fact, Kennedy was not opposed to confrontation with allies if it meant the possibility of better relations with the Soviets.

The fifth, and most interesting, reason why a Skybolt study is useful is that it reveals how decisions were made and implemented in the Kennedy administration. Neustadt wrote Kennedy that his Skybolt report revealed the “insides of our ‘machine’ as they [the British] have never seen it.” Indeed, Neustadt told Kennedy that the copies in his possession could be burned at the president’s request.8 If this episode represents the norm

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rather than an exception, then it is central to an understanding of Kennedy's foreign policy mechanics. Kennedy created a less structured executive organization based on individual initiative. According to Adam Yarmolinsky, an early member of the Kennedy team, Kennedy recruited people who would be tough and who would "make use of the vast resources of government without becoming, as some political appointees have become in the past, merely instruments of the permanent staff."9 Of course decision making was restricted to a limited group composed of the "Best and the Brightest," and "Whiz Kids." Those ideas and methods are partially responsible for Kennedy's foreign policy efforts being labeled by some as arrogant, ignorant, and impatient.10 Analyzing the Skybolt decision provides insight into Kennedy's "collegial approach" to executive administration.11 Indeed, the Skybolt crisis is best explained through an analysis of how Kennedy's executive handled the cancellation.

There were numerous reasons why the Skybolt missile program was canceled. Most authors generally agreed that the decision was badly handled. McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, wrote in 1993 that the crisis which resulted was "a result of inattention, not malice."12 This raises the question of why such "inattention" resulted. The crisis increased distrust and suspicion within the Anglo-American relationship and contributed to strained relations with other NATO countries.

The handling of the cancellation caused Kennedy some brief problems including embarrassment at home. Secretary of the Air Force Eugene Zuckert thought there was enough question about the cancellation decision for a congressional investigation which

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could have made the Administration look very bad. Stuart Symington, Democratic
Senator from Missouri, accused the Kennedy Administration of trying to bring about the
demise of the Air Force. Some Congressmen suggested legislation to restrict
McNamara’s power over the Pentagon and military services. Moreover, some
Republicans, including Everett Dirksen of Illinois and Charles Halleck of Indiana, cited
Skybolt as evidence of the Kennedy Administration’s ineptness in foreign affairs. They
suggested that the United States’ standing with certain “historical allies [had] fallen below
the plateau of prestige” promised during the 1960 campaign by John Kennedy.

Many authors of, and participants in, the Skybolt drama claim that the episode was
blown out of proportion and that the crisis should not have happened. Nevertheless, much
had changed in Washington between 1958, when Skybolt was conceived, and 1962, when
it was canceled. Indeed, viewed within this framework, the cancellation seems to be
deeply rooted in the changes in policy and philosophy introduced by the Kennedy
administration.

13 Eugene Zuckert. Interviewed by Lawrence E. McQuade, 11 July 1964, John F. Kennedy Library Oral
History Program, JFKL, Boston MA, 89.
Chapter 1
The Inheritance

Kennedy apologists often cite the Eisenhower administration for flawed policy that perpetuated situations which later became crises with which Kennedy had to deal. In apologist fashion, Neustadt told Kennedy that the causes of the Skybolt crisis were found in:

"a basic failure reaching back to 1960, to the Eisenhower regime: a failure to assure that Britain's defense posture and Anglo-American cooperation rested on a rationale which could be justified in technical and military terms, since these were the ostensible terms, as well as in implicit terms of diplomatic and domestic politics." (underscore is Neustadt's)\(^{17}\)

Kaufman finds the apologist argument that Kennedy's foreign policy was circumscribed by the legacy he inherited from Eisenhower to be of limited utility. He asserts, as Skybolt will clearly substantiate, that Kennedy apologists "fail to take proper note of the opportunities Kennedy had to cancel or fundamentally alter policies pursued by his predecessor."\(^{18}\)

Eisenhower administration strategists concluded that the most effective and efficient way to provide for the free world's defense was to adopt a massive retaliation policy, based upon overwhelming American superiority in strategic nuclear forces. This strategy seemed to imply that nuclear weapons would be initiated at minimum provocation, but was much more complex. John Lewis Gaddis explains in Strategies of Containment, that massive retaliation meant reacting to "adversary challenges in ways calculated to apply one's own


strengths against the other side's weaknesses, even if this meant shifting the nature and location of the confrontation;... nuclear weapons were a major component but so were alliances, psychological warfare, covert action, and negotiations.\textsuperscript{19}

The Air Force, and the aviation industry, welcomed Eisenhower's massive retaliation policy because, at the time, airplanes were the primary delivery system for nuclear weapons. Air power witnessed phenomenal growth during and after WWII. At the height of World War II there were over 80,000 aircraft in the Army Air Force. The post war peak came in 1955 with aircraft numbering 28,117.\textsuperscript{20} Air Force budgets witnessed the same type of growth. The 1949 defense budget totaled just under $11.5 billion, with a little over $1.5 billion, or thirteen percent, allocated to the Air Force. The Army and Navy budgets respectively represented 51\% and 36\% of 1949 defense allocations. By 1957 the Air Force absorbed 48 percent of total defense dollars.\textsuperscript{21}

Technological breakthroughs in aviation made the aircraft industry a star in economic terms because it represented high growth and high profit. Total Defense contracts for fiscal 1961 totaled $20,995,000,000. Six of the top ten companies awarded these contracts were aircraft manufacturers, representing over 27\% of defense contracts. The other four in the top ten were involved in manufacture of aircraft components. General Dynamics, Lockheed and Boeing led the aircraft companies with a combined 15\% of contract awards totaling over $3,000,000,000. Douglas Aircraft Company, which was developing the Skybolt missile, ranked tenth with awards of $404,900,000.\textsuperscript{22}

The greatest potential for growth and profit for the aviation industry was found in

the United States Department of Defense. Sir Solly Zuckerman, Britain’s Chief Scientific Advisor to the Minister of Defence during those years, maintains that anything flew in the Eisenhower days in terms of research and development. However, Eisenhower restrained the military by making the Pentagon operate under budget ceilings. Nevertheless, new ideas such as sea missiles launched by remote control from huge canisters left unattended at sea proliferated. The administration also considered space bombers, submersible aircraft carriers, and death ray weapons. At the very edge of experimental research and development were antimatter weapons with an explosive force thousands of times mightier than the largest H-bombs of the day. Researchers investigated ways to create perpetual fog, earthquakes and tidal waves over enemy territory. John Rubel, a member of both Eisenhower’s and Kennedy’s Defense Departments characterizes both Skybolt and Bluesteel, a missile being researched in the United Kingdom, as weapons which made little sense, “or would have in a sane world, but in the charged atmosphere of the time both were mightily supported and touted and shouted about.” Nowhere was the atmosphere more charged than in the heart of Europe where the forces of the Warsaw Pact faced the armies of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Eisenhower’s basic thrust toward NATO was to “enhance allied cohesion with limited nuclear sharing, while at the same time trying to avoid the injurious effects of independent nuclear efforts and the proliferation of these weapons.” Many in Washington did not agree with what Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, were doing. Critics speculated that the US was sharing too many nuclear secrets and encouraging proliferation of nuclear weapons. Democratic Senator Chet Holifield of

California predicted that such nuclear transfer would cause the "greatest debate of our generation." Later in his administration, Eisenhower rejected DeGaulle's tripartite proposal, but he finally offered France a limited transfer of NATO nuclear arms because the U.S. could not continue to "treat trusted allies as junior members."28

More importantly, Moscow forced the Eisenhower administration toward nuclear sharing by the late 1950's. On October 4, 1957 the Soviet Union became the first country to orbit a satellite around the earth. The deployment of this satellite, Sputnik, evoked worldwide fears that the Soviets had global nuclear delivery capability. By late 1957 the Soviets were emplacing multi-range ballistic missiles (MRBM's) in Eastern Europe. In response, western leaders agreed upon a bilateral two-key system of shared control over the firing of nuclear weapons on European soil. They also agreed to promote research, development and manufacture of nuclear weapons in Europe.29 The United States placed ballistic missiles in Italy, Turkey and Great Britain.30 At the same time some officials called for NATO to become the fourth nuclear power (after the US, USSR, and UK), with weapons under the control of the supreme allied commander, Europe (SACEUR). As Air Force General Lauris Norstad (SACEUR) became the leading military voice in the push for a MRBM force broadening NATO nuclear authority, West Germany's defense minister Franz Josef Strauss urged fellow defense ministers to "speed plans" for a NATO nuclear force, and the NATO Council suggested that "permanent representatives ....should study the suggestion in detail."31 The west initiated a mobile MRBM proposal and the concept of a Multilateral Nuclear Force, later known as the MLF.32 The Soviet Union opposed both

30 Time, November 1962, "U.S. Bases Abroad."
32 Senator Henry Jackson from Washington State was the first to open the MLF debate before the Senate in 1958 with a speech entitled "Ballistic Seapower - Fourth Dimension of Warfare." See Thomas C. Wiegele. "The
plans. During March and April 1960, Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates proposed placing Polaris on European rails and roads and in European waterways to achieve strategic mobility. Each NATO country could deploy men to man the missiles, with SACEUR controlling operations and the President of the United States retaining sole authority to fire. The Multilateral Force would operate in a similar fashion, with Polaris missiles on surface ships or in submarines. The Soviet Union strongly opposed such proposals. On July 19, 1960 the Soviets accused the United States of intending to give “Polaris rockets for the rearmament of the Bundeswehr.” The USSR charged that the US moved “even further along the dangerous path of creating an active hot-bed of aggression in the heart of Europe.” The State Department replied that, as long as the Soviets continued deploying missiles in eastern Europe, NATO would strengthen its own forces.33

The “Special Relationship” between the United States and Great Britain was also enhanced during Eisenhower’s second term. America was concerned with the impact of British force reductions on Britain’s ability to significantly contribute to the defense of the western world.34 Expanded sharing of weapons technology would reduce duplication of research and development and allow increased British expenditure on alliance needs. The McMahon Act, which restricted the sharing of America’s nuclear secrets abroad, was amended in 1958 in favor of Great Britain.35 Eisenhower and Macmillan signed the Agreement for Cooperation on Uses of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defense Purposes on July 3, 1958. This agreement made Great Britain the only nation which could receive U.S. technical information on the production of nuclear warheads as well as fissile material.

Origins of the MLF Concept 1957-1960” in Orbis, XII (Summer 1968) for discussion of early MLF developments.
This agreement greatly increased the range of military and political topics discussed frankly between the two nations. The British received Thor missiles from the United States, and they entered into a non-binding “gentlemen’s agreement” for an air launched ballistic missile. The former was a silo-based medium range ballistic missile that was vulnerable to a first strike because it took several minutes to warm up for launch. The latter became known as Skybolt.

The Skybolt program was born in 1958 when General White, Air Force Chief of Staff, boasted, “If the Navy can launch a ballistic missile from a submarine, we can launch one from an airplane.” That same year the British became involved with the program. In January 1959, the Air Force decided to pursue the development of Skybolt, and in May it awarded the first development contract to the Douglas Aircraft Corporation. The British were involved in all aspects of this contract process; their requirements were written into the General Operational Requirement; their officials attended the bidders presentations; they helped evaluate brochures; and they submitted recommendations to the board. According to John Rubel, Assistant Director of Defense Research and Engineering, the United States Air Force (USAF) and the Royal Air Force (RAF) were talking about sharing even before the Department of Defense had approved development. General White named Skybolt at a 1960 news conference. Following the news

37 John H. Rubel “On Skybolt And Related Matters.” Personal Papers of John H. Rubel, sent to the author on 12 April 1994, 3. “This paper was first written at the request of Lord Solly Zuckerman in 1988 as an aide memoire to assist him in writing the SKYBOLT chapter of Monkey’s, Men and Missiles he was then composing. Since then I have made minor revisions to the document from time to time as information has come to hand that I did not have in 1988. The last changes, mostly editorial, were made in September, 1993.” footnote, 1.
conference Washington newspapers claimed that the Air Force had started a brand new weapons system. After this newspaper coverage, Rubel remembers increased efforts on the part of the Air Force to "insure development approval" and contributes later approval directly to "the climate that was created by Air Force newspaper publicity." Rubel had recently accepted the position as assistant in charge of strategic weapons development in the new office of Defense Research and Engineering. (DR&E) As with other parts of the Department of Defense, the office of DR&E had yet to acquire the power needed to implement its defined role. The Air Force regarded this office as merely a bureaucratic hurdle to be overcome in order to receive research funding. Rubel recalls an elementary briefing about Skybolt during which an Air Force colonel covered "[n]one of the many complex and wholly unsolved technical problems implicit in such a system" with "any depth." The Air Force sought rubber stamp approval from Rubel's office to proceed with R&D on Skybolt. Rubel consulted with his boss, the Director of Defense Research and Engineering, Herb York, and then told the Air Force that it would have to present more detail about the program before he would approve funding. Meanwhile, several million dollars were allocated for studies.

Although both air forces argued that Skybolt filled a strategic role, both were more assured of the program's survival if it were a "joint" project. An American Air Force General told the Budget Bureau in 1962 "They can't cancel Skybolt on us. The British are in with us. They won't do that to them." Both Air Forces were overly optimistic. According to Adam Yarmolinsky, McNamara's special assistant at Defense, the RAF was responsible for misleading its own government. Solly Zuckerman, Britain's chief scientific advisor to the ministry of defense, also blames both Air Forces, adding "[t]he

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42 Ibid. 7; 6; 4.
44 Adam Yarmolinsky. Telephone Interview with the author, 30 March 1994.
divergence of what was being said publicly on the two sides of the Atlantic worried me considerably, and towards the end of 1960, I protested formally to Watkinson [the British Defense Minister] about the impression of bland innocence and supreme confidence that was being spread about by the Ministry of Defence's Chief Public Relations Officer."

In the Spring of 1959, Herb York established a committee chaired by James C. Fletcher, to review the Skybolt program. This panel advised that the program be discontinued due to system complexity and an unrealistic time schedule. The following January, after accuracy requirements were lowered and time schedules extended, the program was continued, but the Fletcher Committee was still not convinced that the missile would prove successful. The Presidents Scientific Advisory Committee, and the Pentagon's Systems Evaluation Group, also recommended cancellation in 1960. Nevertheless the project went forward. One of Kennedy's special assistants, Theodore Sorensen, suggests that scientific committees hesitated to recommend termination of the program because of their own scientific curiosity.

In March of 1960, the United States agreed to sell the British Skybolt missiles contingent on the "successful and timely completion of its development program."

America could cancel production if the missile was not proving feasible, but it also agreed to consult with the British if this happened. The British were pressing for an early agreement on Skybolt to accompany their impending decision to discontinue Bluestreak; they needed to soften the domestic political impact of that missile's cancellation.

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same time Macmillan had his eyes on Eisenhower’s “invulnerable asset,” the Polaris Missile. Eisenhower was unwilling to arm Britain with Polaris missiles because of ongoing discussions about committing Polaris to NATO. This was explicitly stated in the agreement that was signed by the two nations. The agreement did not show that the U.S. was opposed to sharing Polaris technology with Great Britain, only that no agreement would be reached bilaterally while negotiations were ongoing in NATO. Macmillan therefore settled for Skybolt. In return for Eisenhower’s unconditional offer of Skybolt, Macmillan quickly offered America the use of a dry dock in the United Kingdom for Polaris submarines. The Eisenhower Administration never viewed the berthing facilities as a quid pro quo for Skybolt, nor did Macmillan originally. However the British government attempted later to make the dry dock offer contingent upon obtaining “not only a firmer commitment regarding Skybolt but also to acquire Polaris technology or the submarines for themselves.” The United States threatened to seek berthing docks in West Germany if the British tried to link Skybolt with the dry dock provision. Accordingly, the British decided to drop the issue for the moment. They raised it again after Skybolt’s cancellation, accusing America of letting down an ally which had become a target by stationing Polaris submarines in its sovereign waters.

The argument over Skybolt in the Eisenhower years centered around whether the “gentlemen’s agreement” reached by Eisenhower and Macmillan during March 1960 was binding. Recent studies conclude that the agreement was not binding. According to Ronald Landa, a historian at the Office of the Secretary of Defense, it was “[t]he British,


especially Macmillan, who attempted to make more of the arrangement than was there.” Both Air Forces exaggerated the program’s early success, as did the contractor. But the British had received enough warning from the Defense Department, “[d]espite the fact that Eisenhower and the State Department occasionally blunted Defense’s warnings,” to know that Skybolt’s future was questionable. Landa concludes that “as far as the Eisenhower administration was concerned, there [was] little basis for the charge” made in 1962 “that the United States had broken its part of the bargain.” 53 Ian Clark also concludes that the British realized the questionable future of Skybolt. Relying heavily on British archives, Clark shows that the British government had not placed total faith in Skybolt. Skybolt was viewed as an interim system until the British could acquire Polaris, or another such system, from the Americans. 54

Late in 1960, the Defense Department told Eisenhower that Skybolt was in trouble and that the President ought to tell the British to seek another system in order to maintain their nuclear deterrent. But, State Department officials overrode Defense and convinced Eisenhower to assure the British that the U.S. would do whatever possible to bring Skybolt to reality. State was interested in diverting British funds from a national program so that British money could support programs which were more beneficial to the Alliance. State was not opposed to sharing nuclear weapons with Great Britain, but it saw no purpose in the British pursuing systems on their own. Even the Pentagon did not oppose sharing nuclear weapon technology with the British, but they were concerned with the technical difficulties and the rising costs of the program. As a result, Secretary Gates withheld obligational authority for Skybolt from the fiscal 1962 budget, requiring instead that the Air Force spread the $150 million budgeted for fiscal year 1961 into fiscal 1962.

But his action raised serious questions about the operational date of Skybolt. Gates was acting partially upon the negative technical findings about Skybolt and partially out of displeasure with the Air Force over its management of the program.\textsuperscript{55} He also wanted to give the incoming Kennedy administration a chance to look at the questionable program and make its own decision.

In early 1961, Gates briefed incoming administration officials about Skybolt. Kennedy learned why Gates had reservations about Skybolt and why he had placed financial restrictions on the program. This information would permit Kennedy decision to cancel the program if he so decided. Kennedy inherited from Eisenhower a national defense policy which emphasized nuclear weapons. This emphasis facilitated the growth of the United States Air Force which had become both politically and militarily powerful. Contrary to Kennedy’s campaign claims, he did not inherit a missile gap.\textsuperscript{56} Rather, he inherited a large militarily structured National Security Council; a State Department which was the primary institution of foreign policy; military services which operated under budget ceilings; and a Pentagon which was still looking for definition. Internationally, Kennedy faced European allies who were pursuing nuclear roles and who were greatly interested in the nuclear sharing proposals discussed during the last years of the Eisenhower administration. European countries and the Eisenhower administration were


\textsuperscript{56} The charge of a missile gap, made by the Kennedy campaign in 1960, was unfounded. Kennedy continued to make charges about a missile gap in the Soviets favor even after General Earle Wheeler told him in classified briefings that the United States was not behind the Soviets. The day before his inauguration Eisenhower assured Kennedy that the U.S. was ahead. On February 5, 1961 McNamara publicly stated that there was no missile gap. The next day the new Secretary of Defense revealed to an angry President that the there was a large missile gap, in America’s favor. Nevertheless, Kennedy had his Press Secretary Pierre Salinger announce at a press conference that McNamara’s comments were “...incorrect. Absolutely wrong. No such studies have been completed and no such finding has been made.” Richard Reeves. President Kennedy: Profile of Power. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 59. When Solly Zuckerman met Kennedy early in 1961 Kennedy asked him “What do you think of my missile gap?” Zuckerman could only answer, “What missile gap, Mr. President?” at which Kennedy laughed as though the whole thing had been a vast joke.” Solly Zuckerman. Monkeys, Men, And Missiles: An Autobiography 1946-88. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 244.
pursuing nuclear cooperation because of recent Soviet actions. In short, Kennedy inherited a less than optimal relationship with the Soviet Union; but he did not inherit a firm commitment to the MLF, to a NATO nuclear force, or to Skybolt.

If there was no firm commitment by the U.S. to provide Great Britain with Skybolt, why then did the December 1962 cancellation cause such an uproar? An examination of the philosophy and mechanics of Kennedy’s foreign policy, show why such a decision as the cancellation of an experimental weapon system resulted in “crisis.”
Chapter 2
Changing Course

John Kennedy quickly changed the executive structures used by Eisenhower. Largely as a result of the recommendations of the Jackson Subcommittee, Kennedy abolished the Operations Coordination Board of the National Security Council and greatly reduced the NSC staff turning it into a small presidential group of advisors working "outside the system." Kennedy also began the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) which was a "semi-detached" part of the State Department. The basic problem that the ACDA was attempting to solve "was to weld balanced deterents and total disarmament into a single negotiating proposal." Disarmament was an early and central feature of the New Frontier. Even before his inauguration, Kennedy sent Jerome Wiesner and Walt Rostow to assure V.V. Kuznetsov of the Soviet Foreign Office that any military buildup in the United States would be designed to stabilize the deterrent. Less than a month after his inauguration President Kennedy assigned Thomas Finletter and Dean Acheson to the task of reviewing the policy of nuclear sharing with NATO. Their review culminated in the Acheson report which Kennedy used to formulate military policy toward Europe. By early March, news reports indicated a State Department push to overhaul defense policy at the partial expense of European allies.

Kennedy appointed John McCloy to head the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, which he wanted to be a part of the executive branch. However, Richard Neustadt persuaded Kennedy against such a decision, because “taking disarmament out of State would conflict with the policy of making State the agent of coordination in foreign affairs.” Although Kennedy wanted the State Department to be his primary diplomatic arm he restricted and alienated State by centralizing foreign affairs decision making within the White House. As a result, the British bypassed the State Department. The State Department resented this practice. Like a number of his predecessors Kennedy felt that the bureaucracy of the State Department was inefficient and impeded the translation of White House ideas into active policy. However, Kennedy seems to have resented Foggy Bottom (the nickname given to the State Department because it sometimes becomes enveloped by fog that forms above the Potomac River) for even more fundamental reasons. Historian, James Giglio, in The Presidency of John F. Kennedy, writes that Kennedy had a “natural bias..against the State Department, probably engendered by old Joe Kennedy”, the Presidents father. Arthur Schlesinger suggests that the State Department “puzzled” the President. In the summer of 1962, after 17 months in office, Kennedy was still struggling to get the State Department under control and working the way he wished and more than half of his initial State Department appointees no longer held their positions. There was also some dissatisfaction with Rusk, even though Sorensen recalls that, “Kennedy liked his terse, low-key Secretary of State.”

Rusk was born into a poor family on February 9, 1909 in Cherokee County

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Georgia. At Davidson College near Charlotte, North Carolina he participated in ROTC. He was graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1931 with a bachelor's degree in political science. That same year, he won a Rhodes scholarship. After leaving Oxford, he became a professor at Mills College in San Francisco and attended law school at Berkeley. In 1940, he was called to active duty in the Army. He served primarily in the China-Burma-India Theater as Deputy Chief of Staff to General "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell. Promoted to Colonel, Rusk served on the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, created in 1945, which handled politico-military affairs. In 1946, he left the Army to become Assistant Chief in the Division of International Security Affairs which was part of the State Department Office of Special Political Affairs. Under President Truman, he served as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. In 1952, he was appointed president of the Rockefeller Foundation where he served until being selected by President Kennedy as director of the State Department.

Rusk has been described as "[a] quiet, competent, and relatively unknown person" who was "[c]riticized by White House advisers as too reserved, sitting like a Buddha at meetings." Historian Thomas Paterson maintains that "Kennedy thought Rusk suitable....because he would not challenge the President's desire to be his own Secretary of State." Rusk felt that the Secretary of State served at the pleasure of the President and that if Kennedy did not want him involved he would not question his orders. In The Department of State, Historians Thomas S. Estes and E. Alan Lightner argue that the Rusk philosophy was one that "expected his subordinates, especially regional assistant secretaries, to assume responsibility." However, Kennedy attempted to micro-manage

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70 Ibid., 16.
foreign affairs from the White House. This practice often omitted and alienated the regional secretaries that Rusk was urging to play a larger role in implementing administration policy.

The New Frontier embraced radically different philosophies from Eisenhower’s New Look. New Frontiersmen determined that mutual assured destruction (MAD) had rendered massive retaliation obsolete. MAD was based on the belief that both East and West had massed sufficient nuclear weapons to destroy each other, regardless of who struck first. Therefore defense strategy needed to be more flexible and conventional, so that small conflicts could be resolved without risking total nuclear war.72 The Kennedy administration also embraced a philosophy known as stable deterrence, which was primarily conceived by Jerome Wiesner, the President’s Science advisor. Wiesner’s stable deterrence philosophy promoted a second strike capability and sought to control the proliferation of delivery systems for innovation’s sake only.73 Kennedy frowned upon the MRBM proposal for NATO largely because he felt such a force would destabilize the deterrent.

As American policy changed from massive retaliation to flexible response, the Kennedy administration sought conventional arms buildup in Europe in order to defend against Soviet aggression without having to immediately order a nuclear strike. In contrast to Eisenhower, who believed that the possibility of a non-nuclear conflict in Europe was remote, Kennedy desired through conventional buildup, to gain time to consider all options before initiating a nuclear attack. A barrier to implementing flexible response in Europe was the fact that conventional buildup was more expensive than reliance on nuclear weapons. Kennedy was determined to decrease the deficit in the balance of payments and


73 Schlesinger writes that the gospel of stable deterrence found a welcome ear in the Navy who saw an expanded role for Polaris and in the Army which disliked the proportion of funds which had been allocated to the Air Force over the past years. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 471.

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simultaneously strengthen NATO's conventional arm, which would require a larger European financial contribution.74 Central to achieving this and disarmament, was the need to persuade allies to give up their plans for national independent nuclear deterrents and concentrate instead on conventional buildup. Paul Nitze recently commented "that we thought the British financial situation was such that they could ill afford the resources they were devoting to their independent deterrent."75 Therefore, Kennedy and McNamara pursued a military policy which denied their allies nuclear forces.

Kennedy and his secretary of defense attempted to reshape the Air Force for the purposes of flexible response and stable deterrence. One consequence was that the proportion of money the Air Force received diminished. Indeed, the Air Force budget increased in dollars, but not in proportion to the overall military budget. Its strategic arm suffered most. By 1957 the Air Force budget had grown to 48 percent of the total defense budget, but by 1963, its larger budget of $19,441,000,000, represented only 38% of defense.76 McNamara placed greater emphasis on expanding tactical capability to support troops in the field and on transport capabilities which would bring troops to the field. McNamara created Strike Command (STRICOM), which integrated Air Force cargo planes with army ground units to enable the United State to quickly transport a large conventional strike force anywhere on the globe. By the end of 1961, America increased its long range airlift capacity by 75 percent.77 However, Kennedy included no funds for additional B-52 or B-58 bombers in March of 1961 when he asked Congress for additional defense dollars. McNamara waged a successful battle in Congress to eliminate the RS-70 (B-70) bomber program, ironically making Skybolt a justification for why it was not needed. Kennedy

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77 Robert McNamara 1961 Year End Statement. Public Statements by the Secretary of Defense.
reportedly said “We will use Skybolt to shoot down the B-70.” Congress appropriated $514, 500,000 for long range bombers and $180,000,000 for the RS-70 which the Secretary refused to spend. McNamara argued that Skybolt would extend the life of the B-52 force making the RS-70 a redundant program. President Kennedy repeated this argument in a March 1962 news conference. Congress also appropriated $85,800,000 for Dyna-Soar, a nuclear powered glider, which McNamara refused to spend, thereby killing the project. By the end of 1961, the Administration had requested more than $6 billion additional dollars for defense, but had cut or greatly reduced four major Air Force strategic bomber projects. By 1965 McNamara had also canceled an atomic powered airplane; a nuclear-powered missile called Pluto; and Skybolt.

Skybolt was seen by McNamara and others as a first strike weapon. Therefore it destabilized the deterrent. The Air Force was developing Skybolt, not for innovation’s sake, but to incorporate it into an active first strike strategy. Secretary of the Air Force, Eugene Zuckert viewed the Kennedy administration’s policy as contrary to the strategic offensive, and the Air Force’s pursuit of a first-strike capability placed it at odds with an administration which favored stable deterrence. Although Skybolt fit strategically within the policy of massive retaliation, it did not meet the economic ends that massive retaliation sought. Skybolt fit neither strategically nor economically with flexible response, nor philosophically with the New Frontier. It was an inevitable target for McNamara’s unprecedented management techniques.

Robert Strange McNamara was born on June 9, 1916 in San Francisco, California. He received an undergraduate degree in economics from the University of California at Berkeley. Missing a Rhodes Scholar he attended the Harvard Business School. He joined

the faculty at Harvard after completing his masters degree and remained there until 1942. In World War Two he was an analyst in the Army Air Force’s Statistics Control Unit. He served in both Europe and Asia, advancing to Lieutenant Colonel. In 1945, McNamara went to Ford Motor Company, becoming its youngest President in 1960, shortly before President-elect Kennedy’s call to fill the chief post at the Pentagon. McNamara believed in cost analysis and quantified justification for both business and military ventures. He operated at Ford this way and he would run the Pentagon in the same manner.  

McNamara took control of the Pentagon in 1961 and found its command structure inefficient. At the time, each military service budgeted individually under the constraints of monetary ceilings. McNamara changed this practice and became the financial manager of the Pentagon utilizing a system known as the Planning Programming Budgeting System (PPBS) which revolutionized Pentagon operations. In December 1960, newly appointed Deputy Secretary of Defense, Roswell Gilpatrick warned of a great shake up in the military services which would include more efficient management of the Pentagon. Mismanagement was one reason the Skybolt program was placed under such scrutiny. Streamlining the Pentagon meant toning down the number of projects under development and concentrating on the few that were vital to the security of the United States. Zuckert maintains that McNamara was against Skybolt in principle but that even if he had agreed with it in principle he would have opposed it because it was not being run well. The Skybolt program was re-organized three times and by the time of its cancellation, Zuckert felt that the program was finally being properly managed and progressing very well, but it was apparent that the program was going to cost more than estimated. McNamara’s

81 For an excellent biography of Robert McNamara see Deborah Shapley’s Promise and Power: The Life and Times of Robert McNamara. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993).
84 Eugene Zuckert, Interviewed by Lawrence E. McQuade, 11 July 1964, John F. Kennedy Library Oral
posture statements on defense and his letters to Kennedy on force structure made clear that Skybolt faced a rough time ahead.

McNamara's Pentagon became a place where civilian control and quantitative analysis took hold. Many military leaders thought that their advice and experience was being ignored or set aside in favor of the recommendations of "whiz kids," the term created to describe the young quantitative thinkers who worked for McNamara at the Pentagon. McNamara held the military in disdain; and he felt that the secretary of defense should be given greater flexibility by Congress to use appropriated funds. Some biographers of McNamara have even said that he held no solid views on international political issues before coming to Washington in 1960; that he merely accepted the views of Kennedy and later of Johnson. Be that as it may, McNamara held solid business views and meant to implement his style of quantitative analysis and efficient management in the military environment. One thing quickly became certain, Robert McNamara was in control at the Pentagon.

As previously discussed, the earlier recommendations of Gates provided the new Kennedy Administration with sufficient grounds to cancel Skybolt. However, in March 1961, Kennedy requested an additional $50 million for Skybolt.\(^85\) Why did President Kennedy further the development of Skybolt, when the previous administration withheld funds and warned of its uncertainties? Undoubtedly the decision had more to do with quieting critics than it did with enhancing America's defense. During the 1960 campaign, Republicans charged that Kennedy was soft on communism. The public was unsure of this young Democrat's ability to deal effectively with the Soviets. Also, Kennedy campaigned on a missile gap, accusing the Republicans of neglecting America's security. Kennedy's inauguration was filled with cold war rhetoric and his State of Union address

ten days later was a “war speech without a war.” Kennedy made such speeches to assure his critics that he was not soft on communism. Kennedy’s early cancellation of Skybolt might renew doubts about his stance against the “Reds.” Yet the program was continued against the advice of many administration officials. Historian David Nunnerly argues that the decision was highly political, because it was in direct response to the missile gap issue, which McNamara already knew was unfounded and because the additional expenditures were not sufficient for the timely completion of the program. Therefore it seems that the decision to continue Skybolt, whose mission was inconsistent with the policies of the New Frontier, was based more on bolstering the public perception of Kennedy’s toughness than it was on improving America’s defense posture. The restoration of funds to the Skybolt program sent a welcome, but misleading message of support to the Tory government. By increasing funding, the Kennedy administration sustained hopes for the program and concurrently sent a signal that it supported the British independent deterrent. Yet, at the same time, the administration was plotting a course toward confrontation with Great Britain over their independent deterrent.

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87 Two of the officials who opposed restoration of funds to the Skybolt program were Budget Director Bell and Paul Nitze, head of the office of International Security Affairs.
Deborah Shapley, in a recent biography of McNamara, goes as far as to imply that John Kennedy’s inaugural pledge was the “self imposed and tragic mandate” that motivated Robert McNamara. Deborah Shapley. Promise and Power: The Life and Times of Robert McNamara. (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1993).
Chapter 3
Dueling Allies

The Kennedy administration defined the new American policy toward Great Britain in such a way as to de-emphasize the special Anglo-American relationship and to facilitate several goals. Among these were: engaging France in a more cooperative NATO posture; preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, especially to the Germans; building up NATO's conventional forces; and facilitating Britain's entry into the European Community. In addition, the Kennedy administration sought a nuclear disarmament treaty with the Soviet Union. By keeping these particular goals in mind, Skybolt's cancellation becomes much clearer.

British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan visited John Kennedy in the White House for the first time in early April 1961, arriving in Washington enjoying a "strong political standing" at home. In preparation for these talks, the State Department presented Kennedy with a paper emphasizing greater interdependence within NATO and stressing the buildup of conventional forces. Kennedy learned that Macmillan justified his independent deterrent on the grounds of Great Britain's limited effect on U.S.-Soviet relations and his concern that the acts of others might draw the United Kingdom into war. Ironically, this was major reason that the United States opposed his deterrent.89

During this meeting with Kennedy, Macmillan probed the president about possible US nuclear assistance to France. Kennedy responded that, "I have come to the conclusion, that it would be undesirable to assist France's efforts to create a nuclear weapons capability" because it "could not fail to have a major effect on German attitudes."90

According to McGeorge Bundy, Kennedy had a difficult time with Macmillan. He liked Macmillan, “not instantly, but more and more as time went on, he didn’t dislike him, but the first meeting was rather difficult.” Kennedy found this meeting strained because Macmillan arrived with two issues topping his agenda: the British strategic deterrent and nuclear weapons in NATO, which were not congruent with the changing direction of the New Frontiersmen.

Conflicting national interests placed Great Britain in a precarious position in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Her Majesty’s government was involved in an international economic Commonwealth and had interest in maintaining the “special relationship” with the United States. However, it concurrently attempted to become part of an emerging United Europe. The United States favored British integration into Europe, but viewed Britain’s independent deterrent as an obstacle to its entrance into the EEC and a destabilizing factor within the Alliance. However, in British eyes, Skybolt symbolized the independent deterrent, making it the political symbol by which the Tory party could claim a more equal footing to the U.S. in the cold war. Tory Leaders felt that sustaining an independent nuclear role would enhance their national prestige and increase their influence over the use of nuclear weapons. Macmillan believed that having nuclear weapons capability, if only symbolic, bestowed upon his country the perks of the nuclear club. Macmillan wanted sovereignty over his nuclear arsenal, but his country did not have the economic resources or the desire to pay the costs necessary for maintaining a truly independent deterrent.

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94 During Kennedy’s tenure Zuckerman saw British independence most threatened at the test ban level, because Americans were so dominating nuclear issues that Britain was losing influence in an area that Macmillan had fought so hard. Solly Zuckerman. *Monkeys, Men and Missiles: An Autobiography 1946-88*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988).
Two weeks after meeting Macmillan, Kennedy signed a national security directive which stated “that over the long run it would be desirable if the British decided to phase out of the nuclear deterrent business”......and “that the US should not prolong the life of the V-Bomber force” deterrent, unless Skybolt is “warranted for US purposes alone.” It urged the president to seek commitment of the Vulcan V-bomber force to NATO, but within a framework where the United States gave up no control over SAC aircraft, a concession which Britain might pursue for such a deal.95 The administration hoped to further integrate existing allied military power and at the same time centralize nuclear decision making within the American executive. This directive resulted from the Acheson report, which contained the views of the committee that Kennedy had earlier established to review nuclear weapons sharing with NATO. The report was revised on March 29 by McGeorge Bundy and approved by Kennedy on April 20.96

That month, the NSC stated:

“We must try to eliminate the privileged British status. In matters nuclear, the road to Paris may well be through London. . . . Our minimum objective should be to persuade the Prime Minister to commit his warheads to the NATO Atomic Stockpile, and his delivery weapons to NATO commanders..... Beyond this we should try to move him to cease the production of fissionable material for weapons purposes.”97

Macmillan wrote Kennedy immediately following their first meeting attempting to persuade the President to support French nuclear development. Macmillan also urged

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96 Ibid. (footnote), 285
British Ambassador Caccia to pressure Bundy. Neither Kennedy nor Bundy responded favorably. In reply, Kennedy suggested that Macmillan should instead commit his strategic nuclear forces to SACEUR, to which the Prime Minister responded in strong opposition, "so that there will be no misunderstanding."98

Late spring and summer of 1961 would be a formative time for Kennedy. In late April the Bay of Pigs fiasco momentarily knocked the New Frontier off course and increased Kennedy’s desire to centralize decision making within a small, elite executive group. In June, Kennedy met Nikita Khrushchev, in Vienna, where Khrushchev threatened war over Berlin. Not long after this meeting, Kennedy and McNamara initiated a news blitz which showed that the missile gap was a farce and that the United States possessed superior nuclear strength and was augmenting its arsenal with Minuteman and Polaris missiles.99 However, at the same time, Kennedy furthered his push against proliferation while meeting with Dirk Stikker, Secretary General of NATO. Stikker wanted land-based MRBM’s upgraded in Europe. Kennedy indicated that Pershing II’s, whose range was not sufficient to reach the Soviet Union, would be placed there “in the fairly distant future, but that the first order of business was the conventional buildup of NATO.100 Later that summer the first Berlin crisis erupted resulting in the construction of the Berlin wall.101

At the same time, Skybolt was again under attack from the author of stable

98 Ibid. 323.
99 Richard Reeves. President Kennedy: Profile of Power. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993). This phenomenon can also be tracked by reviewing magazines from the time period, which especially by early 1962 were running articles about America’s superior strength.
101 The Berlin crisis of summer 1961 is an excellent example of the dichotomy which existed on the use of nuclear weapons. Schlesinger tells us that “McNamara, despite heroic efforts, could not bring the Pentagon and the NATO command to consensus on the western military response.” All agreed that the West would have to counter a blockade of Berlin with a thrust along the Autobahn. However, Norstad saw this thrust as a way to create a situation where the West could justify using nuclear weapons if provoked by the Soviets. Kennedy and McNamara saw it as a way to postpone the decision to initiate nuclear attack.
deterrence, Jerome Wiesner who was now joined by Budget Director Bell in urging cancellation. However, the Secretary of Defense instead made a deal with Zuckert and the Air Force to support the program if expenditures remained below previously set and unrealistic budget ceilings. McNamara reacted in this manner because a recent report from Nitze's office concluded that there "is no reason apparent which casts serious doubt on the technical feasibility of the Skybolt." Nitze's report blamed ineffective management. Additionally, the Secretary of Defense was arguing against producing the B-70 bomber. McNamara wrote Kennedy that the B-52 armed with Skybolt would provide a "more effective way than speed," which the RS-70 offered, to suppress enemy defense systems and "assure penetration" of enemy territory. McNamara's deal and the additional funding requested by Kennedy in March allowed Zuckert to reorganize the program and the Air Force to place renewed emphasis on the systems development. Published reports about Skybolt remained predominantly positive up until the time of its cancellation.

Kennedy and Macmillan met again in Bermuda in December of 1961. In preparation, Kennedy received a memorandum from Thomas Finletter, who emphasized that the basic thrust against the British independent deterrent was to keep the Germans

104 Ibid., 346-347.
105 In the autumn of 1962, the Skybolt program was placed under the direction of Brigadier General David M. Jones, who lead the Aeronautical Systems Division of the Air Force Systems Command at Wright Paterson Air Force Base in Dayton Ohio. On April 18, 1942, David Jones participated in an aerial campaign that became known as Doolittle's Raid. This attack upon the Japanese home islands did very little damage in a military sense. All of the B-25's used in the raid were lost, but most of the crews managed to survive. However, Doolittle's raid was a great psychological victory for the United States.
106 The only negative article, "Skybolt Uncertainty Haunts British," appearing on May 8, 1961, accused the Kennedy administration of allowing Skybolt to "become a potential time bomb at the heart of Anglo-American relations." Two magazines predominant in the aerospace industry, Missiles and Rockets and Aviation Week (later Aviation Week and Space Technology) printed positive articles about Skybolt during 1962. Only one article presented the technical and budgetary concerns of McNamara. Magazine articles appearing in Time and Newsweek during the Spring of 1962 were also positive.
integrated in the West and to prevent them from seeking an independent nuclear role. He suggested that the United States not take further steps toward committing to the British independent deterrent unless the United States could get some pledge that they would commit a "portion" to NATO. At the conclusion of the Bermuda conference, Kennedy issued a joint statement with Macmillan pledging to the "search for paths toward effective disarmament." Kennedy also pressured Macmillan to allow U.S. atmospheric testing on Christmas Island in exchange for allowing the British to test newly developed warheads in Nevada that were specifically meant for Skybolt.

1962 proved to be a rocky year for Anglo-American relations. In January, Labour Party leaders Harold Wilson and Hugh Gaitskell visited the U.S. to find out Kennedy's views on foreign policy. During this visit, Wilson met Secretary of State Dean Rusk for an informal exchange of views. Wilson told Rusk that the United Kingdom did not really have to have a nuclear deterrent and that the resources they were pumping into a deterrent kept them from contributing more to the conventional buildup of NATO. Wilson and Gaitskell were convinced from their visit that the Kennedy administration regarded the Britain's independent deterrent pointless and counter productive. Wilson later remarked in the House of Commons that there is not one "person in authority there who thinks that our nuclear deterrent adds one iota to the strength and credibility of the Western deterrent." The Tories responded that US still placed importance on the value of bomber command to the deterrent, when in fact the administration was eliminating their own strategic bomber projects, and emphasizing Minuteman and Polaris. The controversy over the independent deterrent shifted in 1962 from largely a debate between members of the Labour Party to a

debate between the Labour and the Tory Parties.\textsuperscript{110} For the first time in years, Labour had the Tory party on the defensive over the independent deterrent, largely due to information received from Kennedy administration officials.

In February, only two months after meeting Macmillan in Bermuda, Kennedy confronted Julian Amery, British Minister of Aviation and son-in-law of Macmillan, at a White House luncheon. Kennedy questioned if Skybolt would ever work.\textsuperscript{111} Amery became very upset, responding that Skybolt was the foundation of British defense and its cancellation could have far reaching effects in Anglo-American relations.\textsuperscript{112} Interestingly, the day before Kennedy phoned Zuckert questioning what subjects Amery would bring up when they met. Zuckert replied “You know he will bring up Skybolt,” to which Kennedy replied “Yes, I know that. What about the Thor missiles?” Kennedy then questioned Zuckert about the reaction time and range of the Thors to which an amazed Zuckert found Kennedy “right on the head,” adding “[he] always had specifics he could pull out in relation to any problem. It wasn’t a show, it was just a real retentiveness.”\textsuperscript{113} It is somewhat odd that Kennedy’s retentiveness did not apply to Nitze’s report which cast no apparent doubt on Skybolt’s technical feasibility. Perhaps the President was not aware of Nitze’s conclusions. Perhaps still, Kennedy was relying more heavily on the opinion of Wiesner when making his comments to Amery. If the administration was already considering canceling Skybolt for political reasons then attacking its ability to function was much safer politically than direct confrontation with Great Britain over its nuclear role.

However Macmillan and Kennedy seemed on a collision course concerning

\textsuperscript{111} Kennedy’s question to Amery came before Skybolt had undergone its first test flight.
Britain's nuclear role. The President wrote his British counterpart on February 16, 1962 to comment on the upcoming release of Britain's White Paper for Defense scheduled for February 20, 1962. The White Paper reassured that Skybolt was "making good progress." Kennedy expressed serious concerns that the White Paper "may be subject to most serious misinterpretations by the Soviets, by our other NATO allies and by..." the American people. "Finally, I must express special concern about the explicit statement that the United Kingdom will 'continue to maintain throughout the 1960's' its independent strategic nuclear deterrent." It is ironic that Kennedy responded this way because it was well known that the purpose of Skybolt in Britain's defense plans was to extend their V-bomber force and their independent deterrent until the late 1960's. According to Schlesinger, Kennedy feared the possible consequences to East-West relations since postures expressed in the White Paper would inevitably drive other nations to desire national deterrents.

Indeed, Kennedy was alarmed by Macmillan's stance on the use of nuclear weapons. Britain's 1962 Defence White Paper contradicted Kennedy's thrust toward conventional buildup and his deemphasis on the early use of nuclear weapons by stating that the British government did "not believe that major war could long continue without one side or the other resorting to nuclear weapons." The White Paper suggested that preventing war was more vital than preparing for a "long drawn out conventional war." What the White Paper suggested is that in order to prevent war the Soviets must be convinced that NATO would respond swiftly to aggression with nuclear weapons. To no ones surprise,

the Soviets expressed concern. Rusk, while meeting with Gromyko in Geneva in March of 1962, informed Kennedy, via an eyes only cable, that the language in a Soviet position paper about non-transfer of nuclear weapons "although lacking precision, seems designed to prevent any development of a NATO nuclear deterrent." The Soviets emphasized that further diffusion of nuclear weapons to national governments would jeopardize a lasting peace. Instead they sought an international forum to develop diffusion policies. As an interim step, they proposed a unilateral moratorium over relinquishing control of nuclear weapons to any national government not already owning them or aiding any state to manufacture them. The Russian proposal was well received by Kennedy, who several months earlier had told Aleksei Adzhubei, Khrushchev's son-in-law, that "[t]he United States as a matter of national policy . . . will not give nuclear weapons to any country." On March 28, 1962 Kennedy, Rusk and the small NSC staff discussed nuclear testing and disarmament in light of the recent Soviet proposal. Later that spring, American and Soviet officials continued arms control talks again emphasizing the non-transfer of nuclear weapons as a first step toward disarmament. In May Rusk argued against aiding French nuclear efforts, based not on the ongoing Soviet talks, but on the fact that the French were not supporting American objectives. Rusk's statement seems somewhat contradictory considering that American objectives concerning European nuclear programs stemmed from the American goal of bettering relations with the Soviets so to lessen the chance of nuclear war. Rusk did not want the French to view America's stance as a result of Soviet influence over American policy, which it was not but in essence by refusing to aid France America

119 Ibid. 70.
would advance the arms talks. Three weeks after disarmament talks with the Soviets concluded, some officials within the U.S. State Department realized that little had been done to implement the NSC directive of April 1961. Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Foy Kohler, UnderSecretary of State for Political Affairs, U. Alexis Johnson, and the Director of the Office of European Regional Affairs, Russell Fessenden began to actively pursue its implementation. They proposed a joint State - Defense study of US-UK weapons programs to determine whether the scope of US-UK weapons cooperation could be limited without generating a counter productive UK reaction.123 The memorandum that contains these suggestions does not mention Skybolt directly, but it states that in the ballistic missile field, the “entire range of cooperation needs to be reexamined in the light of the present day situation” and that American officials had been confusing the British by implying U.S. support of their independent deterrent when this was contrary to the “approved policy line.”124

The same message being presented by the State Department was being conveyed from the White House. In March of 1962, Kennedy implied in a unsent letter to America’s ambassador to France, James Gavin, that America would begin to influence Britain toward a “gradual phasing down of their nuclear commitment.” Kennedy believed “that technology and economics” would “combine to make this course more and more attractive to the British in the future.”125 Gavin, who was a staunch supporter of sharing nuclear technology with the French, was replaced in September by Charles Bohlen, a former Soviet ambassador. This move was undoubtedly prompted by Gavin’s opposition to the administration’s stance against the French nuclear program. Yet it was also designed to further integrate American policy toward France with American policy toward the USSR

124 Ibid. 1075.
and perhaps to position an expert on Soviet affairs where he could keep a watchful eye on the developing relationship between Moscow and Paris.

The President’s national security adviser was also advocating a change in the Anglo-American nuclear relationship. On April 24, Bundy wrote Kennedy a memo stating that our close cooperation with Great Britain did not depend on England’s

“aloofness from Europe or on the existing preferential treatment of the British on nuclear matters. We want the British in Europe, and we do not really see much point in the separate British nuclear deterrent, beyond our existing Skybolt commitment; we would much rather have British efforts go into conventional weapons and have the British join with the rest of NATO in accepting a single U.S.-dominated nuclear force.”126

Bundy insinuated that nuclear policy toward Great Britain had resulted from misguided past policy that differed greatly with current philosophy. In a letter written that May to a French political commentator Bundy stated:

“If we had it to do over again today, we should not encourage the British in this nuclear effort, and it is our guess that over a period of time all merely national deterrents in the hands of powers of the second rank will be uneconomic and ineffective. Thus from the point of view of nuclear weapons policy, in and of itself, the difference between our position toward Great Britain and our position toward France is simply that a commitment was made to Great Britain at a time when thinking on these matters was very different from what it is now.”127

126 U.S. Department of State. 1068.
America’s willingness to aid Great Britain in the nuclear field, but its refusal to help France did not sit well with Charles DeGaulle. DeGaulle viewed Britain’s special relationship with the United States as evidence of British incapability to be a true part of Europe. DeGaulle liked the idea of leading the revolt against U.S. domination of Europe and felt that any country with hegemonic capabilities would use them against the legitimate national ambitions of France. He believed that no country could conceive of a national role without disposing independently of modern military power. DeGaulle, like many Europeans, was not convinced of America’s resolve to sacrifice Chicago for London.

Before Kennedy traveled to Paris in June of 1961, DeGaulle told Sorensen that all he wanted to know was if the U.S. was willing to maintain nuclear strength on the European continent and use it. By early 1962 it was evident that Great Britain was entertaining joining the French in a nuclear program, especially if the special relationship deteriorated. American officials opposed such actions, instructing Britain that nuclear secrets gained through cooperation with the United States “were not theirs to sell”

When Macmillan returned to Washington late in April 1962, he was under political attack at home. One issue on which Macmillan was losing ground was his unyielding support of the independent nuclear deterrent. The European desk of the State Department informed President Kennedy that Macmillan needed these talks, not the United States, and urged Kennedy to seek British support for a multilateral MRBM force.

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132 This report was prepared by Joseph Sweeney, the officer in charge of United Kingdom-Ireland Affairs, Office of British Commonwealth and Northern European Affairs, Bureau of European Affairs and was cleared with Schaetzl, Tyler, Ball and Rusk.
The paper suggested that Macmillan might "attempt to throw the responsibility for resolving his nuclear deterrent dilemma on us." During this process of stressing European integration, "we should make implicit the way we hope U.K. policy will evolve not as a consequence of U.S. pressure, but as a logical result of the forces now in motion." "We see no reason why the President need conceal his lack of enthusiasm for the Defense White Paper with its failure to support the strengthening of NATO's non-nuclear arm." During these talks Kennedy confronted Macmillan about the difference of opinion that existed over conventional buildup, but the Prime Minister stressed his nuclear deterrent and its credibility.133

At the end of April, the administration reaffirmed its NATO policy against bilateral missile arrangements with National Security Action Memorandum - 147. This action generated McNamara's upcoming speeches at Athens, Greece and Ann Arbor, Michigan and Finletter's speech to the North Atlantic Council. At Athens, in early May 1962, McNamara told members of the North Atlantic Council that weak, vulnerable, or inaccurate nuclear arsenals did not deter aggression, but on the other hand might invite a preemptive first strike. McNamara argued that during a war a country which used such a force "against the cities of a major nuclear power" would be committing "suicide." He concluded that "weak nuclear capabilities, operating independently, are expensive, prone to obsolescence, and lacking in credibility as a deterrent."134 McNamara's ideas were not new. Robert Bowie, the Director of the Center for Independent Studies, provided very similar ideas in a report to the Secretary of State in August of 1960.135

At Ann Arbor in June of 1962, McNamara again spoke out against independent nuclear deterrents, adding to his Athens speech that "the creation of a single additional

134 Ibid., 1074.
national nuclear force encourages the proliferation of nuclear power with all its attendant dangers.” McNamara made it clear that in the United States’ governments view, independent nuclear deterrents were not accordant to a “strategy of controlled response” where “concentration of executive authority and central direction” of nuclear forces was imperative. He added, “In short we have undertaken the nuclear defense of NATO on a global basis.” “We would find it intolerable to contemplate having only a part of the strategic force launched in isolation from our main striking power.” However, independent deterrents such as Britain's enabled just such isolated response. Although he also proposed “a greater degree of Alliance participation in formulating nuclear-weapons policy”, he said nothing about developing or controlling nuclear arms.136 Kennedy commissioned American nuclear weapons as “essential to the defense of the Free World” and sought strategic arms and defenses adequate enough “to deter any deliberate nuclear attack on the United States or our allies.” implying that the nuclear defenses of the West rested upon America. Both Kennedy and McNamara spoke of American nuclear forces, not numerous national forces, and not multilateral forces.

Both Kennedy and McNamara were trying to assure American allies that the U.S. was firmly committed to using nuclear weapons if Europe was invaded. At the same time they were attempting to explain flexible response and counterforce-no cities to the Soviets and inform them how both sides could avoid nuclear war.137 As part of the effort to avoid nuclear war and shortly after McNamara’s Ann Arbor speech, the Kennedy Administration shelved Norstad’s proposal for an MRBM force for Europe. In late June Rusk stressed nuclear integration to the British and they assured him that they would try to find a “formula along [those] lines”138 In December of 1962, Norstad was replaced by Lyman


138 U. S. Department of State. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Vol. 13, West Europe and
Lemnitzer, because he continued to speak in favor of a European MRBM force. All of these actions added to the growing sense of European uncertainty about American resolve to defend their countries with nuclear weapons. Where Kennedy failed, not unlike other Presidents, was in his inability to convince Europeans of America’s resolve to sacrifice Chicago for London.

One journalist called McNamara’s Ann Arbor speech a “godsend” for solidifying the Labour party attack against Macmillan and the independent deterrent. Early in his tenure McNamara clearly differentiated the roles that should be played by members of Defense and State. McNamara said that he did not think that he or military officers should be speaking out on foreign policy, that was a role left to Foggy Bottom. However he made many foreign policy statements, such as the speech in Ann Arbor against independent deterrents and similar comments made at NATO ministerial meetings. McNamara kept a tight lid on what the military was able to say publicly. He was accused of “muzzling” military officers by the press and by Congress. The McNamara who spoke at Athens and Ann Arbor was the same man who forbid his Generals to speak out on political issues which might contradict administration policy. McNamara, it turns out, was speaking for the administration reaffirming its policy against bilateral missile arrangements with his speeches at Athens and Ann Arbor.

British supporters of their independent deterrent questioned the Ann Arbor speech even though the American Secretary of Defense claimed not to be talking about Great Britain. However, shortly thereafter, in a discussion with George Brown, a leading member of the British Labour Party, McNamara made clear that his speech related specifically to British plans for Skybolt. Brown immediately used this information to

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Canada, Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, 1078.

attack the Tories in the House of Commons. However, he kept McNamara's confidence. If McNamara had merely blundered by telling Brown the true intent of his speech, it would have been to Brown's advantage to expose McNamara, to illustrate that Macmillan's claims that the administration supported the independent deterrent were wrong. Brown, and to a lesser extent Harold Wilson, had been attacking the independent deterrent for years. They criticized the decision to cancel Bluestreak in early 1960, not because they favored its development, but because large sums of money were spent pursuing it and it was now to be dropped in favor of the questionable Skybolt missile. On April 27, 1960 the Labour Party questioned whether England would still have an independent deterrent if she relied on the United States for missiles. In July 1960, in a "stormy" debate Brown and Denis Healey attacked the government for relying on Skybolt. Brown said that Skybolt did not even exist and that "the Americans have not bought it." That Fall, Brown attacked Skybolt again citing "unimpeachable information from America" in exposing what he said was a ten month delay in the weapon system that was to be the backbone of British Defense. Brown proclaimed in Parliament that the test firing of the $7,250,000 missile that was scheduled to take place in December had been put off until September of 1961.

Why then, knowing that Brown was the Deputy Leader of the Labor Party, a gifted negotiator and a staunch opponent of Macmillan and the independent deterrent, did McNamara tell him what he did? McNamara offered this information to Brown because he knew that Brown would use this knowledge to attack the Tory party in Parliament. His

actions, unless discounted as being blatantly stupid, were intended to bring the independent deterrent issue to the floor of Parliament, where American officials knew there was declining support. McNamara saw the British diverting funds for Skybolt when they should be supporting the buildup of NATO's conventional forces. What did he care if George Brown caused an uproar on the floor of Parliament. The administration, if only through its public silence, claimed to support the British independent deterrent, while simultaneously condemning it to the Labour Party.

By the summer of 1962 the missile gap was no longer an issue. Skybolt was no longer needed to bolster Kennedy's image. Polaris and Minuteman were more than adequate for that. Additionally, the administration had clearly defined its policy toward Great Britain. Kennedy did not lead Macmillan astray concerning his military force objectives. However, the administration's perpetuation of Skybolt was beginning to emerge as an obstacle to greater goals, like nuclear non-proliferation, East-West stabilization and a second strike strategy. Likewise, Macmillan's insistence on a symbolic independent deterrent; a first strike strategy; and his resistance to the conventional buildup of NATO convinced many American policy makers that Macmillan's government was an obstacle to administration policy. The allies were at odds over military policy, but it is not completely evident that Skybolt had been specifically singled out as part of the effort to persuade Britain to relinquish its independent deterrent. What is evident is that some New Frontiersmen were frustrated that the British had not accepted their nuclear philosophy and were bringing pressure to bear.

Also, during early 1962, American officials believed they were making progress with the Soviet Union toward arms control. Kennedy viewed British defense plans, nuclear cooperation with France and prevention of a German nuclear force from the standpoint of how each countries actions would affect East-West relations. The administration was more concerned with efforts that would improve American-Soviet
relations than those which would improve alliance relations, because the former, the administration felt, would naturally improve the latter. The autumn of 1962 brought the realization, in the administration's eyes, that implementation of their policy was urgent.
In July 1962, before the Cuban crisis began, Kennedy instructed John McCone, Director of the CIA, Rusk, McNamara, and Lyman Lemnitzer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to assess Soviet responses to the U.S. military buildup. The following month, with National Security Action Memorandum - 181, Kennedy formally instructed the Pentagon to formulate action plans to get Jupiter missiles out of Turkey. Kennedy pondered whether European based missiles made any sense when ICBM’s in America and SLBM’s in the oceans covered Russian targets several times over. If these types of weapons did not help stabilize East-West tensions - or to the contrary destabilized them - were they worth keeping around? Did MRBM’s in Europe, even if partially controlled by other countries, raise the risk of miscalculation?

On two previous occasions over the past year, Kennedy moved to withdraw Jupiters from Turkey, but no progress had been made. Even though the agreement to place these missiles in Turkey had been reached during the Eisenhower administration, the missiles were just recently deployed. The Turks would probably be offended if the American government abruptly removed the missiles. Indeed, the Turkish government viewed the Jupiter missiles as symbolic of the nation’s international maturity. Although the Kennedy administration did not want to upset the Turkish government, it felt that a breach with Ankara was a price that could be paid to ease east-west tensions. Kennedy approved NSAM - 181 because he believed that the United States was unnecessarily

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provoking the Soviet Union. Indeed, the United States had the Soviet Union surrounded.\textsuperscript{146}

The day after NSAM - 181 was issued to McNamara, the Secretary of Defense secretly decided to cancel Skybolt. Earlier that summer, McNamara instructed Charles Hitch, Controller of the Pentagon and Harold Brown, Director of Defense Research and Engineering, to prepare separate reports on the Skybolt program. Both reports concluded that Skybolt was an unnecessary program. Nevertheless, their reports negated later claims that Skybolt was not technically attainable, judging that "... the risk that Skybolt will fail to work at all is very low; the risk that it will not be a highly reliable...system until the late 1960's is quite large."\textsuperscript{147} Indeed, McNamara confirmed that Skybolt would work when he later wrote Kennedy that four squadrons of Skybolt could be operational by the end of FY 1965 and that by mid-1967 the U.S. could have 704 Skybolt missiles on alert.\textsuperscript{148}

Hitch and Brown proposed to remove Skybolt from the upcoming defense budget that would be submitted to Congress in December.\textsuperscript{149} Concerned with the power of the air lobby on Capitol Hill, McNamara's men assumed that if Congress pushed for continuance of the program then Capitol Hill would have to justify the funds, during a year when Congress was questioning deficit spending and considering tax cuts. If costs continued to climb with the program, Congress would be the target of criticism, not the Pentagon. If the Administration pushed to spend more money to continue the program for

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another year, it would become increasingly harder to cancel in the future. Indeed, the Air Force was now asking McNamara for production funds. The Defense secretary liked the plan that his assistants presented him. The budget would not be submitted for nearly four months, making the plan more difficult to implement if there were early leaks. Therefore, McNamara released funds for the program on a month-to-month basis to allow development to continue. His actions let it be known that the program was under scrutiny, but he also gave the British and the Air Force the false impression that the missile was still headed for production. McNamara imposed secrecy in order to prevent the Air Force and Congress from gaining early knowledge of the decision. The men at Defense maintained McNamara’s secrecy. Brown and Hitch informed only Alain Enthoven, Hitch’s deputy, and John Rubel, Browns assistant, about the plan; both were told to keep silent.

What is not absolutely clear is how much McNamara’s cancellation of Skybolt was influenced by other, higher priority, administration goals. McNamara claims that the initiative to cancel the program came from the Defense Department. Even if this is true, it is hard to believe that he was acting completely independent of the efforts of State and the desires of the White House. After the crisis, but before Kennedy employed Neustadt, the White House completed two studies focused on the causes of the Skybolt crisis. Colonel Laurence Legere, a member of Bundy’s NSC staff, concluded that the State Department was primarily responsible for the cancellation, but David Klein, an NSC member with ties to the State Department, concluded that Defense was primarily responsible. Neustadt was then employed to sort things out. Regardless of which department was primarily responsible, McNamara’s decision coincided with arms limitation efforts and proposals to limit nuclear cooperation with Great Britain.

150 Ibid., 6.
151 Ibid., 9.
McNamara’s covert actions would fuel later claims, especially by the British, that the Kennedy administration was less than forthright about its reasons for canceling Skybolt. In September, McNamara met Peter Thorneycroft in Washington.154 The Secretary of Defense told his British counterpart that he was releasing production funds for Skybolt, but expressed concern over the program’s rising cost.155 This may have been McNamara’s way of hinting to the British Defense Minister that Skybolt was in trouble. However, Thorneycroft felt it natural for a missile program to experience such problems and discounted McNamara’s comments because the same reservations had been offered about Skybolt since its conception. During this trip, Thorneycroft told Kennedy and McNamara of Skybolt’s importance to the British and argued that the essence of the 1960 Camp David agreement was American support for the British deterrent. Thorneycroft returned to England believing that the United States was not “contemplating cancellation.”156 McNamara could have informed Thorneycroft of his intentions to cancel Skybolt as early as this visit which might have prevented the future crisis with Great Britain. If the decision was based solely on technical problems, then why should he have concealed his decision to cancel? McNamara knew his decision involved greater issues which would have ramifications on Anglo-American relations. Indeed, Roger Hilsman’s later account of the decision implied that McNamara knew the cancellation of Skybolt would cause the British to be “hit by a truck.”157 The Secretary of Defense also knew that Thorneycroft would oppose his decision and naturally publicize it to better his government’s position for a substitute. Such publication could impede administration efforts and cause

154 Peter Thorneycroft replaced Harold Watkinson as British Defense Minister in June of 1962.
the President discomfort. Therefore McNamara said nothing to Thorneycroft. Yet, McNamara chose to tell George Brown that the administration felt the British deterrent ridiculous. By telling Brown, McNamara gave ammunition to the Labor Party to use against the Tories in the debate over the independent deterrent. Clearly, McNamara chose who to divulge his secret to for strategic reasons.

It was more than a month after McNamara agreed with the Hitch and Brown plan before Paul Nitze in the International Security Affairs office, and the Science Advisory office of Dr. Wiesner were notified of the decision.\(^{158}\) Immediately word began to spread. However, shortly thereafter the administration substantiated that the Soviet Union was emplacing ballistic missiles ninety miles from the continental United States.

Most authors conclude that the Cuban problem diverted attention away from the Skybolt issue and was partially responsible for the inattention which later resulted in the Anglo-American crisis.\(^{159}\) However, it seems more likely that the October missile crisis strengthened administration opposition to Skybolt. Kennedy received his first intelligence reports of suspicious activity in Cuba in July of 1962 from McCone.\(^{160}\) However, it was October before the administration confirmed that the Soviet buildup in Cuba included ballistic missiles. The world came to the brink of nuclear war. The crisis ended with the Soviet Union peacefully withdrawing its missiles from Cuba. But the crisis also reinforced administration fears about the risks associated with multiple fingers on the nuclear button.

One of the first questions addressed by the EXCOMM was why Khrushchev was placing missiles in Cuba. Rusk, McCone, and others concluded that it was due to the administration’s boasting about American military might, Khrushchev’s acknowledgment


\(^{159}\) Theodore Sorensen commented about Skybolt - all problems seemed small after Cuba.

of this power, and the fact that the U.S. had nuclear weapons nearer to Russia than the Soviets had to the U.S. Kennedy empathized with Khrushchev's position. Khrushchev had earlier told Kennedy through Secretary of the Interior Stuart Udall that:

“A lot of people have been making a big fuss because we are giving aid to Cuba. But you are giving aid to Japan. Just recently I was reading that you have placed atomic warheads on Japanese territory and surely this is not something the Japanese need.” . . . but fools in airplanes do exist. I realize.....You have surrounded us with military bases.”

Averell Harriman and others urged Kennedy to consider removing the Jupiters from Turkey because they were humiliating to Soviet military leaders and might be puffing up the influence of hard-liners. During one EXCOMM meeting, Bundy and U. Alexis Johnson equated the placement of American missiles in Turkey and Britain to what Khrushchev was doing in Cuba. Bundy asked if America's allies “can live with Soviet MRBM's, why can't we?” Sorensen drafted a letter for Khrushchev inviting the Soviet leader to meet with Kennedy to discuss problems, “including, if you wish, the NATO bases in Turkey and Italy. Clearly some within the administration were ready to make concessions to the Soviets.

The Cuban crisis caused administration officials to fear that American missiles such as the Jupiters in Turkey could impede American or allied action in other parts of the world. McNamara and Bobby Kennedy argued that military action in Cuba could well lead the Soviets to take out the missiles in Turkey which would prompt a military response by NATO. What McNamara, the Attorney General and others feared was the possibility that future American global moves, although not intended to bring about nuclear war, could be stymied because of the Soviets' ability to threaten or even initiate nuclear response in European nations.

Another of McNamara's concerns, reinforced by the missile crisis, was the vulnerability of bomber based nuclear weapons. McNamara wrote:

The Skybolt system combines the disadvantages of the bomber with those of the missile. Being associated with the bombers, it shares their vulnerability on the ground. . . . The sudden appearance in Cuba of ballistic missiles capable of reaching all SAC bases with flight time so short as to make tactical warning based on detection of missile launchings practically unusable, and the recent appearance of a Soviet trawler, with a previous history of cable cutting, over our BMEWS (Ballistic Missile Early Warning System) cables, has underlined once again the undesirability of dependence on the tactical warning plus alert response mechanism for the protection of our strategic forces."

Not everyone agreed with McNamara's assessments. Skybolt's supporters

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166 McNamara, Robert S. Draft Memorandum For The President: "Recommended FY 1964-FY 1965 Strategic Retaliatory Forces (U)." 21 November 1962, Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense.

167 At the time of this writing, land based ICBM's are considered the most vulnerable strategic weapon.
liked the flexibility that manned bombers brought to warfare in the crisis-laden nuclear age. They argued that a plane could be airborne and invulnerable, ready for attack, but recalled at any point before a missile launch. Polaris, Minuteman and other such weapons could not be recalled once the initial decision had been made to launch. According to Air Force General Curtis E. LeMay, “You are either off the button and are at peace or you are on the button and you are at war...there is no loyalty to a missile.”168 LeMay served thirty-seven years in the United States military, twenty-three as a General Officer. Known as “old iron ass,” the cigar chewing bomber pilot was influential in designing new bombing strategies during the Second World War. He led the 305th bomber group in Europe against the Nazi’s and the 20th Air Force in the Pacific against the Japanese. It was in the Far East, during WW II, that LeMay had his first run in with McNamara who questioned his statistics and bombing assessments. LeMay was also influential in the implementation of the Berlin Airlifts of 1948. Undoubtedly, his greatest achievement was turning the Strategic Air Command into one of the most powerful military organizations in history. The mission of SAC was to provide constant bomber flights equipped with nuclear weapons heading toward the Soviet Union to drop their payloads unless recalled by command. This meant that SAC bombers were in the air at all times, which decreased their vulnerability on the ground and limited the time needed to initiate an attack after a command was given to do so.169 McNamara was much taken by SAC’s counterforce capability. According to Britain’s ambassador to the United States, David Ormsby-Gore, McNamara was “obviously awed by this organization himself.”170

system with sea based and bomber based nuclear weapons being the least vulnerable.


169 For information on the life and career of General Curtis LeMay see Thomas Coffey’s Iron Eagle and LeMay’s autobiography entitled Mission with LeMay.

170 Ian Clark, Nuclear Diplomacy And the Special Relationship: Britain’s Deterrent and America, 1957-1962 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 337. Interestingly throughout Schlesinger’s A Thousand Days, Air Force generals are the ones projected as always wanting a larger destructive force and a first strike policy. It is the
But Kennedy despised LeMay. "I don’t want that man near me again, he once said. Gilpatric told his assistants that Kennedy “ha[d] a kind of fit” when he heard LeMay’s name. McNamara and his assistants learned not to mention it. Although Kennedy viewed LeMay as the kind of military leader one needed in war time, he promoted LeMay from Vice Chief to Chief of the Air Force primarily to keep him from speaking about weaknesses in the President’s military policies.171

John Rubel recalls his first meeting with LeMay this way. After staring at each other for several minutes, LeMay asserted:

"The trouble is, there are too . . . many civilians messing around with military affairs they don’t know a . . . thing about. . . . I started RAND after the war to figure out what weapon systems were going to be needed by the fighting man. That’s what RAND was for. . . Now they want to tell us how to run a war. That’s what R&D is all about, to put weapons into the hands of the fighting man. The trouble is, the people who are supposed to do that don’t know anything about the needs of the fighting man. “172

LeMay was not oblivious to Skybolt’s problems. When Rubel quizzed LeMay about what he had in return for his $10 million dollar investment in Skybolt, LeMay admitted that Douglas Aircraft was not managing the program efficiently. Rubel left “feeling that Curtis LeMay wasn’t such a bad chap after all” and that he “was a tough

Air Force that grossly overestimated the Soviet strategic nuclear contingent, as if to threaten the American people and get their support for more and more. “Nor could one ever know what secret thoughts lay in the minds of Air Force generals when they urged bigger defense budgets.” See Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. _A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House_. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 501.

172 John Rubel. "On Skybolt and Related Matters, 5
manager and fierce advocate for the Air Force, especially for bomber forces and SAC." 173

It is true that the Skybolt program was mismanaged, at least initially. Both the Air Force and Douglas were criticized for mismanagement. During the year of Skybolt’s cancellation, Douglas officials denied, before the Permanent Investigations Subcommittee, that excessive profits had been made at the expense of the federal government. 174

Kennedy’s Secretary of the Air Force admitted that the program “wasn’t run well at outset.” But he also maintained that artificial ceilings were placed on research and development funds. Zuckert believed that the Air Force finally had the program on track, running efficiently and progressing during the spring before it was canceled. 175

LeMay and those who thought like him also favored Skybolt for other reasons. First, Skybolt represented the cutting edge of technology. Zuckert characterized Skybolt as the first in a very important line of weapons technology. 176

Undoubtedly, military breakthroughs, beneficial for the future, would be made during research and development for Skybolt. Furthermore, McNamara had just defeated the Air Force over the B-70 leading the Air Force to fear that the demise of Skybolt would further reduce bomber command. The United States Air Force and the Royal Air Force fought hard for programs like Skybolt because they did not wish to be confined in underground missile silos. In the early 1960’s, air generals fought against many civilian military strategists who saw the decline of the strategic bomber in the emerging missile age. Missiles like Minuteman and Bluestreak were placed under Air Force command, but airplanes played no part in the delivery of these weapons. Many bomber critics viewed the Polaris missile as a replacement for NATO aircraft which they argued would be susceptible to advanced Soviet

173 Ibid., 5.
174 Over the ten year period of 1952 - 1961, Douglas made $45.6 million dollars in profits from defense contracts.
176 Ibid., 80.
anti-aircraft weapons. Both Kennedy and McNamara viewed the airplane as a waning asset.\textsuperscript{177} Roger Hilsman, Kennedy's Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, said that "McNamara was trying to force the American Air Force away from manned bombers," when he canceled Skybolt.\textsuperscript{178} Many military officials agreed with those assessments. Charles Hitch, an avid opponent of Skybolt, maintains that "Skybolt was as much a way to keep the Air Force's manned bombers usefully employed as a way to improve the U.S. deterrent."\textsuperscript{179} More importantly, opponents of Skybolt associated it with the first-strike philosophy being pursued by the Air Force.

After the Cuban crisis, the U.S. expedited the removal of missiles from Turkey.\textsuperscript{180} Kennedy recognized that such missiles posed a political problem for Khrushchev; were unnecessary for the Western deterrent and were an unnecessary threat to the Soviets. How could the U.S. share nuclear weapons with the British, Turks and Italians and not expect the Soviets to share with the Cubans? Removal of the Jupiters in return for Soviet missile withdrawal from Cuba was not publicly revealed, but it was agreed to in secret correspondence between Kennedy and Khrushchev. Removing the Jupiters had been discussed during the EXCOMM meetings, but was not agreed to by all. For example, Paul Nitze argued against removing the Jupiters because "we cannot get into the position of selling out an ally... to serve our own interests."\textsuperscript{181}

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\item \textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 80.
\item \textsuperscript{178} Roger Hilsman. Interviewed by David Nunnerly, 26 January 1970, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program, JFKL, Boston MA, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{180} U.S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States. 1961 - 1963, Vol. 16, Eastern Europe: Cyprus; Greece; Turkey, Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, 1994, 735. On October 30, 1962, the Policy Planning Council addressed the problem of removing Turkish IRBM's "in light of recent developments." Objectives were to remove the missiles, but avoid the appearance that the Soviet withdraw form Cuba was not just a result of "our recently demonstrated will and ability."
\item \textsuperscript{181} Richard Reeves. President Kennedy: Profile of Power. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 415. Paul Nitze was one official who supported independent nuclear deterrents as long as they were tied to a common defense and under unified command, each country's deterrent acting like a "spoke" to the "wheel" supplied by the United States. Nitze's support for the British deterrent was due to his fear of Labourites leading the U.K. down the road to neutrality.
\end{itemize}
Kennedy, Macmillan expressed concern at the removal of Jupiters, calling such a move "demoralizing" to NATO. However, Macmillan did suggest the temporary "defusing" of the Thor missiles on British soil. Kennedy postulated that perhaps the Turks could be persuaded to make the suggestion of removing the Jupiters so that it would not appear as an American initiative.

Surprisingly, the Cuban Missile Crisis did not prove devastating to East-West relations. Kennedy told Soviet Ambassador Bolshakov that he believed "the outlook for American-Soviet relations is good." On October 30, 1962, Khrushchev wrote Kennedy stating that conditions were ripe for cessation of nuclear tests. Kennedy, responded favorably to Khrushchev through Norman Cousins, who was traveling to Moscow as an interpreter for Pope John XXIII. Kennedy told the Premier that he didn’t "think there’s any man in American politics who’s more eager than I am to put Cold War animosities behind us and get down to the hard business of building friendly relations." Khrushchev responded that the first step was outlawing nuclear weapons tests. "[T]hen we can start work on the problem of keeping those weapons from spreading all over the world." Indeed, Kennedy had just been through the crisis of his life and emerged from that crisis with renewed hope for disarmament. Additionally both superpower leaders agreed that the first steps toward disarmament began with halting the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

This chapter reveals several reasons for much that was happening in the political realm of the New Frontier. The Cuban crisis brought the world as close to nuclear war as

185 Bobby Kennedy continued the President’s message, meeting privately with Bolshakov and impressing upon him the importance that Khrushchev not embarrass his brother, adding that the President has enemies as well as friends in America. He wanted to meet Khrushchev halfway and he meant what he said about improving relations, but that each step he takes to meet Khrushchev halfway costs him politically at home. See Reeves, 347.
186 Norman Cousins was an anti-nuclear activist and an editor for the Saturday Review. For his account of this trip see Norman Cousins. The Improbable Triumvirate: John F. Kennedy, Pope John, Nikita Khrushchev (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972).
it had ever been, increasing fears of nuclear catastrophe brought about by miscalculation. After the Cuban crisis, the Kennedy administration seemed more willing to make concessions in order to ease the pressure on Khrushchev to act tough. The administration targeted European based missiles for elimination as well as the offensive strategy of the Air Force. Also, the increased possibility for disarmament, opened by the secret communication between Kennedy and Khrushchev, may have caused Kennedy to see himself as not only the free world's commander-in-chief, but also as the only man capable of bringing about disarmament with the Soviets.

Even if McNamara's decision to cancel Skybolt was engineered independently in the Pentagon, it promoted the realization of other administration goals and seemed more valid in the aftermath of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Kennedy accepted McNamara's decision to cancel Skybolt but allowed its handling to create distrust within the British desk at State Department, the United States Air Force, and among certain allies.

187 At a defense policy conference on Nov. 30, 1962, McNamara "suggested that if Europeans were insistent about nuclear status-symbols we should underwrite all costs of a multilateral nuclear force and free their funds for serious business, conventional forces." Richard E. Neustadt. Report to the President: "Skybolt and Nassau: American Policy Making and Anglo-American Relations," November 15, 1963, JFKL, National Security Files, Box 322, Staff Memoranda, Neustadt--Skybolt and Nassau, 58.
Chapter 5
Division and Alienation

The Cuban Missile Crisis distracted attention from the early developments in the Skybolt drama, but in no way is it an explanation for the "inattention" given to Skybolt. The administration had no coherent or viable plan as to how to deal with the British in the event of Skybolt's cancellation. Members of State, Defense and the NSC were at odds over administration policy. The president showed no resolve for stated policies, nor did he offer decisive leadership to change the direction of his policy. Rather, he allowed events to shape his decisions.

A week before the public announcement of missiles in Cuba, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric told the Budget Office, under pledge of secrecy, that McNamara was planning to cancel production of Skybolt. At the height of the crisis, David Bell sent a memo that was originally meant for the President, but ended up in the hands of Carl Kaysen, one of Bundy's assistants.188 This memo appears to have contained the first written expressions of concern, over the political consequences to Macmillan if Skybolt were canceled. On October 31, Kaysen talked with Nitze and asked the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, William Tyler, to produce a report about the political consequences of a Skybolt cancellation. On November 2, Tyler warned the White House that "[w]hatever our own feelings about the efficacy of [their] deterrent the British could hardly regard our canceling of Skybolt as a friendly gesture."189

By this time, Peter Thorneycroft, who had heard rumors of Skybolt's pending demise, attempted to get confirmation of the rumors from Rubel, who was in London for talks unrelated to Skybolt. Rubel could only say that the program was under review.\textsuperscript{190} Ironically, at the same time reports circulated that Douglas had received the first production orders for Skybolt. Thorneycroft cabled McNamara on November 5th expressing his pleasure at the news of production orders and stressed that Skybolt is "a central feature both of our defense policy and of our collaboration with you."\textsuperscript{191} Nitze's office drafted a reply for Thorneycroft which McNamara found unsatisfactory. On November 7, almost two weeks after the Cuban Missile Crisis had ended, McNamara, Rusk, Nitze, and Bundy, met to discuss the matter with Kennedy.\textsuperscript{192} Soviet IL-28's, which McNamara had insisted be withdrawn from Cuba because of their nuclear bomb carrying capability were still not removed.\textsuperscript{193} Indeed, it would be December before these planes were finally withdrawn.\textsuperscript{194}

During the meeting, Kennedy agreed with McNamara's proposal, stating that "[f]oreign policy considerations did not justify foregoing all that money." Rusk and McNamara warned the President that the cancellation might be serious enough to bring down the Tory Government, which is a far cry from later claims of incidental political overtones.\textsuperscript{195} The President decided to warn the British immediately and to consult with


\textsuperscript{195} Dean Rusk, Kennedy's Secretary of State, maintains in his biography that "Bob (McNamara) and I both felt it [Skybolt] was primarily a military matter with only incidental political overtones." Dean Rusk as told to Richard Rusk. As I Saw It. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), 6. George Ball, UnderSecretary of State, recalls that President Kennedy also felt that Skybolt was primarily a military matter to be handled by McNamara. George Ball. The Past Has Another Pattern: Memoirs. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company,
them after the Joint Chiefs had made their recommendations, so that it would not appear that the administration was leaving its military leadership out of the decision making process. This would help quiet claims that the administration was not sensitive to military opinion and that the philosophy of the "whiz kids" prevailed over military experience. The President, who was sympathetic to McNamara's concerns about the Air Force, suggested that secrecy could best be maintained by talking with David Ormsby-Gore, the British Ambassador. McNamara volunteered to call both Ormsby-Gore and Thorneycroft. He told the President and the Secretary of State, "I'll take care of it." If there was even a remote possibility that the political consequences of cancellation could cause the Tory government to fall, there would be ample justification for Rusk, or the President, to become immediately involved in the negotiations. McNamara departed from the White House as the man who would handle consultation with the British. The Secretary of State was to have little role in the upcoming negotiations.

Special Assistant to the President, Theodore Sorensen, wrote that Rusk "deferred almost too amiably to White House initiatives and interference." Rusk may have asked to play a role in the Skybolt cancellation yet it does not seem that he pushed for it. The President did not request Rusk's or the State Department's involvement in the early negotiations. Paul Nitze recalled recently that Dean Rusk was not heavily involved in the Skybolt discussions "[b]ecause Robert McNamara and I were more directly involved in the negotiations than was he." Yet at the time of this first meeting with the President, there had been no international discussions, only a cable from Thorneycroft to McNamara

1982), 263. McNamara recently supported Rusk's statement saying that the problem with the Skybolt was relatively simple, "The damn thing just wouldn't work," maintaining that he, President Kennedy and Rusk did not think that canceling Skybolt would cause the political problems that it did. Robert McNamara, Telephone interview with the author, 16 February 1994.


emphasizing Skybolt's importance. When later asked why President Kennedy did not become involved at an earlier date, Nitze recalled "that [Kennedy] preferred to leave it to McNamara."\(^{198}\)

Although, not as politically experienced as Rusk, McNamara's personality and stringent arguments allowed him to wield heavy influence over the president. Attorney General Bobby Kennedy was somewhat frightened by McNamara's influence with the president. He called McNamara "the most persuasive man in the cabinet," and demanded that his brother hear the views of others.\(^{199}\) Adam Yarmolinsky, one of McNamara's assistants at the time, attributes McNamara's extensive role in the Skybolt negotiations to his dominant personality.\(^{200}\) Rusk had not been as decisive, active and bold an adviser as McNamara during the Cuban Missile Crisis. According to Roswell Gilpatric, the President's confidence in McNamara increased following the Cuban missile crisis.\(^{201}\) Either way, the President's decision to rely on McNamara was evidence of his dislike for the State Department.

About the same time that Kennedy was meeting with McNamara, Rusk, Nitze and Bundy, Solly Zuckerman learned from Will Hawthorne that Skybolt was already canceled. Hawthorne was a British Professor of Engineering from Cambridge, who was serving a year as visiting professor at MIT and had friends in Washington, including Bundy and Schlesinger. Bundy confided in Hawthorne that Skybolt was as good as dead. In turn, Hawthorne told Zuckerman, who relayed the message to Thorneycroft and the following day told Bundy and others that if Skybolt were canceled, "the heart of their [British] problem became our substitute."\(^{202}\)

\(^{200}\) Yarmolinsky, Adam. Taped telephone interview with the author, 30 March 1994.
International discussions about Skybolt's potential termination got underway when McNamara contacted David Ormsby-Gore on November 8 to bring him up to date on America's position on the Skybolt program. Historian Ian Clark writes that McNamara told Ormsby-Gore that Polaris was an alternative that the U. S. would be willing to supply. Greatly disturbed about Skybolt's cancellation, the British Ambassador sent a cable to Thorneycroft. Thorneycroft later claimed that he immediately "rang up McNamara and asked him for Polaris," telling him "that from the military point of view Polaris was the only answer," reminding him "of the rumpus that was going to take place but anything short of that would then be very troublesome." But, the next day McNamara apparently called Thorneycroft to tell him that the final decision on Skybolt would not be made until around December 10. During this conversation Thorneycroft asked for an advanced memorandum stating America's views on a substitution. McNamara has never confirmed that Thorneycroft asked him for Polaris. The most he has offered is that Thorneycroft may have asked about Polaris and that he told Thorneycroft there would be legal problems with such a deal. McNamara wrote to Kennedy later in November that "[t]here is concern that the recent announcement of the U.K. decision to phase-out the Thor system has increased the British dependence on Skybolt," but also suggested the possibility of providing a less expensive means for Great Britain achieving the same

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deterrent. Two things about this statement need to be clarified. First, Polaris was far more expensive than was Skybolt. Second, the British “decision” to “phase out the Thor system” resulted from the Kennedy administration’s refusal to continue paying for the maintenance of that system.

The day after speaking with Ormsby-Gore and Thorneycroft, McNamara instructed Nitze’s office to begin work on alternatives for the British. The men in the ISA office compiled four alternatives, the Hound Dog missile; a takeover of Skybolt development; Polaris technology; or participation in a multilateral MRBM force. This same day Tyler sent a memorandum to Rusk to update him on the study he had done for Kaysen on 02 November. Tyler asked Rusk, after updating the Secretary of State on his warning to the White House, if there was anything that he should be doing in relation to the Skybolt matter. Rusk replied “No, I’m in touch with McNamara and the President.” Members of State waited for instruction, but meanwhile contemplated how the decision to cancel Skybolt could further other objectives. For J. Robert Schaetzel and his office, the demise of the British independent deterrent (this is how he viewed the cancellation because the NSD of April 21, 1961, signed by the President confirmed that the U.S. would not bolster the British deterrent beyond the Skybolt arrangement) meant easier British entry into the EEC. Henry Owen, Walt Rostow’s Deputy in the Policy Planning Council, and Robert Bowie, a part-time consultant, were both devoted to a multilateral solution to European nuclear problems and regarded the cancellation of Skybolt as an unforeseen opportunity to

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210 The International Security Affairs office within the Pentagon operated in a policy formulating capacity and was referred to by some as the “little state department.” Townsend Hoopes argues in The Limits of Intervention that the ISA’s role was magnified during the McNamara era due to the secretary’s preeminent role in foreign affairs and military strategy.


212 Ibid., 25.

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push the MLF on which they had been working. Jeffrey Kitchen and his assistant Seymour Weiss hoped for a continuation of Skybolt, favoring, as did Rusk, the special Anglo-American relationship until something better came along. These men did not disagree with Schaetzel, Bowie and Owen, but felt that there was no need to pursue such objectives rashly. The men at State were adrift, lost in their own tasks, individually contemplating what the Skybolt decision meant to them.

On November 12, McNamara instructed Nitze’s office to send America’s Ambassador to Great Britain, David Bruce, a cable bringing him up to date on the Skybolt situation. Bruce received this cable through military, not State Department channels. Bruce recalls that this was the first cable in his memory to reach “him “eyes only” from another Secretary other than Rusk through channels other than the State Department’s.” A copy of this cable was sent to Dean Rusk who, for some unknown reason, did not share it with other members of the State Department. McNamara’s notification of Bruce was not necessarily improper, but caused confusion, which in Neustadt’s words, “immobilized” Bruce. Raymond Courtney, one of Bruce’s aides, pressured the ambassador to respond to McNamara. Bruce did so on November 21, with an “eyes only” cable sent to the Secretary of State. The message suggested giving the British as much advance notice as possible if Skybolt were to be discontinued. Bruce repeated this warning several days later in another “eyes only” cable sent priority to Rusk.

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214 The State Department’s office of Politico-Military Affairs handled defense related issues.
216 Ibid., 21; 54-55.
217 David K. Bruce. Eyes Only For Secretary From Bruce, EMBTEL 1928, 3 December 1962, Papers of Richard E. Neustadt, Box 19, JFKL, 1.
On November 11 Thorneycroft informed Macmillan about his conversation with McNamara and four days later Macmillan cabled Ormsby-Gore to verify negotiation procedures with the President. The Prime Minister proposed, and Kennedy agreed, that there would be no press leaks and no decision before consultation, and that consultation should occur soon. Macmillan also instructed Ormsby-Gore to ask Kennedy if he should call the president directly. It took Ormsby-Gore a week to respond to his prime minister. When he did, Ormsby-Gore advised that a direct call was premature because Kennedy had not gotten deep into the issue, but planned to over Thanksgiving in Massachusetts. After the crisis Kennedy said “He [Macmillan] should have warned me of the dangers to him. We could have come up with a solution before publicity.”

Macmillan has responded strongly, asking why Kennedy did not call him. Neustadt has suggested that “the phone did not appear a proper vehicle [for Macmillan], nor was the timing right, not when the man who should have spoken first had chosen for some reason to employ the author of Ann Arbor as his spokesman.” Macmillan seems to have felt that Kennedy was obligated to offer a substitute for Skybolt instead of expecting Macmillan to ask for one. Also, Macmillan, unlike George Brown, was not privy to the fact that McNamara’s speech against independent deterrents included British plans for Skybolt. This lack of communication was peculiar for two individuals that put their private line to use quite frequently, especially the month before, during the Cuban crisis.

Ormsby-Gore’s behavior also remains a mystery. He and Kennedy were personal friends and Ormsby-Gore had easier access to the president than some administration

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220 Bruce, David. Incoming Telegram from London to the Secretary of State, NO: 2106, December 6, 1962, Noon, 3.
officials. The British ambassador became visibly upset when McNamara informed him of Skybolt’s pending demise and Ormsby-Gore reiterated to Kennedy the importance of Skybolt to the British. If, as Neustadt claims, McNamara, Rusk and Kennedy had never been disposed to withhold an agreement on Polaris if necessary then the crisis could have been avoided by simply reassuring Macmillan, through Ormsby-Gore, enabling him to tone down his exasperated attacks. Rusk has commented that Ormsby-Gore “had a knack of getting in the British views at the early stages, so we took them into account before we came to a final conclusion.” Bundy reveals that Ormsby-Gore’s position was not always the same as British governments. Perhaps Ormsby-Gore’s report on Skybolt, which remains classified, will explain his behavior when it is opened to researchers.

On November 20 the Joint Chiefs of Staff, excepting the newly appointed Chairman Maxwell Taylor, recommended that the Skybolt program be continued. McNamara was now ready to proceed with his own force structure proposal for the president. In this proposal McNamara told Kennedy that “[o]ne of the most frequently used arguments for Skybolt is that ‘it extends the usefulness of the manned bomber,’” by performing defense suppression. McNamara argued that the Air Force already had a weapon for defense suppression which could perform the task at less cost.

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221 Bundy says that Ormsby-Gore recognized his privileged status and tried not to abuse it.
225 This report is located at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library in Austin Texas. The file location is NSF, Subject File, Skybolt, Box 45, document 2b, report “Brought in by Lord Harlech (Ormsby-Gore) in June of 1964.
227 Defense suppression referred to destroying enemy anti-aircraft capability to allow bombers to easily penetrate enemy territory to release more accurate gravity bombs.
228 McNamara was referring to the Hound Dog missile which was not ballistic and had a range of only 500 miles as compared to Skybolt’s range of 1000 miles.
then attacked strategic bombers stating that “[t]he appropriate objective for the design of our strategic retaliatory force is to be able to destroy the required number of targets at a minimum cost; it is not to prolong the lives of particular weapon systems beyond the point at which their continued operation is no longer compatible with that objective.”229 In the same memorandum McNamara informed the President that Air Force proposals were designed to achieve a first strike capability, but he also offered that “[o]f course, any force designed primarily for a controlled second-strike . . . will inevitably have in it to an important degree a first-strike capability.” He asked the president to base his decision on “whether [U. S.] forces should be augmented beyond what” he recommended “in an attempt to achieve a capability to start a thermonuclear war,” as if the first strike capability sought by the Air Force was synonymous with an unprovoked surprise attack.230 It seems that one reason McNamara recommended cancellation of Skybolt was to punish the Air Force which was trying to sustain a “waning asset” and pursue a first strike capability inconsistent with administration views.

Kennedy agreed with McNamara’s proposal. The president, like the secretary of defense, viewed the strategic role of a weapons system as a key consideration when choosing between a number of them. Kennedy preferred weapons “which could survive an attack against the system which might provoke one.”231 McNamara argued that Skybolt was vulnerable on the ground and invited surprise attacks. Kennedy's aversion to Jupiter Missiles in Turkey and Italy was based on this same premise. The Thor missiles in Britain

229 McNamara, Robert S. Draft Memorandum For The President. "Recommended FY 1964-FY 1965 Strategic Retaliatory Forces (The United States already had a non-ballistic missile for defense suppression called Hound Dog which was similar to Skybolt, but had a shorter range.


were viewed as first strike weapons because, like the Jupiters, they had limited second strike capability. Kennedy also opposed a first strike strategy. Skybolt was an offensive weapon being developed when the administration was de-emphasizing the strategic offensive. Across the Atlantic in late 1962, Britain still held to the first use of nuclear weapons. Macmillan even referred to a second strike as an act of “posthumous revenge.” Neustadt suggests, that in the British view Skybolt’s “effectiveness” required only that the Soviets should fear it might hit somewhere in a city.” “British claims to status as a nuclear power, in possession of an independent nuclear deterrent, were . . . mortgaged to Skybolt, not as a weapon of defense suppression but as the means of mounting an attack.” Kennedy viewed Britain's independent deterrent as a “piece of military foolishness.” Given these facts, it is difficult to be as assured as some that Skybolt was canceled solely on technical and financial grounds.

By late November, the administration had given the Joint Chiefs an opportunity to express their views, so that it could now cancel the program without appearing to have violated protocol, when in fact McNamara had implemented civilian control by excluding the military. At Hyannis Port on November 23, Kennedy officially canceled Skybolt. However, Kennedy seemed to have forgotten the procedural agreement he had made with Macmillan a week earlier. There is no evidence that he relayed Macmillan’s concerns to

232 Limited strike capability meant that an enemy first strike could wipe out these missiles before there was a chance to retaliate. Therefore in order to be truly effective the missiles would have to be launched in a first strike.
237 McGeorge Bundy, interviewed by Dr. David Nunnerly 30 January 1970, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program, JFKL, Boston MA,
those persons who had attended the Hyannis Port meeting. Neustadt implies that Kennedy took it for granted that such procedures would be followed because they mirrored his own instructions at the November 7 meeting. During the meeting Wiesner attempted to discuss the British problem, but was cut short by Bundy, who moved to other business. This may have resulted in a missed opportunity for someone like the President to instruct McNamara to consult the British immediately. There may have been another reason why Wiesner may have been cut short. Perhaps the Skybolt decision had become even more complex. Much of the discussion that day still concerned Cuba. In fact, Soviet IL-28 bombers still remained on the Caribbean island. Only four days earlier Kennedy threatened through easily intercepted NATO channels that the U. S. might destroy the Soviet planes with an air strike if they were not removed. The following day Khrushchev claimed that Kennedy had not mentioned bomber aircraft during their October correspondence. The Soviet Premier called the planes obsolete and scoffed at them being classified as offensive weapons. Had Khrushchev, whether intentionally or not, caused someone in EXCOMM to equate the intended sale of Skybolt, which was intended to perpetuate the obsolete Vulcan bomber force, to the Soviet bombers in Cuba just as the Soviet missiles in Cuba had been equated to American missiles in Turkey? Of course, this interpretation is pure conjecture, but it is not outrageous to assume that this comparison was mentioned and that if it was then it reinforced Kennedy’s approval of McNamara’s Skybolt decision. What is clearly known is that Khrushchev ordered the removal of the planes in return for the lifting of the Cuban quarantine which consequently Kennedy immediately ordered.

The same day as the Hyannis Port decision, Rowen met with Owen, Weiss, Bowie and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Atlantic Affairs, J. Robert Schaetzel.


Rowen had been instructed by Nitze to address the political issues surrounding the cancellation, and he sought advice from the State Department in order to do so. There is no evidence to suggest that McNamara instructed his assistants to consult the State Department, but such instruction was probably not warranted because it was standard operating procedure. Rowen sought State’s advice for several reasons. First, one of the four initial proposals suggested two weeks earlier involved British involvement in a multilateral MRBM force and Rowen knew that several members of the European desk had been hard at work on this issue.240

Another reason that Rowen sought State’s advise was a memorandum signed by Rusk and sent to McNamara earlier in September. The memorandum urged McNamara to “hold to existing policies in discussions with Defense Minister Thorneycroft.”241 The memorandum which was part of the effort to implement the National Security Directive of April 21, 1961, and originated in the office of Schaetzel, but had taken three months to get dispersed.242 In the memo, Rusk urged McNamara not to “foreshadow any curtailment” of the special relationship because of political developments and EEC negotiations, suggesting that the special relationship would be curtailed after Britain entered the EEC. Rusk presented States’ opposition to sharing Polaris technology with England, adding that if the British requested submarine technology then they should be offered hunter-killer subs. Rusk sent Bundy a copy of this memo, apprising the White House of the direction State wished to pursue in the upcoming talks.243 No one from the White House intervened to

suggest that administration policy was any different than what was stated in this letter.

Neustadt’s report suggests that the content was not Rusk’s, only the signature, causing McNamara and Nitze to ignore the letter. However, Rowen, who did not ignore the letter, sought States advice. Like the NSC directive of April 21, 1961, this letter is very interesting because it explicitly states that United States policy was opposed to extending the special relationship with an offer like Polaris. Additionally, Rowen had received word from Bundy and Legere of the NSC that a substitution of Polaris would be out of the question from the White House perspective. Rusk also suggested that he had instructed Tyler and his staff “to be in touch with your staff” about a review of nuclear collaboration with the British It is unknown if Tyler proceeded with this request, but the first opportunity for interdepartmental review came the same day of the Hyannis Port decision.

The British desk at the State Department was furious when it learned from Rowen that sharing Polaris with the British was on the table for discussion. Weiss suggested that negotiations would probably end up with Polaris, even though it had been moved to fourth place on the list of alternatives. Weiss recalls: “You’d have thought that I’d called Christ an atheist in a room full of bishops” when the suggestion was made about discussions ending with Polaris. The European Affairs Office feared that the sharing of Polaris would keep the British out of the EEC, destroy the chances for a multilateral force and cause other European countries, especially the Germans, to seek individual deterrents. If that was not

245 Ibid., 24. Rowen was co-author of McNamara’s Athens speech and a staunch supporter of counterforce-no cities, the McNamara doctrine of targeting nuclear weapons at military installations and sparing population centers.
enough, the office also learned from Rowen that Rusk was not to have an active role in the negotiations. After hearing all of this, Rowen suggested that the State Department present its case for alternatives to Defense, which State did on 24 November in another letter signed by Rusk. States alternatives were British continuation of Skybolt, substitution of Hound Dog, and “participation in a sea-based MRBM force under multilateral manning and ownership.” Rusk’s letter stated explicitly that during talks with Thorneycroft it should be made clear that there is no possibility of US support of setting up a nationally manned and owned UK MRBM force.  

The last week of November and the first week of December were filled with conflicting information about Skybolt and the upcoming negotiations between Kennedy and Macmillan. On November 27, the White House and Admiralty House announced that President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan would meet in Nassau on December 19. Having heard nothing from Washington, Macmillan assumed that Skybolt would be the primary topic of discussion. On November 28 the London Daily Express reported that a State Department lobby was trying to strike down the British independent deterrent with the cancellation of Skybolt. The next day papers in Washington reported on a fifth straight test failure of the Skybolt missile.  

On November 28 Rowen suggested that McNamara send an advance party of Nitze and Rubel to precede McNamara’s arrival. McNamara again said “I’ll take care of it.” Thorneycroft never received the advance memorandum that he had requested from McNamara. Many people including Weiss and Kitchen at State, Brown and Rowen at

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250 George Ball. The Past Has Another Pattern. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 263.
252 Ibid., 59.
253 Ibid., 56.
Defense, and Bundy at the White House were uneasy about McNamara’s procrastination. Yet no one intervened. On November 30, the British *Daily Telegraph* reported that news from Washington said that Skybolt development would continue despite the test failures. On December 2, Henry Brandon reported that opponents of Skybolt were gaining ground within the administration. On December 3, the British got the word that McNamara would come to London for talks with Thorneycroft on December 11. The next day, Hitch informed the military services that Skybolt was eliminated from the budget. During these first few days of December, Gilpatric and Ormsby-Gore discussed keeping the Skybolt program alive until EEC negotiations were clarified, implying that the program was not dead. On December 5, 1962, two days before the public announcement of Skybolt’s demise, Dean Acheson, the primary author of the directive opposing the British deterrent, spoke at West Point. The former Secretary of State said that Great Britain had “lost” an “[e]mpire and has not yet found a role.” Acheson said that the ties that existed between Britain and the Commonwealth were on shaky ground and about to end. He denounced the role that Great Britain was trying to play as “broker” between the United States and the Soviet Union. Acheson asserted that England “seemed to conduct a policy as weak as its military power.” This speech created an uproar in England and represented, in British eyes, another example of the lack of American resolve to aid Britain in her quest for an independent deterrent. On December 7, newspapers announced the cancellation of the Skybolt missile program, three days before the earliest date that the United States Secretary of Defense had told the British Defense Minister that such a decision would be made. After cancellation, the British Press, and some British

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254 Ibid., 59, 52, 53.
government officials, accused the United States of deliberately canceling Skybolt to force an end to their "independent" deterrent. However, Solly Zuckerman informed London that McNamara had again suggested Polaris as an alternative during a meeting on December 9. Although McNamara suggested that there may be some difficulty in supplying Polaris, Zuckerman departed believing that McNamara was determined to be helpful.

The day before McNamara departed for London, Rusk, Bundy and the President met with McNamara in the Oval Office to hear the Defense Secretary summarize the proposals to be offered to Thorneycroft the following day. There is considerable disagreement about who prepared this aide-memoire. Neustadt maintains throughout his report that its substance represented views from both State and Defense. However, Adam Yarmolinsky claims that he prepared the aide-memoire by himself, recalling talking with some of Harold Brown's assistants in DDR&E. But he does not recall consulting "with [Henry] Harry Rowen or any of the ISA people." Yarmolinsky sent the completed memo to George Ball for review. Ball suggested some changes in wording and may have delegated this duty to other people.

Regardless of its author, the aide memoire did not contain an offer of Polaris and its content was nearly identical to the November 24


259 McGeorge Bundy. "Last Conversation with the President before NATO meeting of December 1962, 13 December 1962, Papers of Richard E. Neustadt, JFKL, POF, Box 19, 1.


262 John Rubel "On Skybolt and Related Matters." Kaysen flew to India with the Harriman mission looking into the war between India and China before the Hyannis Port meeting removing him from the Skybolt stage.
proposals from State. Neustadt implies that McNamara proceeded with the three
alternatives that Rusk signed with "fingers crossed" because he felt that the President
wanted him to give them [the State Department] a crack at what they wanted,263
(underscore is Neustadt's) even though the men in the oval office were supposedly not
opposed to sharing Polaris. It is clear that McNamara doubted that the British would
respond favorably to any of the alternatives, but headed to London armed only with States
proposal and the President's approval.264

During this meeting Rusk pushed for greater U.S. assistance to help the British
meet the costs of Skybolt.265 This seems to be the first time that Rusk spoke his own
mind. Earlier on November 6, Rusk had agreed with the president and McNamara that the
savings that Skybolt's cancellation represented outweighed "foreign policy considerations."
Now he was arguing the opposite point. Perhaps Rusk sensed the upcoming crisis.
President Kennedy denied his request still not wishing to spend valuable resources on a
weapon that only the British would use.266 Also, if the program were continued,
questions would be raised about the technical unfeasibility of Skybolt and if the missile
proved successful, then questions would arise about the administrations wisdom in
abandoning it.

During this meeting Kennedy also instructed McNamara to open the talks at the
NATO ministerial meeting with emphasis on "directing the attention of Mediterranean
NATO members away from the existing obsolescent missile system and toward better
arrangements." In other words, McNamara was to discuss the removal of Jupiter Missiles

263 Richard E. Neustadt. Report to the President: "Skybolt and Nassau: American Policy Making and Anglo-
American Relations," November 15, 1963, JFKL, National Security Files, Box 322, Staff Memoranda, Neustadt-
Skybolt and Nassau, 61.
264 McGeorge Bundy. "Last Conversation with the President before NATO meeting of December 1962, 13
December 1962, Papers of Richard E. Neustadt, JFKL, POF, Box 19, 1.
265 On November 30, Jeffrey Kitchen and Seymour Weiss, in the Office of Politico-Military Affairs, wrote
Rusk "searching for a way back to the status quo," which in their minds was Skybolt. Neustadt, 57.
266 McGeorge Bundy. "Last Conversation with the President before NATO meeting of December 1962, 13
December 1962, Papers of Richard E. Neustadt, JFKL, POF, Box 19, 2.

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from Turkey and Italy. The president and his advisers agreed that any arrangement to remove those missiles would be a step forward for the Alliance. McNamara planned to point out to the Italians and Turks that the Cuban experience had convinced the administration "how dangerous these soft, vulnerable, first-strike weapons are." 267

Almost five weeks had passed since McNamara had spoken to Thomeycroft on the telephone and very little interaction between the two governments had occurred since then. Historian Ian Clark concludes that British silence in the matter was sinister. Thomeycroft, he says, had given up on Skybolt in early November in favor of Polaris. Macmillan also favored Polaris but wished to keep Skybolt afloat for a year or more to quell parliamentary political attacks. Both increased the pressure on the American administration to better their own odds at influencing Kennedy's decision. The best way to do this was join the chorus that claimed the decision was abrupt and part of a scheme to force Britain out of the nuclear club. Clark claims that there is no evidence from British archives to suggest that the decision to cancel Skybolt came as a surprise to the Tory government. As a matter of fact, American officials outside of the Air Force had never assured them of success and the British never doubted the possibility of cancellation. 268 McNamara was not even convinced that the British would honor their deal to buy Skybolt if the missile had been produced. 269

On December 11, four days after Skybolt's cancellation was reported in the press, Robert McNamara flew to London to meet with Peter Thomeycroft. McNamara reportedly waited until December 11 to meet with Thomeycroft because the NATO meeting in Paris began December 12 and he thought it would be "a waste" to lose a day by making two trips instead of one. 270 On the plane, McNamara told Rubel that he had a card up his sleeve

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267 Ibid., 2.
269 Ibid.
(Polaris) but he was going to make Thorneycroft ask for it. Upon arrival, McNamara made a statement referencing the technical difficulties, test problems and rising costs that Skybolt was experiencing. Three days earlier, George Ball warned McNamara not to say anything publicly that might suggest any failures in the Skybolt tests and that talking to the press before meeting with Thorneycroft would violate protocol.

The meeting, which took place later that day, did not resolve the matter. During this meeting, Thorneycroft got the feeling that Skybolt was going to be canceled and McNamara was not going to offer him anything in return. He told McNamara that this would have grave consequences. Would a British government ever trust America in defense dealings again? Thorneycroft later claimed that he was not sure whether McNamara understood the political implications surrounding the cancellation, but still “took the opportunity of explaining to him [McNamara] in no uncertain terms what was necessary...he understood what we were talking about.” From earlier discussions, McNamara certainly understood the political implications as well, but his hands were tied by the aide-memoire which instructed him on what to offer, even though he was not personally opposed to sharing Polaris. By this time, Rusk too, was not personally opposed to Polaris, but for a different reason. He was concerned about breaking ties with Britain at a time when America’s relationship with other European countries was suffering. Influenced largely by DeGaulle, many European countries questioned America’s resolve to defend their continent with nuclear weapons. They also questioned the soundness of NATO’s conventional buildup and hesitated to contribute to it at the rate requested by Washington. Indeed, the growing nationalist sentiments of some European countries bolstered attacks, led by DeGaulle, against American hegemony on the continent.

271 Ibid., 62.
272 George Ball. The Past Has Another Pattern. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 264.
274 Ibid., 18.
Therefore, Rusk felt it wise to sustain the “special relationship” to have somebody to talk to in the world.”

Thorneycroft maintains that McNamara’s brief not offering Polaris stemmed primarily from a decision of the State Department contrived to force the British to relinquish their deterrent.” There is no denying that some officials within the State Department saw Skybolt’s cancellation as an unforeseen opportunity to pursue this objective. However, they were not acting outside of administration policy. As Neustadt wrote, they all had a hunting license signed by the President. Bundy maintains that Kennedy knew of State Department efforts to pressure Britain. Kennedy did not believe that their efforts were going to work, but neither did he attempt to stop them. During the meeting, Thorneycroft sought “a categorical assurance that the United States was in favor of the independent British nuclear deterrent, which McNamara refused to give. The British government was not the only one being sly. Kennedy, McNamara and Rusk may have all felt that Polaris would be offered if nothing else would suffice, but they were not unwilling to pursue a questionable proposal. In fact they hoped that the British would accept a lesser substitute. By being less than candid with the British on alternatives and allowing events to determine policy, they were largely responsible for the atmosphere of betrayal that enveloped negotiations.

John Rubel recalls that Thorneycroft’s tone at this meeting evoked “images of the

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most dire betrayal.” Rubel reflected at the time on Thorneycroft’s “skill” at making the Americans feel “guilty” and “obligated.”

McNamara remembers headlines of betrayal on the afternoon of December 11. These may have resulted from press comments on McNamara’s airport statement, but the specifics of the headlines made McNamara conclude that British officials had immediately leaked to the press those details which had been discussed earlier that day. The fear in much of Tory Britain was that Skybolt was gone and the United States was not going to offer a substitution. The British knew from policy statements coming out of Washington that the administration opposed independent deterrents and stressed centralized nuclear decision making in Washington. The only way the British could be calmed was if President Kennedy assured them. Those assurances never came.

During a news conference on foreign and domestic affairs on Dec. 12, 1962, Kennedy was asked if Skybolt is canceled what role could Britain play in mutual atomic defenses. The President answered that, "well I think it would play a significant role as a nuclear power." Next, he next bashed Skybolt saying that "it requires the most advanced engineering and of course, it has been really, in a sense, a kind of engineering that is beyond us." The President then questioned Skybolt’s cost; called all five test flights unsuccessful; and questioned how much it was worth to the British and the U.S. to put that much money into the program when both countries have competing claims for available funds. Kennedy went on to say Skybolt would be discussed in Nassau and “the U.S., which [was] reviewing its budget, [would] make no final decision until these conferences”

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281 The Sunday Telegraph in London mocked the special relationship with a humorous remake of an old Christmas song. “On the upteenth day near Christmas, the U.S. sent to me - 12 Reappraisals, 11 Compromises, 10 Tactless statements, 9 Faint denials, 8 Fervent cliché’s, 7 Goodwill gestures, 6 Big bland smiles, 5 Unprintable things, 4 apologies, 3 sick jokes, 2 words of cheer, and a De-Fence Secretary.” Richard Reeves. President Kennedy: Profile of Power. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 439 Another cartoon of a less humorous note showed Macmillan having the chair pulled out from under him on three different occasions by America, Skybolt, Suez, and Anti-colonialism. The caption read “Maybe its time to give our special position with America an agonizing reappraisal.”
On December 15 the lead editorial in the Washington Post attacked the Kennedy administration's handling of the British. American papers were beginning to respond to the Skybolt cancellation taking a pro-British stance, putting pressure on the Kennedy Administration, which was very sensitive to press criticism. One powerful newspaper editor called on Kennedy to voice support for the British. Kennedy, who was said to be very aware of "British friends" in America knew that a public breach with Britain would not come cheap at home. Kennedy was also worried about Eisenhower's reaction to the decision, since Ike was particularly supportive of the Anglo-American special relationship. Kennedy had always felt that although Eisenhower's approval for his actions was not necessary, his public disapproval would be devastating.

The NATO meeting, during which McNamara discussed the removal of Jupiters from Turkey and Italy, began in Paris on December 12 and adjourned December 15. On the next day, McNamara returned to Washington and headed straight for the White House accompanied by Roswell Gilpatric and others from the Pentagon. The highest ranking official representing the State Department was George Ball. Both McNamara and Rusk attended the NATO conference in France, yet Rusk did not accompany McNamara to London. After the NATO meeting, while McNamara and others flew to Washington to talk with President Kennedy about the deteriorating situation in Anglo-American relations, Rusk flew to Lisbon to discuss bases in the Azores.

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286 Bundy, McGeorge. Memorandum of Conversation, December 13, 1962. "Last Conversation with the President before the NATO meeting of December 1962, JFKL, POF, Staff Memoranda, Neustadt Papers, Box 19, 1-2.
Yarmolinsky was asked by McNamara to accompany him to this meeting. Afterwards, McNamara told Yarmolinsky that he would suggest proposing Polaris at the Nassau meeting because he recalled a requirement in the original agreement that Skybolt would be assigned to NATO. Yarmolinsky thought McNamara's assumption was false, but was assured by Gilpatric that McNamara had it right. Yarmolinsky assumed it was he who was not fully informed, since he had not actually been in the meeting with the President, and he did not question the assumption. McNamara, it seems, now believed that sharing Polaris technology tied to NATO would just be a swap of one NATO weapon for another.287

Five days after his last news conference, and the day after being briefed by McNamara about the London meeting with Thorneycroft, Kennedy blasted Skybolt in a prerecorded television interview responding to accusations by the Douglas Company that Skybolt had met only with successes. He admitted that "the British feel very strongly about" the program, but added that "we don't think that we are going to get $2.5 billion worth of national security" from Skybolt, basically discounting the missile and sealing its fate five days after saying that no decision would be made before the Nassau meeting.288 It is interesting that this interview was scheduled for one hour, but Kennedy insisted on filming for an hour and 35 minutes so that he and his advisors could edit what he did not like.289 Because the interview was not live, it is safe to assume that questions which Kennedy did not wish to respond to were not asked. A question concerning Skybolt was asked, presumably at Kennedy's request. The president responded by discrediting the missile, knowing full well that his comments could impede upcoming negotiations. He could have allowed the question, but only replied that due to impending negotiations he

would rather not comment. He also could have utilized the editing session to omit or rephrase his answer. The president chose not to. McGeorge Bundy had commented on the television show, *Meet the Press*, the day before that the U.S. had no “fixed obligation” to the British. The administration was thus sending conflicting and confusing messages to the British as well as discrediting a system which the British had been told that they could continue with American help if they so desired. The public interviews were sending an entirely different message. McNamara questioned why the British would want a system that would not work and that was being rejected by the U.S., although his own report to Kennedy stated that the missile would work. It seems that the administration felt that they could best seal the programs coffin, while at the same time influencing Britain’s position at the upcoming meeting by publicly discounting the system. Indeed, Neustadt writes how the Presidents televised remarks were later “amplified in telling fashion” when the budget went to Congress so that the “cancellation now appeared in context of the deficit.”

Just before the Nassau meeting, there was still no shared sense of direction within the administration. Kennedy’s ambassadors and advisors sent warnings and opinions from around the globe. Seymour Weiss, from the office of politico-military affairs, wrote that “While at some point in time a direct confrontation with British on subject of their maintaining independent nuclear force might be unavoidable clearly this is not the time best calculated from US point of view to accomplish our objectives.” Evidently such confrontation was being discussed or Weiss would have had no reason to suggest that the time was not right. Weiss suggested that two variations of a Polaris proposal might be consistent with stated administration policy. The British could participate to some degree in the political control of America’s Polaris force or they could purchase Polaris missiles if

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291 Ibid., 111.
292 Weiss, Seymour. Draft Cable For The Secretary, REF: A 2195, 13 December, 1962, 1.
they committed them to a MLF manned immediately by multi-national crews. Another proposal in this memorandum was that “senior politic-military team of US and UK officials” meet in Washington to review alternatives and attempt to reach a mutual agreement. Weiss speculated that such an agreement may be concluded in Nassau but in all likelihood it would take longer. America’s newly appointed ambassador to France, Charles Bohlen, also argued against the substitution of Polaris. Bohlen saw the issue as one of passing “from one category of weapons to another, and would involve crossing over a watershed of considerable importance.” Bohlen argued that the decision must be seen in terms larger than the relationship with Great Britain and urged against offering Polaris at Nassau. Polaris would make European countries see national weapons as the only way “out” and deny critics of the French a “very powerful argument.” France could deny the British EEC entry unless the British agreed to share nuclear knowledge with Paris, which would be a breach of Britain’s understanding with the U. S. America’s Representative to the European Communities, John W. Tuthill warned about the ramifications that a Polaris deal would have on British entry into the EEC. Rostow and Tyler, conceding that a Polaris sale was inevitable, argued that it was “essential that [the administration] hold firmly to our multilateral condition in any UK sale agreement, and that this condition be written in terms which have some real bite.”

On December 18 Yarmolinsky notified Gilpatric and McNamara that there was a misunderstanding as to the nature of the Skybolt understanding. Kennedy, McNamara

293 Ibid. 3.
294 Ibid. 4.
295 Bohlen replaced James Gavin in October of 1962. Gavin favored U.S. assistance to the French nuclear program, Bohlen did not. Bohlen was also considered a respected Soviet watcher.
296 Skybolt supported the bomber phase and Polaris supported the missile phase.
297 Bohlen, C. E. This untitled document dated 17 December, 1962 was presumably sent to McGeorge Bundy (MAC) and is located in the Richard E. Neustadt Papers, Box 19, JFKL, Boston MA.
Rusk and Bundy met again that day to discuss the "inadequacy" of Yarmolinsky's aide-memoire as it related to what the U.S. was obligated to give the Prime Minister. During the last meeting the men suddenly concluded that the administration owed the British more than it had offered and more than it had been saying. One possible reason for re-thinking the alternative was the rising domestic pressure Kennedy faced. McNamara's airport statement and his meeting with Thorneycroft were highly publicized in the United States. American newspapers took a pro-British stand on the issue. The Tory tactics, after the cancellation of Skybolt became imminent, were to make the American negotiators feel guilty so that the U.S. would agree to Polaris or another system on just as good of terms as they had hoped to get Skybolt.

There seems to be ample reason to blame both sides for behaving inappropriately and several previous accounts of Skybolt deal with this issue. However, several issues need to be clarified. It is evident from these events that the State Department was excluded from the negotiations. Rusk does not seem to have aggressively pressed for State's involvement, in part because he was not an avid supporter of some of the initiatives, but more importantly because Kennedy did not instruct Rusk or State to become involved. He preferred to leave it to McNamara.

Many authors of the Skybolt episode have attributed McNamara's actions to his personality. They argue that he lacked political sensitivity and acumen. It is true that McNamara was not a politician, but in this instance he was caught in a political waiting game. Indeed, it seems that McNamara offered Polaris as a substitute well before Kennedy publicly concurred. Likewise, the Defense Department does not seem to have been opposed to sharing Polaris technology. However, the State Department, excepting Rusk, was wholeheartedly against such action. It had every reason to be. For the previous year

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and a half, the administration had made clear its opposition to American perpetuation of the British deterrent. Also, there were several groups within both Defense and State pursuing a variety of different initiatives. Some pursued MLF, some only a mobile multilateral force, some sought a quick end to the British deterrent, and some favored a slower pace toward confrontation with the British over this issue. That there were differences was not a problem, but at no time after the cancellation of Skybolt was imminent, did any of these persons receive clear and precise instructions about what direction the administration should take. Kennedy, recognizing the controversy that was growing over his British policy, preferred to delay a decision as long as possible in order to assess the political environment and propose an alternative which would place the administration in favorable regard.

Additionally, the administration contributed to the growing panic by failing to give consistent information to British officials and to the press. The administration was either confused as to what it wanted to do or was hoping that growing political pressure on Macmillan would enhance its bargaining position, or both. Several political mishaps occurred over a short period of time, related to a single missile program, by an administration that was particularly careful not only about what it said, but how it said it, and who was allowed to say it.
After McNamara’s London meeting with Thorneycroft, Kennedy faced a dilemma about to what to offer the British without shattering eighteen months of policy directives. As Weiss suggested, the key to negotiations would to be find a formula that “did not push [the] British into making a premature decision without at the same time forcing the U.S. to openly accept indefinite maintenance of and U.S. support for an independent U.K. nuclear force.” Weiss warned that further commitment to a British deterrent would mean a reversal of the “entire basis for U.S. nuclear policy of this administration with all the adverse consequences this would portend.”

Kennedy could not easily or abruptly offer another system to the British even if he wanted too. The administration established a policy opposing the British independent deterrent nineteen months earlier and in the spring of 1962 it began looking for ways to “limit the scope” of present weapons cooperation between the U.S. and Great Britain. Kennedy knew that reneging on such policy would increase the distrust and division that was growing within the State Department.

Rusk also suggested that part of the difficulty was found in the complexity of our constitutional system and the difficulties this places on consultation. He remarked, “By the time we get to a conclusion as to what we want to say to a foreign government, we have gone through such an elaborate procedure in getting to that conclusion that it isn’t easy for us to change it.”

Macmillan was obviously concerned about the consequences that could result if...

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Kennedy offered no substitute for Skybolt. He predicted a "great battle" with President Kennedy at Nassau and sent the following message through Ormsby-Gore about the upcoming talks:

"if we cannot reach an agreement of a realistic means of maintaining the British independent deterrent, all the other questions may only justify perfunctory discussion, since an 'agonizing reappraisal' of all our foreign and defence [plans] will be required."304

Macmillan may have exaggerated his fears to Ormsby-Gore, but the Tory government would find itself in a bind if Macmillan came up empty handed at Nassau. If America provided no substitute for Skybolt, then the future of the independent deterrent, a major platform of the conservative party, would be in jeopardy. Labor leaders would use the Kennedy administrations opposition to the British deterrent to their favor during the scrutinizing debate with the Tories which would surely follow. If Macmillan reinstituted production of Bluestreak or Bluesteel, and could survive politically from accusations of bad judgment over the Skybolt deal, he still would have no strategic mobility with his ballistic forces. Because England could not afford to maintain an independent deterrent on its own, and in order to keep some means of an independent deterrent, Britain might have to consider sharing nuclear knowledge with France or other countries. Although this might spread the economic burden across multiple national budgets, it might also equip many alliance countries with nuclear weapons. By forcing the British to seek other alliances, the United States could have drastic ramifications not only on British policy and politics, but on NATO. Macmillan would also face the difficult task of justifying to the British people his willingness to put complete faith in an American administration which had privately

given him little doubt as to where it stood on nuclear issues. Still, Kennedy, nor any other American official, contacted Macmillan to reassure him that the United States was not trying to undermine him.

On the way to Nassau, Macmillan met DeGaulle. He told DeGaulle that if the United States refused to help him maintain the British deterrent then Britain would continue alone. The two leaders also discussed the possibility of a joint nuclear program. Macmillan acted tough, perhaps believing DeGaulle would be impressed, which would increase British chances at entering the EEC. En route to Nassau, Macmillan was still not sure that Kennedy was going to offer Polaris; he was not sure that the administration would come out in support of the British independent deterrent.

On December 18, Air Force One carried the President, McNamara, Nitze, Ball, Tyler, Bruce, Bundy and Ormsby-Gore to Nassau. Against the advise of many aides, Dean Rusk remained in Washington to attend a dinner for the diplomatic corps.

Neustadt suggests that en route to Nassau Kennedy first got to the "heart" of the British problem and entertained two "new" proposals. It was here, in conversation with Ormsby-Gore, that Kennedy supposedly first conceived of a 50-50 offer, and that William Tyler proposed that British and American officials join in a study to find the best substitute for Skybolt. The 50-50 offer simply stated that the United States would continue the development of Skybolt, for the British only, but share the remaining costs equally. The

305 According to Harold Watkinson, the British faced several problems within their defense ministry in the late nineteen fifties. First, there was the basic question of whether there was a future for an independent British nuclear deterrent. The second concerned strategic mobility. The third issue was relations with the United States and the developing weapons interdependence with America and other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The Tory Party platform claimed that a credible independent deterrent was a necessity for Britain and their party was best able to deal with the Americans. Harold Watkinson. Turning Points: A Record of Our Times. (Great Britain, The Chantry: Michael Russell Publishing Ltd., 1986), 107-108.


fifty-fifty offer raised the monetary cost to Britain for nuclear independence, which might hasten a rethinking of their whole deterrent posture. According to Neustadt, this made the 50-50 offer "nearly perfect"... "as a political device for squaring our wants with their needs to our advantage."\(^{308}\) Also, as Ormsby-Gore would later tell his British comrades, the 50-50 offer, if publicized, would nullify British claims that America was against the British deterrent.\(^{309}\) But, Kennedy had already made it next to impossible for Macmillan to accept the 50-50 offer by publicly discrediting Skybolt on several occasions. Most importantly however, if the 50-50 offer was a serious proposal and not only made for political design, then it represented a change in administration attitude. Kennedy had earlier decided against a similar recommendation made by Rusk. Now, one day before meeting with Macmillan, the President was suggesting that the U.S. help finance a weapon that only the British would use. Perhaps Kennedy was conceding to the growing political pressure to make things right with Macmillan. Indeed, if this proposal had been offered prior to December 11 much of the controversy might have been prevented. At least the British would have been unable to accuse the Americans of being deceitful. More likely however, as Ormsby-Gore told his colleagues, Kennedy decided to make the 50-50 offer at such a late hour to disable British allegations that America was opposed to their deterrent. Indeed, the 50-50 offer was like the joint-study proposal in that it had political designs greater than its face value.

The joint study proposal seemed designed to delay a decision and move debate to the floor of Parliament, where current sentiment toward maintaining an independent deterrent was waning. Macmillan's sentiments about the independent deterrent were not shared by all members of his cabinet. In November 1962 Macmillan faced his biggest

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\(^{309}\) Ibid., 88.
attack over the deterrent issue.\footnote{310}{Alistair Home. \textit{Harold Macmillan: Volume II 1957-1966.} (New York: Viking Press, 1989), 433.} George Brown and Patrick Gordon Walker, a Labor defense spokesmen, both attacked Skybolt, calling it a gamble with British defenses to rely on a missile made by a foreign country. Brown said "There can be no future for Britain as an independent nuclear power. Walker asserted that it was impossible to be independent by depending "wholly on another country for their weapons, even it you get them delivered." Liberal Party leader, Jo Grimmond, called on the government not to succumb to the line of taking over the huge expense of continuing Skybolt. He said Britain should rely on the nuclear defenses of the U.S.\footnote{311}{New York Times. "Macmillan Returns" 17 December 1962, 2.} Indeed, there was a growing base of support in Britain for the goals of the Kennedy administration. Brown for one had his own power base as did other members of the opposition party.\footnote{312}{Avi Shlaim, Peter Jones and Keith Sainsbury. \textit{British Foreign Secretaries Since 1945.} (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1977), 205.} Harold Wilson, the young star of the Labor Party, appealed to some Kennedy administration officials , who by June of 1963 were forming an inclination toward him as the next Prime Minister.\footnote{313}{Alistair Home. \textit{Harold Macmillan: Volume II 1957-1966.} (New York: Viking Press, 1989), 516.} Harold Wilson threatened to campaign against the independent deterrent on the basis “that we [Britain] must give up our deterrent to keep the bloody Germans from getting theirs.”\footnote{314}{Richard E. Neustadt Report \textit{to the President: "Skybolt and Nassau: American Policy Making and Anglo-American Relations," November 15, 1963, JFKL, National Security Files, Box 322, Staff Memoranda, Neustadt--Skybolt and Nassau, 115.} Cabinet Ministers Timothy Bligh and Michael Cary admitted that “There’d have been a lot of sentiment, perhaps overwhelming, to let the deterrent go; to carry on alone would have been unattractive and they couldn’t have blamed anything” on the U.S.\footnote{315}{Ibid., 46-47.} After the Nassau meetings, Cary confirmed that the British Cabinet would have preferred a joint-study; Butler and McLeod were not “sold on the deterrent,” Reginald Maudling and Boyle were concerned about the money Polaris would cost; Edward Heath feared the impact in would have on the Brussels negotiations; and Lord Mountbatten, who was not a fan of Skybolt,
was also “unhappy about Polaris.” Kennedy and his team knew that overwhelming support for maintaining the independent deterrent did not exist, even within the Tory Party and they were attempting to rally such sentiment in the administration’s favor.

Another motive behind the joint study was to bring officials together from both countries who could discuss the matter of a substitute after Parliament had reconvened for the new year. Many of Kennedy’s advisers believed that Britain would accept America’s thinking with respect to independent deterrents, especially if European integration continued and if the growing cost of maintaining an independent role permeated British thinking, but politically they would need two to four years to “ease out of a fixed position.” A joint study provided another excellent way to balance British and American needs. It would also keep America from rushing into an agreement before careful study and consideration could be made about the deal. Nevertheless, prudence would not be Kennedy’s mode of operation in Nassau.

Kennedy and Macmillan met at Nassau, in the Bahamas, on December 19, 1962. The two leaders were scheduled to cover many issues at this summit. However, Skybolt dominated the talks. That same day Kennedy received a letter, at Nassau, from Khrushchev stating a readiness to end nuclear tests. It is not known whether Khrushchev planned for the letter to reach Kennedy while he was meeting with Macmillan, but it would be logical that the Soviet Premier would wish to make his eagerness for talks simultaneously known to both western nuclear leaders. Also, given the recent and secret dialogue between Kennedy and Khrushchev, the Soviet Premier was certainly interested in its impact on the President.

The Nassau discussions terminated Skybolt for good. Macmillan rejected both the

316 Ibid. 96.
317 Seymour Weiss. Top Secret Draft Cable For the Secretary 13 December 1962, JFKL, Papers of Richard E. Neustadt, Box 19, 1.
50 - 50 offer and the joint study proposal. Whatever interest Macmillan may still have had in continuing Skybolt was shattered by the recent public comments of Kennedy and McNamara. Macmillan remarked metaphorically that “the virginity of the lady must now be regarded as doubtful.” 319 Macmillan rejected the joint study proposal because he needed an immediate agreement which he could take home to show that he, as Tory leader, was best able to influence American politics and that America still supported the British independent deterrent. Because of Macmillan’s insistence on an immediate decision, Kennedy was unable to persuade Macmillan to defer judgment on Polaris. Therefore Kennedy had to concentrate on improvising what he wanted from Macmillan, which was British nuclear forces dedicated to NATO and under American control. 320

At Nassau, Macmillan employed Thorneycroft’s tactics of using guilt to influence the Americans. 321 He invoked the past, retracing Anglo-American nuclear relations; the two country’s cooperation in past wars and their commitments to common goals. 322 The president and the prime minister were at odds over the effect that a bilateral arrangement would have in Europe. The U.S. felt it would be devastating to relations with other countries; the British disagreed. Macmillan argued that until some supranational authority arose to cancel nationality, countries needed some semblance of sovereignty to “remain something in the world.” 323

321 McNamara was obviously perturbed by the British tactics. He told Solly Zuckerman, after the talks had concluded that “If the tubes on your Polaris boats ever have to open, I hope that the first missile that is shot out is that public relations officer of your defense department.” McNamara was referring to Brigadier Hobbs and Col. Sammy Lohan, whom, according to Zuckerman the papers liked because they knew how to do their jobs. Solly Zuckerman. Monkeys, Men, And Missiles: An Autobiography 1946-88. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 262-263.
The Nassau meetings concluded with the British promising to increase conventional force support and to integrate their V-bomber force into NATO. Macmillan also agreed that if America offered the United Kingdom Polaris missiles that he would assign all of the Polaris force to a NATO multilateral force provided the Queen had the right to withdraw these forces for independent national use in case of a dire emergency similar to 1940. Neustadt argues that Kennedy reluctantly accepted this “escape clause” because of Macmillan’s concessions. Kennedy was reluctant to agree to sharing Polaris with the British, citing administration policy against independent deterrents and questioning how this new deal would appear to other countries. Timothy Bligh says Kennedy “was obviously reluctant to let loose of Polaris in a bilateral deal with [Britain]. It was plain in his whole tone and manner that he didn’t want to do it, didn’t think he ought to do it. We all sensed that.” Kennedy would have preferred that the British renounce their deterrent entirely, but Macmillan’s refusal led Kennedy to agree to a substitution of Polaris within vague multilateral parameters to avert the political repercussions which would accompany a breach with England. He committed his administration to further develop the concept of a multilateral force of which most were very skeptical. This was a commitment that Kennedy did not want.

Much discussion between Kennedy and Macmillan revolved around what

Canada, Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, 1105.

325 Ibid., 91.
326 McNamara thought the multilateral force was “insane” and “absurd.” Telephone interview with the author 16 February 1994. Thorneycroft called it “the biggest piece of nonsense that anybody had ever dreamt up and rather a dangerous one in fact.” Peter Thorneycroft. interviewed by David Nunnerly, 18 June 1969, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program, JFKL, Boston, MA, 25. Legere recollects that the “professional military leadership, both US and UK, was never very enthusiastic about it. In my opinion, this fragmentation of opinion was probably at least partly responsible for the top levels in the Administration not signing onto the crusade with great enthusiasm.” Letter to the author 04 April 1994.
Macmillan would say to the press and to Parliament. Macmillan agreed to emphasize that the Polaris forces would be part of a NATO force and that he would not emphasize the escape clause which gave a semblance of independence to the British force. Zuckerman found the escape clause contradictory. He believes that Kennedy gave way in the end at Nassau giving Macmillan what "he had come for" which was contrary to what he [Kennedy] must have thought best." Bruce, later commented, that Macmillan was so happy to receive a deal on Polaris that he would have agreed to anything, even a commitment on MLF, if American officials had only known what they wanted. Neustadt counseled the president in his report, offering that by "[n]ot having planned to give them an escape-clause, we were unprepared to name our price and improvised accordingly."

The American negotiating team quickly realized that the bilateral decision to share Polaris technology with Great Britain might create problems in NATO. As soon as agreement was reached on the Polaris substitution, American officials drafted letters to both DeGaulle and Germany's Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Kennedy promised DeGaulle that an arrangement similar to the one offered Britain could be negotiated with France. Zuckerman viewed the letter to DeGaulle as an attempt "to repair part of the damage" done by the Nassau agreement. DeGaulle did not wish to negotiate similar arrangements, seeing how France had no nuclear warheads to deploy on Polaris missiles. A month later, DeGaulle vetoed British entry into the EEC. Most historians agree that the Nassau

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331 Ibid., 95 

agreement was not the cause of the veto, but it allowed DeGaulle a stage to emphasize the negative aspects of the special Anglo-American relationship and denounce U.S. hegemony in Europe.

On the afternoon of December 21, McNamara, Nitze, Bundy, Ball and Tyler boarded a plane for a return to Washington D.C. McNamara, commented that “If Skybolt hadn’t happened it should have been invented to get us set on this new track of viable policy.”\(^{333}\) The new “track of viable policy” of which McNamara spoke was weapons committed to NATO, no independent deterrents, which from his point of view was a step in the right direction. However, the British had made only a symbolic step toward nuclear integration, but an air force first-strike program had been eliminated and McNamara was one step closer to phasing out manned strategic bombers.

After Nassau, American officials were still not marching to the same tune. Rostow wrote Rusk on Dec. 21 1962 asking him to “underline the fact and importance of our commitment to mixed manning for a multilateral force” to McNamara who had been “wavering on this point,” extrapolating that “[t]he prospect of a nationally owned [German] Polaris submarine force would create “politically intolerable strains in East-West relations.” Rostow added that “[s]trains would not be reduced by the prospective application of US permissive links to the warheads; neither our allies nor the Soviets would have any confidence that this would surely prevent diversion of a German nationally owned and manned Polaris to national purposes.”\(^{334}\)

The last major scene in the Skybolt drama was “like the final twitching of the tail of a dead lizard,”\(^{335}\) revealing the growing division between military and civilian officials.

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335 This is how Henry Brandon, a reporter for the London Times described Skybolt’s final test.
greatly intensified by McNamara’s secret maneuvers which terminated Skybolt. On December 22, 1962, off the coast of Florida, about twenty miles east of Cape Canaveral and 40,000 feet above the earth, the 11,000 pound Skybolt Missile underwent a final test flight which the Air Force called completely successful. According to General LeMay, its objectives were:

"to verify the functional operation of the missile guidance and flight control systems and evaluate the performance of all missile subsystems except the reentry vehicle and thrust reversal. The test also successfully demonstrated the ability of the aircraft from which the Skybolt was launched to determine its position in flight precisely by daylight star tracking and to transfer this data to the missile."

These objectives were met, but Air Force press agents embellished the success, declaring Skybolt an operational weapon system and claiming that the missile struck a predetermined target area. The Air Force failed to say that the missile was not equipped with a nose cone and therefore could not survive reentry into the atmosphere to impact in any target area. The civilian leadership of the Pentagon was greatly upset and quickly let it be known that the Air Force’s claims were exaggerated.

The handling of this test flight was embarrassing for the President, the Air Force, and General LeMay. Kennedy heard of the announcement at Palm Beach while relaxing by the pool, surprisingly enough, with Ormsby-Gore. According to Gore’s diary, Kennedy blurted about McNamara, “Jesus Christ, Is he crazy?” “Why would he do this after all

336 The Air Force had tested Skybolt five times before the public announcement of cancellation, beginning on April 9, 1962, but had plans for 28 tests. Graders marked the first five tests as either "partial successes" or "failures," depending on who was doing the talking. See Aviation Week and Space Technology. “Skybolt’s Fate Up to Kennedy, Macmillan.” 17 December 1962, 26-27.
The press attacked the Air Force for embellishing Skybolt's performance and accused LeMay of being disloyal to the President. McNamara and LeMay regretted what had happened. In a letter to LeMay, McNamara said, "I trust that for both our sakes there will be no recurrence of such incidents."

Why did the Air Force make such claims? There are several possible explanations, but the major reason seems to have been to expose McNamara's true motives for canceling Skybolt. McNamara and others had been publicly condemning Skybolt for its technical difficulties and test failures. The Air Force knew that McNamara was not telling the whole truth, and the sixth test was one of the events which helped, in Roger Hilsman's' words, to "expose" McNamara "and therefore cause trouble." Zuckert warned his superiors on several occasions about the upcoming sixth test because you "couldn't blind yourself to the fact that this program was in trouble at the policy level." Zuckert personally believed "that the technical people downstairs had gotten Mr. McNamara and the President in a bit of a bind by picking on the "technical unfeasibility" or at least making dampening comments about technical progress in connections with Skybolt." By embellishing the success of the system, the Air Force hoped to pressure Congress to conduct an investigation that might force the Pentagon to continue the program. Zuckert believed there were enough questions about technical unfeasibility to warrant such an investigation; it never came.

Why did McNamara allow the sixth test to take place? The Air Force had not

341 Eugene Zuckert, Interviewed by Lawrence E. McQuade, 11 July 1964, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program, JFKL, Boston MA, 89. Congressmen complained that Skybolt was one argument used by Defense to justify the cancellation of the RS-70. Senators Mike Monroney (OK), Chairman of the Senate Aviation Committee and A. Willis Robertson (VA), Chairman of Defense Appropriations Subcommittee condemned decision to drop Skybolt. Monroney said that cancellation would "make us totally dependent on fixed based missiles." Jack Raymond. "Skybolt dispute rising in Capital: Two Democratic Senators Condemn project Britain favors." New York Times. 15 December 1962, 3.
independently contrived this test. The Secretary of the Air Force decided on December 6 that by delaying the test until late December there would be better chance for success. Zuckert informed McNamara that the test was set for December 21 and the “chances of success looked very good.” No one turned the Air Force down.342 McNamara commented, “Well, with Zuckert’s luck I bet the damn thing works.”343 Even the day before the test, UnderSecretary for the Air Force, Joseph Charyk cleared the upcoming test with Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric, who told him to proceed as planned.344 The secrecy surrounding the Skybolt decision and the fact that the administration really did not know what it wanted explains why there were no stops put on this test. Zuckert claims that “to not have fired would have looked like our policy people were putting the lid on in order to prove their contentions.”345 On December 6, McNamara had not yet met with Thorneycroft. If he canceled the test on the 6th he would have revealed that the decision was made prior to consultation, breaching the Camp David Agreement of 1960 and Kennedy’s November promise to Macmillan that no decision would be made prior to negotiations.

Considering past results, there were not many Skybolt critics who expected a successful test, regardless of Zuckert’s optimism. Skybolt’s opponents would use a sixth failure to buttress their claims against the missile. Ironically, only forty-eight hours after the Nassau meeting, there was a successful test and growing doubts as to Skybolt’s technical unfeasibility. The United States Embassy in London called the British reaction sensationalized. The British inferred that the sixth test proved the major consideration

behind the decision to cancel Skybolt was strategic and political and that if Skybolt had complimented Kennedy’s concepts it would have been continued. Skybolt died a questionable project, just as it had been born.

The Kennedy Administration handled the Skybolt cancellation and the resulting negotiations at Nassau with hopes of influencing Britain’s abdication from the nuclear club. The Administration’s efforts were not overtly coercive, but they were contrived, designed to mobilize Macmillan’s opposition and thus pressure the prime minister into admitting that Great Britain’s independent deterrent lacked efficacy; contributed to greater international problems; and should therefore be abandoned. This scheme was not a new one to Kennedy. The United States expedited the removal of the Thors from Britain by discontinuing maintenance funding. Kennedy even suggested that Jupiter missiles in Turkey could be most easily removed by persuading the Turkish government to make the suggestion.

Shortly after the new year began, Kennedy ordered a secret reappraisal of U.S.-European nuclear policy. Neustadt concluded in his report to Kennedy that the administration “may have “lost” (quotations are Neustadt’s) what maybe was a chance to further our proclaimed concern for European unity and strategic integration.” This seems to imply that such integration was never a concern. Rather the administration’s purpose was to appease America’s allies with symbolic nuclear roles. It hoped that such action would foster better relations with the Soviets by demonstrating American willingness to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons in Europe. Ironically, shortly after the Nassau meeting, the Soviets cut off test-ban talks. Kennedy assumed that their response

346 Unsigned Telegram from London to the Secretary of State 24 December 1962, JFKL, Papers of Richard E. Neustadt, Box 20, 2.
was due to the growing sense of allied division. Although the test ban would later materialize, the Soviets recognized the unpredictability of Kennedy’s foreign policy. At least in the Skybolt episode, the President’s actions were not consistent with administration statements because the potential of immediate political harm to Kennedy’s presidency outweighed proclaimed objectives.
Conclusions

The two questions always asked about the cancellation of Skybolt are why the missile was canceled and why this produced a crisis between two historical allies. As is quite apparent there are many reasons which can be justified as to why the Skybolt program was ended. However, as is the case with history, the progression of time seems to offer the clearest explanation. Indeed, between the start of his administration and late autumn of 1962 President Kennedy changed his position on Skybolt. If Kennedy had canceled the program in early 1961, it would be easy to conclude that he was acting upon the financial and technical reservations presented by Defense Secretary Thomas Gates and others. However, by the autumn of 1962, even though the program was exceeding artificial budget ceilings, it was being well managed and progressing. Indeed, McNamara’s own reports negate his later claims that Skybolt simply wouldn’t work.\textsuperscript{349} Therefore, by the time of the cancellation, technical and financial reasons, although still factors, were less valid justifications than they would have been in early 1961. Of course the administration claimed that cancellation was based on technical and financial grounds because this was less troublesome than attacking the British independent deterrent or the U. S. Air Force and it was less controversial than explaining their reasons behind conciliatory measures to the Soviets. Clearly it seems that by the autumn of 1962, a greater policy objective, East-West reconciliation was a main factor in the missiles cancellation.

The missiles cancellation became a “crisis” because the president failed to project a coherent or consistent strategy during the autumn of 1962. The Kennedy administration was trying to ameliorate Soviet-American relations with conciliatory gestures while simultaneously attempting to assure both Americans and Europeans of its tough stance.

\textsuperscript{349} During a telephone conversation with the author on 16 February 1994 McNamara said that “the problem with Skybolt was relatively simple, the damn thing just wouldn’t work.”
against the Soviets. This difficult task resulted in contradictory statements and actions which muddled interpretations of American policy. Why did Kennedy fail to offer clear and decisive leadership? Basically, the president refused to resolve conflicting pursuits within the administration and failed to clearly communicate his intended direction for American foreign policy. Indeed, Kennedy seemed allow others decisions to influence him instead of being the leader in the matter. Additionally, Kennedy was predominantly concerned about the current reputation of his administration which caused him to alter long term plans for short term comfort. Historian, Graham Allison suggests that the Cuban Missile Crisis had as much to do with the tug of personalities and bureaucratic interests within the EXCOMM as with any single decision Kennedy made.\textsuperscript{350} Likewise, Kennedy did little to stop the bureaucratic struggle and the clash of personalities evident during the Skybolt episode. In fact, he encouraged it, by refusing to make his stand on the British independent deterrent clearly known. Additionally, Kennedy was never in doubt that Skybolt’s cancellation would have great political ramifications for Macmillan.\textsuperscript{351} Yet he never acted in a way that was helpful to Macmillan until he realized that any other course of action would be of political consequence to himself. Neustadt maintains that Kennedy “attempted to trace a rather subtle line of action through competing aspirations which were unresolved and unresolvable until time clarified unknowns.”\textsuperscript{352} This seems to explain Kennedy’s passive role. Accordingly this allowed State and Defense to pursue different objectives, both believing that they supported the President’s view. The result was chaos.

Why was it chaos? The clearest reason is that John Kennedy reacted to events primarily for personal political reasons instead of controlling events to reach greater geo-

\textsuperscript{351} The Skybolt episode seems to be the only instance where Kennedy apologists do not claim Kennedy to have had extraordinary retention and extra-sensitive political antennae.
political goals. Although, Kennedy had signed a policy directive stating American opposition to perpetuating the British deterrent, he readily deviated from this policy when a breach with the United Kingdom was evident. The possibility of immediate political harm to his administration due to such a breach outweighed other consequences of which his advisors warned, including possible setbacks in East-West relations. Kennedy restored funds to the Skybolt program in early 1961 largely for political purposes and he furthered the British independent deterrent with Polaris nearly two years later for the same reason. In March of 1961, Kennedy was beginning a massive military buildup in response to his claims of a missile gap. Indeed, Kennedy would have been unwise to cancel Skybolt at the beginning of his administration after creating such a clamor, however false, about the missile gap. However, by late 1962 there was no question as to American nuclear superiority over the Soviets. Therefore Skybolt was no longer needed to enhance the President's political position. Kennedy's decision to supply the United Kingdom with Polaris technology also seems politically motivated unless Kennedy had suddenly changed his mind on the efficacy of the British independent deterrent and the feasibility of the MLF. Kennedy certainly did not want the trouble that a serious Anglo-American breach and all its potentialities would bring. Neustadt remarks in his report to Kennedy that it took a crisis over the cancellation of Skybolt to secure White House attention.353 In actuality the White House was attentive all along, but it took a crisis atmosphere to force Kennedy to make a decision.

Additionally, much had changed between early 1961 and late 1962 vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. Indeed, it would be unrealistic to view the Skybolt decision independent of changes in Soviet-American relations. From the start of the New Frontier the major goal was to prevent war between the two nations which could blow the world up "seven times over." In order to reduce tensions, Kennedy and his Secretary of Defense turned away

353 Ibid., 120.
from the strategic offensive; removed nuclear missiles from Europe; and emphasized the conventional buildup of NATO. The cancellation of Skybolt had more to do with these changes in American nuclear policy than it did with technical and financial problems. As a result, the strategic wing of the United States Air Force suffered and Europeans grew increasingly doubtful about American resolve to subject the North American continent to nuclear attack in order to defend Europe. That Skybolt's cancellation was just a punitive move against the U. S. Air Force would be hard to substantiate because of the many other reasons which contributed to the decision. However, it would be unreasonable to believe that many in the Kennedy administration were not displeased and at odds with the Air Force over several issues such as the maintenance of a first strike capability. Indeed, the Air Force sought such capability, but it seems that to the Air Force "first strike" meant launching a crippling attack against the Soviet Union once conditions convinced the president to order the use of nuclear weapons. Many air generals felt that it was only in this manner that damage to the West could be limited. The Air Force did not seek to launch an unprovoked surprise attack against the Soviets as their position was often interpreted by those who opposed a first strike strategy. The administration's opposition to the first strike had as much to do with conciliation toward the Soviets as it did with changing to a more effective strategy. Indeed, McNamara privately assured the President in November of 1962 that a second strike strategy retained a level of first strike capability. It seems obvious that the administration believed that they could gain more politically with the Soviets by embracing a second strike strategy. However, many military leaders, civilians and allies viewed the posture as a no-win strategy.

Arthur Schlesinger suggests that the most important thing at the time was

354 Roger Hilsman maintained that McNamara's target was the Air Force when he canceled Skybolt. Roger Hilsman, Interviewed by David Nunnerly, 26 January 1970, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program, JFKL, Boston, MA, 2.

Kennedy's ability to effectively deal with Nikita Khrushchev. Schlesinger adds that Kennedy "rarely lost sight of other peoples motives and problems" and [f]or all the presumed coolness on the surface, he had an instinctive tendency to put himself into the skins of others. It is quite possible, given the events of 1962 and the rising hope for disarmament, that Kennedy did not have a momentary lapse of his renowned retentiveness during the Skybolt episode. It is quite likely that the politician he was empathizing with was Nikita Khrushchev and not Harold Macmillan.

Indeed, as Secretary Zuckert commented, Skybolt would have been a formidable weapon to which the Soviets would have had to deal. It is highly likely that the Soviets would have diverted rubles from other military initiatives to expand or improve anti-aircraft defenses which Skybolt threatened. Likewise, it is quite possible that the Soviets would have invested in a system to defend solely against Skybolt. Additionally, as is often the case, the Soviets may have dedicated valuable resources at the expense of other initiatives to develop a similar ALBM system so to stay competitive in the arms race. Expenditures such as these could have weakened the Soviet military and economy and thus been in the United States' strategic interest. However, at the time, the administration was not out to topple the Soviets or win the arms race. Indeed, for the previous twenty-three months Kennedy had attempted to improve relations, and following October 1962 the administration increased its efforts toward reconciliation.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was the last in a progression of events that sealed Skybolt's fate. Subsequently, Kennedy was more eager to make conciliatory gestures toward the Soviet Union. One might naturally ask why Khrushchev or the Soviets would have viewed this decision as conciliatory when, two weeks later, Kennedy agreed to share

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Polaris technology with Great Britain. Skybolt’s cancellation could be viewed by
Khrushchev as a conciliatory move. Although Polaris already existed, Skybolt would have
been an addition to America’s arsenal and another formidable weapon for the Soviets to
contend. The cancellation saved the Soviets the added expense of defending against the
missile, or of developing one themselves. The elimination of another American success in
the missile field, eased political pressure on Khrushchev, which would have stemmed from
Russian hard-liners.

This study also suggests that Kennedy’s foreign policy was more heavily
influenced by Robert McNamara than Dean Rusk. At present it is not clear if McNamara’s
decision to cancel Skybolt in August of 1962 was directly connected with larger
administration efforts to curb nuclear weapons cooperation with Great Britain. But it is
hard to believe that McNamara’s efforts were totally separate. The Defense Secretary’s
speeches and his opposition to a first strike strategy complimented such efforts.
Nevertheless, if McNamara’s decision to cancel Skybolt was truly independent of other
administration efforts, then he showed disregard for stated policy and forced a premature
and direct confrontation with Great Britain over their independent deterrent at a time when
other officials warned against an abrupt change in the special relationship. Indeed, many
administration officials warned that Macmillan would need four or more years to abandon
the independent deterrent to prevent disastrous political harm to himself and his party.

Also it appears that Kennedy preferred McNamara to Rusk for the handling of
foreign policy issues related to military affairs. Kennedy clearly condoned McNamara’s
preeminent role in the Skybolt drama by not instructing Rusk or the State Department to
lead negotiations. McNamara seems to be the first Secretary of Defense to play such a
dominant role in form and conducting foreign policy. The Defense Secretary’s
aggressiveness was more influential with Kennedy than was Rusk’s diplomatic, yet timid,
manner. Indeed, McNamara tended to cross the short historical boundary between the
Secretaries of Defense and State more often than his predecessors. Coincidentally, a rapidly growing defense department, and the inseparability of foreign and defense policies, led the roles of the Secretaries of State and Defense to merge ever closer. At the same time, structures such as the Operations Coordinating Board of the NSC, which integrated interdepartmental objectives, were being eliminated. This allowed a dominant individual like McNamara to have greater influence over foreign policy than he would have had at another time.

Kennedy’s administrative structure bears some responsibility for the Skybolt crisis. Neustadt’s report criticized the President for the absence of “Whitehallogists” within the administration. Neustadt argued that if the Skybolt crisis had involved the Soviets, then all the “Kremlinologists” in America would have been involved.358 This insight is almost an indictment of the collegial approach used by Kennedy to manage the executive. The very structures which Kennedy had changed or restricted could have prevented the cancellation from becoming a crisis. Likewise, by restricting departmental roles and centralizing decision making within the White House, Kennedy diminished the number of people handling problems. If his departments were not acting as he so desired, perhaps the problem was his unwillingness to commit to a plan before he had assurance of its success. If Kennedy wished for the State Department to be the principle arm of American policy, as Schlesinger claimed, he did not show it in this episode.359 Instead, he further alienated the State Department.360


360 The relationship between the State Department and the White House was not improved six months later when Neustadt was researching his report. Bundy wrote Neustadt on May 4, 1963 that “in the wake of your first discussions at the State Department they are asking us if they can see a Klein memorandum to which they say you referred. I have had to tell them that this is an internal paper, and obviously their sense of confidence in us is not going to be increased.” McGeorge Bundy. Letter to Richard Neustadt, 4 May 1963, JFKL, The papers of Richard E. Neustadt, Box 20.
The management of the Skybolt cancellation contributed to confusion about American objectives. While the Kennedy administration talked about strengthening alliances, its policies magnified the bipolarity of the world and bolstered European complaints about American hegemony. The Administration's plans commanded European countries to give up national sovereignty and at the same time the plans augmented the national sovereignty of the United States. Kennedy's efforts to eradicate independent deterents encountered too many uncontrollable variables, such as the surrendering of nationalism, which the administration simply assumed would be accepted due to the logic of its argument. During this era national identity was deeply rooted in the possession of nuclear arsenals. The administration was naive to believe that European countries would readily accept New Frontier wisdom and symbolic nuclear roles at the expense of their national prestige. The administration tried to convince other countries of this. Obviously it failed. That it strengthened the West by such efforts is highly questionable.
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