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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR

VIA: The Executive Director *LJK*

1. This memorandum is for information only.
2. The Stewart Alsop article in the SATURDAY EVENING POST of 1 December 1962, which, he states, "is the most important piece I've ever written," concerns Cuba, but mainly Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, who "has the highest intelligence quotient of any leading public official in this century." Alsop on page 16 quotes McNamara as being "absolutely convinced" of current intelligence estimates regarding U. S. decisive margin of superiority in missiles. But on page 18 in answer to a question regarding the so-called missile gap myth, McNamara states: "The myth was the result of incomplete intelligence; although it was created by intelligence analysts acting in good faith, it was a myth all the same."
3. I sent you yesterday an advance copy of LIFE which also glorifies McNamara and which gives McNamara and the DIA credit for the hard intelligence on Cuba.

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STANLEY J. GROGAN/
Assistant to the Director

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About the Authors. Washington editor Stewart Alsop believes that his article on OUR NEW STRATEGY is "the most important piece I've ever written." Alsop not only talked at length with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, whose remarkably candid exclusive interview is recorded in detail, but also asked questions of practically all of McNamara's chief military and civilian subordinates. . . .

Our New Strategy

THE ALTERNATIVES TO TOTAL WAR

By STEWART ALSOP

● If the Cold War ever reaches the final showdown, do we have to choose between nuclear holocaust and surrender? ● Or can we find other ways to defend ourselves? ● Planning for such a crisis is the problem confronting Defense Secretary Robert McNamara. ● Pentagon strategists call it "thinking about the unthinkable." ● They use weird terms like "spasm response," "megadeath" and "counterforce collateral damage." ● But these words could become realities the next time Khrushchev makes a wrong move. ● In the following pages, a *Post* editor reports on McNamara's "Doctrine of Controlled Response" —why it has cost billions in extra spending, why it might someday save millions of American lives.

“There’s not much doubt he has the highest I.Q. of this century’s top public officials.”

When Nikita Khrushchev gave the order to build nuclear-missile sites in Cuba, he laid a military trap for the United States. In so doing, he brought the world close to what President Kennedy called “the abyss” of nuclear war. The President never had the faintest doubt that the Soviet missile bases in Cuba had to be eliminated at whatever risk. Behind this crucial decision was an understanding of the military realities that underlie and shape the world situation today. No one in the United States is better qualified or more articulate upon the subject of these military realities than the President’s chief strategic adviser, Secretary of Defense Robert F. McNamara.

Since McNamara became Secretary of Defense, the whole American defense establishment has been shaken from stem to stern, and some \$14,000,000,000 more than planned by the Eisenhower Administration has been allocated for our defense. With the McNamara regime in the Pentagon well into its second year, it is time to ask: What are the results of all this shaking and spending?

Moreover, since McNamara took over, the strategic theory of the United States—the basic thinking about the kind of wars we may be called upon to fight, and how we will fight them—has been drastically revised. It is important for Americans to understand this revolution in our strategic thinking, for it is a revolution we will live with or die with for years to come.

It ought to be said at the outset that this report is not going to make light or easy reading. It concerns subjects which a lot of Americans prefer not to think about at all. Moreover, it is impossible to write about such subjects without using occasionally a rather weird sort of Pentagon shorthand, which includes phrases like “second-strike counterforce capability” or “spasm response,” or “counterforce collateral damage.”

The jargon has an unreal and academic ring at first, like the debates of medieval theologians. But if you talk, as this reporter has recently talked, with the 30 or 40 key men who are responsible for our strategy in the nuclear age, the jargon begins to take on an oddly fascinating reality. For you come to recognize that it is about things that are real enough—like the survival or destruction of the United States, or the life or death of you and me.

Thinkers About the “Unthinkable”

The inventors of the Pentagon shorthand are a new breed of men, the “defense intellectuals.” The job of this new breed is to “think about the unthinkable.” The nuclear weapons and the ballistic missiles, married together, have changed the very nature of warfare, as Winston Churchill was the first to point out, and the defense intellectuals are professional students of this new and almost unthinkable kind of war.

Most of them are young, almost all are brilliantly intelligent, and many once worked for the Government-supported “think factories,” like the Rand Corporation. McNamara has imported a good many of these defense intellectuals into the Pentagon—men like Charles Hitch, Henry Rowen, Alain Enthoven, Eugene Fubini, Harold Brown. But the No. 1 defense intellectual is McNamara himself.

There is no longer much doubt that Robert McNamara has the highest intelligence quotient of any leading public official in this century. With his astonishing mental equipment, McNamara quickly mastered the shorthand of the defense intellectuals and the basic concepts which it expressed. He has gone on to reshape and re-define those concepts. He is himself the chief inventor of three distinct but related “McNamara doctrines.” These three McNamara doctrines express the revolution in our strategic thinking.

A good place to begin, in order to understand the McNamara doctrines, is with the story, often told in the Pentagon, of the encounter between one of the defense intellectuals and an Air Force general. It took place in the pre-McNamara era, at the vast headquarters of the Strategic Air Command near Omaha, Nebraska. The defense intellectual had a high security clearance, and the general briefed him at length on the SAC “war plan.” The war plan was a design for reducing all Russia, in a matter of hours after the “Go order” was given, to a heap of radioactive rubble. “General,” said the defense intellectual. “You don’t have a war plan. All you have is a sort of horrible spasm.”

Genius for Recognizing the Obvious

The “horrible spasm” war plan was simply a massive civilization-destroying attack, a natural outgrowth of the theory of “massive retaliation.” In his job McNamara has had no choice but to think about the unthinkable. McNamara has a genius for recognizing the obvious: The Soviet Union is obviously also capable of “massive retaliation.” Thus if a horrible spasm is visited upon the Soviet Union, a horrible spasm will also be visited upon the United States. To base U. S. strategy wholly on the “spasm response” therefore means, as one defense intellectual puts it, “basin strategy on a willingness to commit suicide.”

McNamara recognizes that in certain circumstances we may have no choice but to “literally destroy” the Soviet Union, come what may, as he says in the revealing interview which accompanies this report. But McNamara is a man who hates to be pinned down. He always wants a choice. His favorite word is “options.”

“Bob McNamara seeks his options,” says one friend, “as Parsifal sought the Holy Grail.” His thinking about the unthinkable has led McNamara to the conclusion that even in a nuclear war it should be possible to “maintain the options.” He has concluded that even a nuclear war need not necessarily be a civilization-destroying “multimegadeath war”—megadeath being the shorthand for a million dead.

This conclusion is central to McNamara’s strategic theory. The object is to avoid the “spasm response,” and to make the nuclear weapon a usable instrument of national policy. The instrument, if it is ever used, must be under continuous control of the civilian authority—the President or, if he is killed, his constitutional successor. This is the Doctrine of the Controlled Response. It is the basic McNamara doctrine, to which the two other McNamara doctrines are corollaries.

“Before McNamara,” one defense intellectual explains, “the President really had only two

buttons to push—Go and No Go. If he pushed the Go button, the military took over with the spasm response. McNamara wants to give the President a whole series of buttons on his nuclear console, from strictly limited tactical nuclear war at one end, through several shadings to Armageddon at the other end. He wants to give the President a nonnuclear console as well. And he wants to make sure that the civilian leaders, not the military, do the button-pushing from beginning to end.”

Two requirements must be met, if the Doctrine of the Controlled Response is to make sense. First, the difficult problem of maintaining control, even after a surprise nuclear attack, must be solved. The buttons must still be there to push, a civilian leader must be there to push them, and the military must be able to understand and obey the button-pushing.

This is the problem of “command and control,” to which McNamara from the beginning has assigned a high priority. Various steps, some necessarily secret, have been taken to assure continued command and control. The whole communications system has been made heavily redundant, so that it can still function if part of it is knocked out in a surprise attack. Many things have been done to ensure against unauthorized or accidental button-pushing. For example, an electronic “permissive link” system has been established to short-circuit the unauthorized firing of a nuclear weapon and thus guard against the sort of war-by-accident described in the novel *Fail-Safe*. And steps have also been taken to ensure the physical survival of the civilian leadership. “If one day Lyndon Johnson is no longer seen in his accustomed haunts,” one of the defense intellectuals wryly remarked, “you’ll know the situation is really ugly.”

The Still-Secret Gaither Report

The other requirement is that there must be weapons to respond with even after a massive surprise nuclear attack. Here it is worth glancing back into the recent past, for such a backward glance will suggest how our situation has been transformed in this respect. Readers with long memories will recall the furor five years ago over the famous, still-secret Gaither Report. The reason for the furor was simple. The members of the Gaither Committee, after a good look at our situation, concluded that the Soviets might soon be capable of playing Delilah to our Samson, by destroying our ability to retaliate against a surprise attack.

In those days almost the whole of our nuclear striking power was concentrated on some 42 aboveground SAC bomber bases. A single hydrogen bomb per base might all but eliminate our nuclear striking power, leaving us a hairless Samson. The then-current intelligence estimates indicated that the Soviets would soon be able to do the job.

Despite much soothing syrup distributed at the time, the Gaither Report sent a shiver throughout the entire defense community. It was a useful shiver. Work on the ground-based long-range missiles and the Polaris missiles and submarines was stepped up. So was work on

In Pentagon terms, "spasm response" strategy "is based on a willingness to commit suicide."

BMEWS, the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System, which covers the northern approaches to this country. And for the first time a proportion of the big SAC bomber force was put on 15-minute ground alert.

It is important to understand the significance of the BMEWS-bomber combination. For that combination is still today, in this worried autumn of 1962, the heart and soul of our defense against Soviet surprise attack. BMEWS would provide warning of any missile attack across the northern approaches. Half of SAC's 1,500 bombers are always now on a 15-minute ground alert. This great force of SAC alert planes would be off the ground and winging toward the Soviet Union before a Russian bomb fell. Although some of these planes would certainly be destroyed, they could unquestionably deliver a wholly devastating nuclear retaliation. Thus the Soviets could not play Delilah to our Samson.

The Cuba Plot: to Bypass BMEWS

This suggests why McNamara instantly recognized Khrushchev's attempt to transform Cuba into a missile base as a trap, which had to be smashed at any cost. Khrushchev's trap was a way of bypassing BMEWS. There is no missile warning system between this country and Cuba, and Cuba is so close to this country that no effective warning system is possible. If Khrushchev had completed the laying of his trap, he would have broken the BMEWS-bomber combination, as a thief breaks the combination of a safe. With no warning time, the whole SAC bomber complex would have been nakedly exposed to surprise attack from the Soviet missile base in Cuba. The world balance of power would have been shifted drastically in Russia's favor.

The "controlled response" which McNamara seeks would then have been rendered impossible. To be sure, airborne SAC bombers and the Polaris missiles, which because of limited accuracy and range are essentially "anticity" weapons, would have ensured us the final, suicidal "spasm response." But that is precisely what McNamara seeks to avoid.

From Khrushchev's point of view, the combination would have been broken just in time to give him an opportunity for a decisive showdown with the West. As the Cuban story has unfolded, it has become obvious that the attempt to establish a Soviet missile base in Cuba was part of an elaborate plan, first conceived many months ago, to prepare for such a showdown.

A 4,000-man team of Soviet military technicians installed the missiles with amazing speed, and this team must have started training last May or earlier. A vital part of the plan was an attempt by Khrushchev to deceive President Kennedy. A subordinate officer of the Soviet embassy in Washington conveyed personal assurances to the President from Khrushchev, through attorney general Robert Kennedy, that under no circumstances would Soviet weapons capable of hitting targets on the United States mainland be established in Cuba. The purpose of both the speed and the deception is clear in retrospect. It was to use the Cuban missile base as leverage to force an American backdown in Berlin, or Southeast Asia, or elsewhere.



McNamara, who likes to see war zones for himself, visits Vietnam with Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer.

"Bob McNamara seeks his options," says one friend, "as Parsifal sought the Holy Grail."

Khrushchev's need for maximum speed and maximum deception is easily explained. Very soon now the BMEWS-bomber combination will no longer be the essential element in our defense against surprise attack. Very soon now our defense combination will be unbreakable.

Here it is instructive to compare what was being said only a few years ago by knowledgeable men and what McNamara is saying now. In 1958, for example, Sen. John F. Kennedy warned in a somber speech that the United States in "1960-64" would be in a "position of great peril," as a result of crushing Soviet superiority in "offensive and defense missile capability." He was not alone. Among many others, Gen. Maxwell Taylor, now chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, foresaw much the same grim future, "*unless heroic measures are taken.*" (The general's italics.)

Compare these dire forecasts with what McNamara says in the accompanying interview about our ability to "take a full surprise attack" and respond either by destroying the aggressor or hitting only military targets. If McNamara is not talking through his hat, our situation in terms of the nuclear power balance has been wonderfully transformed.

Mind you, if Khrushchev had succeeded in breaking the BMEWS-bomber combination, McNamara would have been talking through his hat. But the combination has not been broken, and McNamara is not talking through his hat. Our situation *has* been transformed. Why?

Is it because of McNamara's "heroic measures"? He has allocated about \$6,000,000,000 more than planned under the Eisenhower Administration to improve our ability to deliver nuclear weapons to target. But McNamara himself is the first to acknowledge that this is *not* the real reason for the transformation—the money has not yet begun to pay off importantly in nuclear hardware. As one defense intellectual put it, "What we are living with now is what we inherited from Ike."

Decisive "Margin of Superiority"

The real reason for the transformation in our situation is that, as McNamara says, "a myth of national weakness has been destroyed." It might be more accurate to say that "a myth of Soviet strength has been destroyed." The Soviets simply did not build the kind of long-range-missile force they were expected to build. According to the intelligence estimates current three or four years ago, the Soviets were expected by this time to have between 600 and 800 intercontinental missiles. According to the current estimates, their 100th long-range missile became operational only a few weeks ago.

If the current intelligence estimates are accurate—and on this score McNamara says that he is "absolutely convinced"—the decisive "margin of superiority," which McNamara claims, is entirely real. That margin is based today on the BMEWS-bomber combination which Khrushchev tried to break. But McNamara's \$6,000,000,000 extra investment will also soon be paying off in a big way.

Until very recently our intercontinental ground-based missile force was "soft"—it consisted of

about 60 of the big, liquid-fueled, thin-skinned missiles, like the Atlas and the first version of the Titan. These missiles are aboveground. They could be destroyed by a warhead exploding several miles away, and it is slow and tedious work to get them into firing position. They could thus be destroyed in a surprise attack, which is why the BMEWS-bomber combination is still so vital.

But in recent weeks the first "hard" Titan and Minuteman missile sites in the United States have been declared ready for business. A hard missile is dug underground. It can be put out of business only by a direct hit or a very close miss. And the Minuteman can be fired almost as quickly and simply as a bullet is fired when you pull the trigger of a gun.

Moreover, thanks in part to McNamara's \$6,000,000,000 investment, we will soon have large numbers of these hard missiles. By the end of next year they will number in the low hundreds. By the end of 1964 we will have upward of 800. When that time comes, no trap Khrushchev can lay for us could eliminate our ability of "controlled response."

Claim: Sure Second-Strike Capability

Missile mathematics is a complicated business, which keeps the Pentagon's computers whirring. But as one of the defense intellectuals has remarked, "You don't really need computers—only the stub of a pencil and the back of an envelope." The Pentagon rule of thumb is that it would require eight Soviet missiles to knock out one hard American missile. Thus to have any hope of destroying our missile force—let alone our bombers, our submarines and our other means of delivery—the Soviets would have to have a missile force eight times as big as ours. "They just can't do it." That is the confident, unanimous prediction of the defense intellectuals. And as time goes on, and our protected missile force grows, it will become more and more impossible for the Soviets to "do it."

With the Cuban trap smashed, in short, McNamara claims what is known in the Pentagon shorthand as "sure second-strike capability." He claims more than that, although some Pentagonians privately believe that his second claim is premature. He claims that we could "respond by hitting only military targets." In the shorthand McNamara claims "second-strike *counterforce* capability."

Here we come to the second McNamara doctrine, which is a corollary of the Doctrine of the Controlled Response—the Doctrine of Counterforce Retaliation, which is also known as "the no-cities doctrine." Here it is in McNamara's words, in a historic recent speech in Ann Arbor, Michigan:

"Our nuclear strength . . . makes possible a strategy designed to preserve the fabric of our societies if war should occur. The U.S. has come to the conclusion that to the extent feasible . . . principal military objectives, in the event of a nuclear war . . . should be the destruction of the enemy's military forces, not of his civilian population."

One of the young defense intellectuals tried to explain this "counterforce doctrine" in simple

terms: "This country and the Soviet Union are like two men with cocked pistols. Both know that if one trigger is pulled the other will be pulled. Both want to be able to aim at the heart. But both have a mutual interest in avoiding death. So both will also want to be able to aim at the shoulder, say, or the hand holding the pistol, as in one of those duels where both duelists want to stop short of killing. The trouble is, of course, that to hit the shoulder and not the heart you've got to have a damn good aim. And if you aim at the shoulder, and the other fellow aims at your heart, you've got to have another bullet left to aim at his heart."

McNamara recognizes the need for that second bullet. Here he is again, speaking at Ann Arbor: "[We can] retain, even in the face of a massive surprise attack, sufficient reserve striking power to destroy an enemy society, if driven to it. In other words, we are giving the possible opponent the strongest imaginable incentive to refrain from striking our cities."

One of the defense intellectuals put the matter more simply: "We might choose to go for the missile bases, not Moscow. But if he hits New York, good-bye Moscow—and every other place in Russia bigger than a one-horse town."

This "counterforce doctrine" represents a revolution in our defense strategy. It also holds out hope—though no certainty—that the "fabric of our society" could survive a thermonuclear war. Because it is so important, certain questions need to be asked about this second McNamara doctrine.

The first question has already been asked—in Russia as well as in this country. Is it really a "first-strike doctrine"? Is it a formula for hitting the Russians before they can hit us? If we have the power to strike decisively at Soviet nuclear forces *after* they have hit us, doesn't it make sense to strike *before* they can hit us?

No U.S. Temptation to Strike First

McNamara's answer is that it does not make sense. As one defense intellectual put it, "We could decimate their forces in a first strike, but in the nuclear age decimation is not enough."

Suppose, with a first strike, we knocked out nine tenths of their missile-bomber force. They would still have enough left to destroy the major cities of Europe and America—and that is presumably precisely what they would do. As a McNamara subordinate put it: "We're not about to kiss good-bye to Manhattan, not unless we have to."

The second question is also obvious. Won't the Soviets also achieve a "sure second-strike capability"? McNamara's answer is surprising and significant. The first part of the answer is, of course, "yes." There is already evidence that the Soviets are getting ready to leapfrog from their cumbersome soft missiles to the hard solid-fueled missiles like Minuteman. The second part of the answer is the surprising part. It boils down to "the sooner, the better."

Many of the military men, like General Taylor, agree in substance with McNamara's curious but logical reasoning, as set forth in the accompanying interview. Some do not. In the Air Force especially, there is skepticism about the whole

Some military men are skeptical about the whole retaliation theory of the "defense intellectuals."

theory of "counterforce retaliation," which is regarded as the unrealistic invention of the defense intellectuals. "You just can't control these weapons that easily," says one Air Force general. "It's like asking us to play a Beethoven sonata with one hand tied behind our backs and the other in a boxing glove."

But on one point there is unanimous agreement. McNamara's "no-cities" theory makes sense only if it is married to a serious national shelter program.

The only way to kill a hard missile is to use a nuclear warhead to dig it out of the ground. This means ground-level bursts. This in turn means great masses of radioactive debris in the atmosphere and thus maximum fallout. (This used to be called "the bonus," but in the current shorthand it is called "collateral counterforce damage.") The best estimates are that even in a no-cities war there might be upward of 70,000,000 dead in this country from fallout alone. In some circumstances, depending on certain variables, the fatality rate could be upward of 60 percent of the population from fallout alone, even if the cities were spared.

Chances for Surviving Catastrophe

Given so monstrous a catastrophe, could "the fabric of our society" be preserved? Perhaps in time it could be restored. The human race is fecund, and human bodies could in time be replaced more readily than the delicate machinery of our industrial society. But the fabric would be most terribly rent, and it would be a very long time before it could be knitted together again.

Now suppose the same set of circumstances, plus a serious national fallout-shelter program. The Pentagon's innumerable studies suggest that in this case fatalities might be "on the order of" 10 percent of the population.

In short, even under what the Pentagon grimly calls "optimum" circumstances, nuclear war would be a hideous thing. But as McNamara says, "You have to think about it." And even with one American in 10 dead from a nuclear attack, the essential "fabric" of American society might well be preserved if our cities and industries still stood.

All this is enough to suggest why McNamara means to put a serious fallout-shelter program very high on his list of priorities for the next session of Congress. But all this is also enough to suggest why thinking men in and out of the Pentagon are beginning to question the value of the nuclear weapon as the chief military instrument of national policy.

"Bob McNamara is a near-genius," says one of these critics. "His no-cities theory is a brilliant attempt to rationalize the nuclear weapon. But it just won't wash. Suppose both sides adopt a no-cities strategy—which seems to me unlikely—how can you rely on a weapon as your chief instrument of power when you *know* that using it will cost you at least twenty million dead?"

McNamara himself, in his endless quest for "options," has moved at least halfway to the conclusion implicit in that question. And here we come to the last of the McNamara doctrines—the Doctrine of the Conventional Option. Ever since he became Secretary of Defense,

McNamara, with the President's full backing, has preached this doctrine doggedly—often to deaf Allied ears. The heart of this third McNamara doctrine is simple. We must have enough nonnuclear power so that "we cannot have nuclear war forced upon us because we have no other choice."

To this end McNamara has invested some \$8,000,000,000 above the Eisenhower level in nonnuclear defense. Because of the difference in lead time between conventional and nuclear weapons, this investment has already paid off handsomely. McNamara "quantifies the increment" (a typical McNamara phrase) at 25 percent for the NATO forces, 45 percent for American forces.

As a result, we now certainly have "the conventional option" in peripheral situations—Khrushchev never had any doubt that we could handle Fidel Castro with our conventional forces. But our central weakness is implicit in the last part of the interview which accompanies this article. If the Soviets make a serious grab for Berlin, we will have to "use all weapons," in McNamara's phrase. As a defense intellectual put it, "No matter how you slice it, if we're serious about holding Berlin, we've got to be prepared to go to the nucs." (Pronunciation: newks.)

In other words, in Europe, which is the grand prize of the cold war, we *could* "have nuclear war forced upon us because we have no other choice." As McNamara insists, there is no inherent reason, in terms of "wealth, manpower, resources," why this should be so. In all these ways the Western alliance ought to be "more than a match for the Communist side." But it isn't. In Europe we lack the "conventional option." And we are not going to achieve that option in the near future.

Final, Intangible Cold-War Factor

As a defense intellectual says, "Sure, we could match them—if. If the British adopted conscription. If the French committed their forces to NATO. If the Germans upped their proportion of manpower and gross national product devoted to defense to our level. If we ourselves cut back our long noncombat tail. But when are all these things going to happen? Not until or unless we've all had the living daylight's scared out of us."

Perhaps that time is coming soon. And here we come to a final, intangible factor in the cold-war equation, a factor which cannot be "quantified." It is will—the will of the people of the United States; above all, their President.

Nikita Khrushchev told Robert Frost that we Americans are "too liberal" to fight. Earlier he told the British ambassador in Moscow that Americans were not "crazy" enough to "sacrifice thirty million people for three million people in Berlin." Khrushchev must be persuaded that we are "crazy" enough to do just that.

Perhaps Cuba has helped to persuade him. Meanwhile, in charge of our defenses is a brilliant man with the courage to think about the unthinkable and the strength to shape our strategy, and the means to support it, in terms of the hard realities of the nuclear age.



Comptroller Charles Hitch came to the Pentagon from Rand Corporation.



Henry Rowen worked at the Harvard Center for International Affairs.



Eugene Fubini headed laboratory that worked on airborne instruments.

The "new breed" in the Pentagon



Alain Einthoven, weapons specialist, was a Rand Corporation economist.



Harold Brown, research chief, was director of a radiation laboratory.

McNamara thinks about the unthinkable

In a candid, exclusive interview with *Post* editor Stewart Alsop, the Secretary of Defense discusses our strategic situation today.

ALSOP: It seems to me interesting to compare what you said at Ann Arbor about the strategic balance of forces and what was being said only a few years ago by responsible people about the prospect of great Soviet superiority in missiles. How do you explain the difference?

McNAMARA: This nation created a myth of its own weakness. That is the main reason. The myth was the result of incomplete intelligence; although it was created by intelligence analysts acting in good faith, it was a myth all the same.

ALSOP: How confident are you that the myth of the missile gap was and is a myth?

McNAMARA: Absolutely confident. Of course there is a margin of error. There always is. But the margin of error is much less than the margin of our superiority. And the ending of the myth has made it possible to take a firm line with our adversaries and at the same time to reassure our friends that we are strong and determined to use our strength if we have to.

ALSOP: What do you think about the proposition that the price of any kind of nuclear war is so high that the nuclear weapon is not a rational instrument of national policy?

McNAMARA: Your question suggests the reason why we have made a great effort to achieve nonnuclear options, so that we cannot have nuclear war forced upon us because we have no other choice. Suppose you were to start from the premise that nuclear war is unthinkable and that you are not capable of fighting a nonnuclear war. If that is true, then you have no military foundation at all for your policy.

No sane man wants nuclear war, or any kind of war. But war *has* to be conceivable in support of vital national interests. Otherwise you have no real national power. You have to meet three tests. First, you have to have the power to support your policy. Second, you have to know you have that power. Third, he—the other side—has to know you have that power, and he has to believe that you will use it if your vital interests are threatened.

We have today sufficient nuclear power so that we could take a full surprise attack and respond in such a way that we would literally destroy the aggressor. We also have sufficient nuclear power so that we could respond by hitting only military targets.

Option of No-Cities Response?

ALSOP: In other words, you have the option of adopting the so-called no-cities, or counterforce, response, which you discussed in your Ann Arbor speech.

McNAMARA: Yes, we would have that option. I think in some ways the press overplayed that part of the speech. I carefully qualified what I said, and I made it clear that this was only one of a series of options. I would want to be absolutely certain that we had the other options.

ALSOP: Surely we must assume that the time will come when the other side will have a sure second-strike capability—solid-fuel missiles, hardened bases and all the rest of it.

McNAMARA: Yes, and that raises an interesting point. I believe myself that a counterforce strat-

egy is most likely to apply in circumstances in which *both* sides have the capability of surviving a first strike and retaliating selectively. This is a highly unpredictable business, of course. But today, following a surprise attack on us, we would still have the power to respond with overwhelming force, and they would not then have the capability of a further strike. In this situation, given the highly irrational act of an attempted first strike against us, such a strike seems most likely to take the form of an all-out attack on both military targets and population centers. This is why a nuclear exchange confined to military targets seems more possible, not less, when *both* sides have a sure second-strike capability. Then you might have a more stable "balance of terror." This may seem a rather subtle point, but from where I'm sitting it seems a point worth thinking about.

"No Pressure on Us to Preempt"

ALSOP: As you know, some writers here and abroad have interpreted what you said in your Ann Arbor speech as implying the possibility of the United States' adopting a first-strike strategy—a strategy of hitting first.

McNAMARA: What I said meant exactly the opposite. Because we have a sure second-strike capability, there is no pressure on us whatsoever to preempt. I assure you that we really never think in those terms. Under any circumstances, even if we had the military advantage of striking first, the price of any nuclear war would be terribly high. One point I was making in the Ann Arbor speech is that our second-strike capability is so sure that there would be no rational basis on which to launch a preemptive strike.

ALSOP: It seems to me that a no-cities doctrine only makes sense if it is married to a serious fallout-shelter program. Otherwise, even if the cities were left standing, the fatalities from fallout would be astronomical.

McNAMARA: Yes. Some people seem to feel that even to think about the fatalities which might result from a nuclear war is immoral. But you have to think about it. You have to ask yourself whether there are *no* situations in which one side or the other might use nuclear weapons. Your answer has to be that there are such situations. Then you have to recognize that there is a tremendous difference, a vital difference, between, say, thirty percent fatalities and sixty percent. A serious national fallout-shelter program could make that sort of difference.

ALSOP: When you think in terms of fatalities in the tens of millions, aren't you forced to ask yourself, again, whether the nuclear weapon is in fact a rational instrument of national policy?

McNAMARA: In a sense, nuclear war is certainly irrational—all war is irrational. But being irrational doesn't make it inconceivable. You might be forced into nuclear war as a result of an irrational act on the other side, for example, or of a misjudgment of our response to an attack on our vital interests. And given a nuclear capability on the other side, you *must* have a credible deterrent on your side. And you can't create a credible deterrent by threatening an incredible

action. For example, the use of nuclear weapons would be an incredible response to the building of the Wall, or to certain kinds of political-military pressure on the periphery. You can't fashion a deterrent by threatening to take action which no one in fact believes you will take.

The nuclear weapon, for example, becomes a rational weapon only in relation to situations in which the weapon might credibly be used—those situations in which the alternative might be even worse than the risk of nuclear war—for example, a surrender by stages to Communist aggression. There are certain circumstances in which the other side is dead sure we will use the nuclear weapon—an attack on the United States or on our NATO allies, for example. But there is always the danger of miscalculation. This is why it was important to make clear in a public statement that we mean to defend Berlin and that, if necessary, all weapons will be used for that purpose.

ALSOP: Berlin seems to me to symbolize our great central weakness. We're in far better shape to fight another limited conventional war like Korea than we were. But we still do not really have the "conventional option" in Europe.

McNAMARA: I don't maintain that the balance of conventional forces in Europe is all we would like it to be. But the NATO forces have been made much stronger—General Norstad quantifies the increment at twenty-five percent. Our own conventional forces have been increased by forty-five percent—from eleven to sixteen combat-ready divisions in the Army, for example. What is more, all sixteen divisions are better combat divisions, with more mobility, more airlift and more tactical air support. So the true increment is greater than forty-five percent.

We have stockpiled equipment for two divisions in Europe, and exercises prove that the men for these divisions could be airlifted to Europe in a matter of a week or so. We have a strategic reserve in this country of eight divisions as against three a couple of years ago. Our air power in Europe is at least equal to theirs, and there is on the central front about an equal number of men on both sides of the line.

"NATO a Match for Communist Side"

ALSOP: Yes, but they have much greater reserve power, don't they? Isn't the real difference that the threshold is higher—that they would have to mobilize and bring up their reserves to gain conventional superiority in Europe?

McNAMARA: Yes, they would have to bring up their reserves. But can they? We have a lot of air power in Europe. And we have reserves, too, don't forget. We spend two billion dollars a year on the reserves and the National Guard. I'm not saying that we wouldn't all be a lot happier if we had more conventional power in Europe. But conventional power is only part of the equation, and as I've said, if necessary we would use all weapons. But if we say that the Western powers are hopelessly inferior, then we're creating another myth of weakness. By any sensible standards—wealth, manpower, resources—NATO is, or can be, more than a match for the Communist side.

THE END