WHY did the Johnson Administration decide in the late 1960's to deploy a ballistic missile defense system in the United States?

In attempting to answer this question we need to seek an understanding of several distinct decisions and actions.\(^1\) The most puzzling event occurred in San Francisco on September 18, 1967, when Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara delivered an address to the editors and publishers of United Press International.\(^2\) McNamara devoted the first fourteen pages of his talk to a general discussion of the strategic arms race, emphasizing the limited utility of nuclear weapons and the fact that neither the United States nor the Soviet Union had gained any increased security from the arms race. With this as background, he turned to a specific discussion of the ABM issue:

Now let me come to the issue that has received so much attention recently: the question of whether or not we should deploy an ABM system against the Soviet nuclear threat.

To begin with, this is not in any sense a new issue. We have had both the technical possibility and the strategic desirability of an American ABM deployment under constant review since the late 1950s.

While we have substantially improved our technology in the field, it is important to understand that none of the systems at the present or foreseeable state of the art would provide an impenetrable shield over the United States. Were such a shield possible, we would certainly want it—and we would certainly build it. . . .

Every ABM system that is now feasible involves firing defensive missiles at incoming offensive warheads in an effort to destroy them.

But what many commentators on this issue overlook is that any such system can rather obviously be defeated by an enemy simply sending more offensive warheads, or dummy warheads, than there are defensive missiles capable of disposing of them.

\(^*\) An earlier version of this paper was prepared for delivery at the Sixty-sixth Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 8-12, 1970. I have benefited from comments from a number of readers of previous drafts, including Graham Allison, William Capron, Leslie Gelb, Arnold Kanter, Herbert Kaufman, and Jerome Kahan.

\(^1\) The framework of analysis used here is drawn from the author’s ongoing study of Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy.

And this is the whole crux of the nuclear action-reaction phenomenon. Were we to deploy a heavy ABM system throughout the United States, the Soviets would clearly be strongly motivated to so increase their offensive capability as to cancel out our defensive advantage.

It is futile for each of us to spend $4 billion, $40 billion, or $400 billion—and at the end of all the spending, and at the end of all the deployment, and at the end of all the effort, to be relatively at the same point of balance on the security scale that we are now.

If we in turn opt for heavy ABM deployment—at whatever price—we can be certain that the Soviets will react to offset the advantage we would hope to gain.

Many listeners undoubtedly expected the speech to end with the Secretary of Defense committing the United States firmly against an ABM deployment. Instead, McNamara immediately turned to another tack:

Having said that, it is important to distinguish between an ABM system designed to protect against a Soviet attack on our cities, and ABM systems which have other objectives.

One of the other uses of an ABM system which we should seriously consider is the greater protection of our strategic offensive forces.

Another is in relation to the emerging nuclear capability of Communist China.

There is evidence that the Chinese are devoting very substantial resources to the development of both nuclear warheads, and missile delivery systems. As I stated last January, indications are that they will have medium-range ballistic missiles within a year or so, an initial intercontinental ballistic missile capability in the early 1970s, and a modest force in the mid-70s.

Up to now, the lead-time factor has allowed us to postpone a decision on whether or not a light ABM deployment might be advantageous as a countermeasure to Communist China's nuclear development.

But the time will shortly be right for us to initiate production if we desire such a system.

Is there any possibility, then, that by the mid-1970s China might become so incautious as to attempt a nuclear attack on the United States or our allies.

It would be insane and suicidal for her to do so, but one can conceive conditions under which China might miscalculate. We wish to reduce such possibilities to a minimum.

And since, as I have noted, our strategic planning must always be conservative, and take into consideration even the possible irrational behavior of potential adversaries, there are marginal grounds for concluding that a light deployment of U.S. ABMs against this possibility is prudent.

The system would be relatively inexpensive—preliminary estimates place the cost at about $5 billion—and would have a much higher de-
gree of reliability against a Chinese attack, than the much more massive and complicated system that some have recommended against a possible Soviet attack. . . .

After a detailed review of all these considerations, we have decided to go forward with this Chinese-oriented ABM deployment, and we will begin actual production of such a system at the end of this year.

Before concluding, the Secretary of Defense returned to his earlier theme and warned of the danger in the deployment he had just announced:

There is a kind of mad momentum intrinsic to the development of all new nuclear weaponry. If a weapon system works—and works well—there is strong pressure from many directions to procure and deploy the weapon out of all proportion to the prudent level required.

The danger in deploying this relatively light and reliable Chinese-oriented ABM system is going to be that pressures will develop to expand it into a heavy Soviet-oriented ABM system.

We must resist that temptation firmly—not because we can for a moment afford to relax our vigilance against a possible Soviet first-strike—but precisely because our greatest deterrent against such a strike is not a massive, costly, but highly penetrable ABM shield, but rather a fully credible offensive assured destruction capability.

The so-called heavy ABM shield—at the present state of technology—would in effect be no adequate shield at all against a Soviet attack, but rather a strong inducement for the Soviets to vastly increase their own offensive forces. That, as I have pointed out, would make it necessary for us to respond in turn—and so the arms race would rush hopelessly on to no sensible purpose on either side.8

The apparent contradictions in the speech were a puzzlement to the audience. Some speculated that McNamara had planned to give an anti-ABM speech and was instructed by the President at the last minute to add a deployment decision. However, an examination of the following questions will show us that the speech was planned from the first as it was delivered.

1. Why, in January 1967, did President Johnson ask Congress to appropriate the funds to deploy an ABM, but state that he would defer a decision to initiate the deployment pending an effort to get the Soviet Union to engage in talks on limiting the arms race?4

8 Ibid.
4 Lyndon Baines Johnson, "Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1968, January 24, 1967," Public Papers of the President of the United States, 1967: Book I (Washington 1968), 48. "In 1968, we will: continue intensive development of Nike-X but take no action now to deploy an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defense; initiate discussions with the Soviet Union on the limitation of ABM deployments; in the event these discussions prove unsuccessful, we will reconsider our deployment decisions. To provide for actions that may be required at that time, approximately $375 million has
2. Why was the decision to deploy an ABM announced at the end of a speech whose whole structure and purpose was to explain why an ABM defense against the Soviet Union was impossible?

3. Why did the Secretary of Defense describe the system as being directed against China, while the Joint Chiefs of Staff and their congressional allies described it as a first step toward a full-scale defense against the Soviet Union?

4. Why was the system that was finally authorized for deployment one which was designed and deployed as if its purpose was to protect American cities against a large Soviet attack?

Having stated the questions, we must postpone attempting to provide the answers until we have examined in some detail the nature of the process by which the decisions were made. We must ask who the participants in the process were. We must examine the personal and organizational interests that defined their stakes in the ABM debate. We must determine the constraints operating on the process in terms of the decision-makers' shared images of the world, the rules of the game by which decisions were made, and the participation of large organizations. We must also ask what arguments were advanced on each side to secure the outcome desired, and what the consequences were. After thus analyzing the process we will be better prepared to find answers to our puzzling questions.

In seeking to understand why the United States Government makes a particular decision or takes a particular action, we can make no greater mistake than to assume that all the participants in the process looked at the issue in the same way and agreed on what should be done. The reality is quite different.

When individuals in the American government consider a proposed change in American foreign policy, they often see and emphasize quite different things and reach different conclusions. A proposal to withdraw American troops from Europe, for example, is to the Army a threat to its budget and size; to Budget Bureau examiners a way to save money; to the Treasury Department a gain in balance of payments; to the State Department's Bureau of European Affairs a threat to good relations with NATO; and to the President's congressional advisers an opportunity to remove a major irritant in the President's relations with the Hill.

The differences stem from the differing faces of the issue which they

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been included in the 1968 budget for the production of Nike-X for such purposes as defense of our offensive weapons systems."
see; they depend in part on whether their interests lead them to per-
ceive a threat or an opportunity.

What determines which face an individual sees? What accounts for
his stand?

Participants in the process of national security policy in the Ameri-
can government believe that they should take stands which advance
the national security of the United States. Their problem is to de-
termine what is in fact in the interest of national security; they must
seek clues and guidelines from a variety of sources. Some hold to a set
of beliefs about the world (e.g., the Soviet Union is expansionist and
must be stopped by American military power). Others look to authori-
ties within the government or beyond it for guidance. For many partici-
pants, what is necessary for the nation's security comes to be defined
as a set of more specific intermediate interests. For some, these may be
personal (e.g., since, in general, I know how to protect the nation's
security interests, whatever increases my influence is in the national
interest). For others, the intermediate interests relate to domestic po-
litical interests (e.g., since a sound economy is a prerequisite to national
security, I must oppose policies which threaten the economy).

Many participants define national security according to the interests
of the organization to which they belong. Career officials naturally
come to believe that the health of their organization is vital to the na-
tion's security. Organizational commitments on the part of outsiders
appointed to senior posts vary depending on the individual, the strength
of his prior convictions, his image of his role, and the nature of the
organization he heads. Some senior officials seek clues less from their
organization's interests than from the interests of the President, as
they define them.

The proposal to deploy an ABM was seen in different ways by dif-
ferent people and posed different threats and opportunities to their
perception of the national interest as well as domestic, organizational,
and personal interests. A look at the faces of the issue as seen by the
participants, and their calculation of the stakes, is the place to begin
to seek a solution to our puzzles.5

5 The discussion of the interests of the participants is based in part on knowledge
gained by the author as a participant in the process, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of
Defense (ISA). Some of the observations are based on guesses about positions taken.
Many of the same insights can be derived from a reading of congressional testimony,
speeches, etc. See also Edward Randolph Jayne II, “The ABM Debate: Strategic De-
fense and National Security,” MIT Center for International Studies, Center Paper
C/69-12, 669-712. This study, based largely on interviews, confirms many of the stands
described here. To be fair to the reader (and to add to his confusion), it should be
noted that the present author was one of those interviewed by Jayne.
DECISION TO DEPLOY THE ABM

We will start with the organizations that were exerting pressure upward on the Secretary of Defense and the President. In doing so we will oversimplify: we will talk about the Army, the Directorate for Defense Research and Engineering, etc. Just as the United States Government can be broken down into major departments, and these departments in turn into smaller components, these smaller components themselves have parts with differences of interest, objectives, and perspective. For our purposes in explaining the ABM decision, it is sufficient to go no lower than the main components of the Defense Department, such as the Army and the Directorate of Defense Research and Engineering.

Organizational Stakes

The Army

Throughout the 1950's the Army fought for a role in the preparations for strategic nuclear war. It did so because it recognized that budget funds were moving towards strategic nuclear programs and because it believed that these programs were critical to the security interests of the United States. Most of the Army's efforts, however, were unsuccessful. It did receive partial responsibility for air defense involving warning systems and surface-to-air missiles, but it did not have the tactical fighter component of the air defense system, and it failed to get involved in strategic offensive forces. The Army did receive permission to work on the R & D for medium-range ballistic missiles, but in the end the responsibility for deployment went to the Air Force. Thus, by the late 1950's the Army realized that its role in strategic nuclear forces would be restricted to defense. Because of the limited role of anti-aircraft defenses, those in the Army who were responsible for developing, deploying, and operating air defense systems turned to missile defense. For them it was simply the next step in the same direction.

One of the most publicized aspects of the program budgeting system installed in the Pentagon by McNamara and his Comptroller Charles Hitch was the so-called program package. Under this concept, strategic forces would compete for defense funds with each other, rather than with other programs in the budget of each Service. Insofar as this procedure really affected budgets, the funds for the ballistic

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6 On Service interests, see Morton H. Halperin, "Why Bureaucrats Play Games," Foreign Policy, No. 2 (Spring 1971), 70-90.
7 On the Army's interest in ABM in particular, see Herbert York, Race to Oblivion (New York 1970), 214.
missile defense program would come out of the budget for strategic offensive and defensive systems and not out of the Army budget, as it would probably have in the 1950's when budgeting was explicitly done on the basis of Service shares of the budget. Some in the Army undoubtedly opposed the ABM, arguing that in fact each Service still had a limited budget which, in the case of the Army, should be used for its main purpose, viz., ground combat forces. However, this was also a period of rising defense expenditures, with the Services competing vigorously for the larger funds. Thus, the opposition within the Army to seeking a major ballistic missile defense was weakened: proponents could argue that the means would come, not from the existing Army budget, but from new funds which would otherwise go to Air Force and Navy strategic programs.

THE NAVY

In the postwar period, the United States Navy developed a broader participation in the various roles and missions of the United States Armed Forces than either the Army or the Air Force. The Navy has its own ground troops in the form of Marines, and its own air capability, both for tactical air support of Marine operations and for strategic bombing missions from carriers. In the late 1950's it staked out a major role in strategic offense missions when it got permission to proceed with Polaris submarines with their nuclear missiles. Strategic defense was the only area in which the Navy was not yet active.

The Navy's attitude towards ABM was determined in part by a search for a share in the responsibility. By the early 1960's the Navy had a program aimed at developing a ship-based ballistic missile defense. Naval officials recognized that they could not hope to get exclusive responsibility for ballistic missile defense, since the Army had primary responsibility. The Navy therefore sought to justify its system as a supplement to the Army land-based system. Consequently, the Navy recognized that the only hope of getting permission for deployment was to have the Army go forward first. The Navy, then, wished to proceed with the ABM in a way which kept open the possibility that later additions to this system would include a Navy-controlled, sea-based system.

In return for Army support of continuing development of the Navy sea-based ballistic missile system, the Navy was prepared to support an Army land-based system.

Moreover, the Navy was concerned, as was the Air Force, with main-
taining the system of unanimous support by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for Service procurement programs. This issue is discussed in detail below in considering the rules of the game.

THE AIR FORCE

The Air Force–Army rivalry in the field of defense has always been intense because of the lack of a clear division of roles in air defense. Both the Army and the Air Force have sought total control over the air defense role, the Air Force viewing it as part of the strategic mission and the Army as related to battlefield defense. In the late 1950's, when the Air Force got exclusive authority for medium-range ballistic missiles, an uneasy truce had been worked out on air defense, under which the Air Force had responsibility for tactical fighters and the Army for surface-to-air missiles. The Air Force did not, up to the end of 1968, make any effort to challenge this division by seeking a role in deploying ballistic missile defense.

Some Air Force officials, particularly those in SAC, were concerned about the proposals from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) for defending Minuteman silos with the Army ballistic missile defense system. In part this was a reflex reaction, a desire not to have Air Force missiles protected by "Army" ABM's. In part there was concern that the Air Force would not be funded for a new offensive missile if billions were spent defending the Minuteman missiles with an ABM system. The Air Force clearly preferred that the funds for missile defense be used by the Air Force to develop new hard rock silos or mobile systems.

However, as long as the ABM was an area defense, competing (as the Air Force saw it) with Army funds for air defense and for civil defense, the Air Force was prepared to go along. Area defense also did not challenge any Air Force missions or appear to pose competition for funds for new strategic offensive forces.

Although each of the three Services saw a different face of the ABM issue, in the end they all were prepared to support it. There was no such unanimity within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, to which the Secretary looked for advice and support on this matter. The three offices involved were the Office of the Director of Defense Research and Engineering, headed during this period by John S. Foster; the Office of Systems Analysis, headed by Alain Enthoven; and the Office of International Security Affairs, headed by John McNaughton and then by Paul Warnke. Each of these offices saw a different face of ABM and reached different conclusions.
The Director of Defense Research and Engineering is the Secretary of Defense's principal adviser on scientific and technical matters. He is also the manager of research and development programs. Foster therefore was responsible for monitoring the progress of ballistic missile defense, both in the Army and in the Advanced Research Projects Agency, which was a part of his office. He had previously been head of an AEC nuclear laboratory, and viewed his role as representing within the higher councils of the Pentagon and within the White House the perspective of the research scientist. Foster took it for granted that technology should be pushed as hard as possible, although he recognized the need to choose from the wide variety of different possible new technologies. He also believed that when technology reached the state where it was militarily effective, it should be deployed.

For Foster, the ABM issue was relatively simple and straightforward. At stake was the continued effectiveness of the weapons laboratory and the scientific research teams of American industry. Having developed an ABM system that was technically well designed, that community would expect it to be deployed. Its morale would be adversely affected by a decision not to deploy a system considered technologically "sweet." As the decision to deploy the ballistic missile defense system was delayed far beyond the time Foster thought to be justifiable on scientific and technical grounds, he began to fear that the laboratories involved would break up as the scientists became convinced that the United States would under no circumstances deploy a ballistic missile defense. He also feared that rising costs due to the delay in opening production lines would make it harder to justify a later decision to deploy. Furthermore, Foster believed that the Russians, in deploying an ABM while we did not, could develop a technologically more efficient system. As far as he was concerned, national security required that we maintain the vigor of our R & D establishment in order to maintain military superiority.  

Thus, Foster was for deployment of the ABM. The move from re-

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8 Industrial groups and contractors shared these concerns, as did research organizations such as the Stanford Research Institute, which worked on the ABM for the Army. However, the influence of these groups was limited to supplying arguments for ABM supporters in the administration and helping to arouse congressional concern. A T & T, the prime contractor, is much less dependent on defense contracts than the prime contractors of most large systems; nevertheless, A T & T was eager for the contract because it used its involvement in air defense and missile defense to help prevent an anti-trust suit to split Bell Labs, the research group, and Western Electric, the manufacturing unit, from the Bell system.
search and development to deployment was more important to him than how the decision was rationalized publicly.

SYSTEMS ANALYSIS (SA)

Systems analysis was perhaps McNamara's major innovation in Pentagon organization and decision-making. Organized by Enthoven in 1961, the SA office was responsible for preparing for McNamara a series of Draft Presidential Memoranda (DPM), including one on strategic offensive and defensive forces. This document laid out McNamara's rationale for procuring strategic forces and indicated his decisions on particular force posture issues.

Enthoven believed that we were spending too much on strategic forces and strongly resisted Service-proposed programs to build a new bomber, a new missile, a new submarine, or to increase expenditures vastly on strategic forces. He doubted whether strategic superiority gave the United States any significant advantage.

In deciding whether an ABM system should be deployed, Enthoven and his colleagues examined the possible role of the system as compared to other methods of accomplishing the same objectives. With regard to city defense they expressed doubts about whether the system would function effectively; they pointed out that the Russians could respond at much less cost and negate the value of any larger ABM system. Defense against China was difficult to evaluate in terms of systems analysis. SA could only calculate the cost of the system relative to the possible savings in lives in the event of a Chinese attack; it could not judge whether the cost was justified. For the defense of Minuteman silos, SA calculated the cost of ABM protection by comparing it to the cost of moving into much harder rock silos or to that of a mobile land-based missile. In terms of these comparisons, the choice of whether or not to proceed with a ballistic missile defense was always a marginal one. In the end, however, the advantage of heading off Service pressures for new strategic offensive systems tipped the balance in Enthoven's mind toward support of ABM defense for Minuteman silos.

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS (ISA)

ISA has no budget, no relations with outside laboratories, industry, or foreign governments, and is committed to no specific method of analysis. Hence, the approach it takes tends to be dominated by the views of the Assistant Secretary. John McNaughton and Paul Warnke brought to this position a strong commitment to arms control, both in terms of a United States–Soviet agreement on strategic forces and a nuclear non-
proliferation treaty. Both saw American ABM deployment as a threat to these interests and opposed it.9

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE ROBERT S. Mc纳米ARA

During the course of his seven years as Secretary of Defense, McNamara became more and more concerned with the problems of getting the strategic arms race under control. He came to believe by 1965 that, early in the Kennedy administration, the United States had bought a far larger strategic force than was necessary for deterrence of the Soviet Union, in turn stimulating a Soviet build-up which was now threatening to force the United States to step up the arms race once again. He believed that what he called the “mad momentum of the arms race” had to be brought under control in order to prevent nuclear war and to create a climate in which political relations between the United States and the Soviet Union might be improved. McNamara appears to have viewed the ABM as in some sense a symbol of the arms race. If the United States could take the decision not to deploy an ABM, then it might be possible to negotiate an agreement with the Russians or to reach a tacit understanding with them which would permit a leveling off of the strategic expenditures on both sides and, ultimately, their reduction. On the other hand, the decision to deploy the ABM—a system which McNamara, unlike Foster, believed was technologically unlikely to work—would symbolize our determination to buy whatever was available and to continue the search for a superiority which McNamara felt was unattainable and much less useful than many believed. Perhaps more than any other participant in the process, McNamara saw very high stakes for the national interest in the decision whether or not to deploy an ABM system; and he had no doubt that the correct decision, on grounds of national security, was not to deploy.

McNamara, as Secretary of Defense, was keenly conscious of his accounts both with the military and with the President. He believed that he could overrule the Joint Chiefs of Staff on matters about which

9 The Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the State Department, and the President’s Science Advisory Committee shared many of these concerns. None of these organizations played a major role in the decisions. Cf. the comment of Herbert Scoville, who at the time was an Assistant Director of ACDA: “ACDA was at no time a participant in any of the senior-level discussions leading up to it [McNamara’s speech].” Herbert Scoville, Jr., “The Politics of the ABM Debate: The View from the A.C. & D.A.”; paper prepared for the APSA Annual Meeting, September 1970, 4. The rules of the game, as explained below, limited the involvement of these organizations as well as that of the Budget Bureau. Secretary of State Rusk’s role involved direct and private communication with the President.
they felt strongly on only a limited number of occasions, and he care-
fully chose the issues. He recognized that on such occasions the Chiefs
might go directly to the President, and that they would almost cer-
tainly go to the Hill to seek to enlist their supporters in bringing pres-
sure to bear on the President to overturn his decision. Nevertheless,
he expected to get (as he did on most occasions), the President’s back-
ing, but this depended on not seeking presidential support too often
and never on issues on which the President was strongly committed
to the other side.

ABM was for McNamara a vital issue, and he was prepared to over-
rule the Chiefs and to seek the President’s support. At the same time,
he was not prepared to push the issue to the point of a break with the
President.

WALT W. ROSTOW

Serving as the President’s National Security Assistant, Walt W.
Rostow was potentially in a position to play a major role. However,
Rostow never had the mandate (which both Bundy and Kissinger have
had) to involve himself heavily in the substance of all major foreign
policy issues, particularly those pertaining to defense. Furthermore,
McNamara tended to deal directly with the President, and to get in-
volved in between on an issue concerning McNamara and Johnson
would have meant a substantial cost to Rostow. Since the two appar-
ently were in disagreement on the issue, he could only lose by stating
a position. In this relationship, Rostow tended to save his own influence
for Vietnam and a few other issues about which he felt very strongly.

Rostow’s own stakes in the decision were not very high compared
to the cost of involvement. He thus remained outside and did not play
a key role, either in providing information for the President or in seek-
ing to influence his decision directly.

CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS

Under the rules of the game in the United States, military leaders
have not only the right but the obligation to state their personal views
on defense issues to Congress when asked by members of the Armed
Services or Appropriations Committees. Thus, it was routine for Con-
gress to be informed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were unanimously
in favor of a ballistic missile defense system and to hear the arguments
for such a deployment from senior military officers. In addition, there
may well have been private discussions between military leaders and
senior Senators and Congressmen.
Congressmen tend to defer to expertise, and the leaders of these committees viewed the military rather than the civilians in the Pentagon as the experts on national security. They were prepared to support programs which the military believed were vital to the improvement of American military capability. In particular, they found it difficult to understand why we should not deploy something which would save American lives in the event of a war. As Richard Russell said in explaining his position, if only two human beings were to survive a nuclear war, he wanted them to be Americans: as he saw matters, an ABM would clearly increase this possibility. In general, the legislators were suspicious of Soviet motives and believed that the United States should maintain strategic superiority. Many of them also derived advantages, in terms of defense industries in their states and districts, from increased defense spending. Finally, they felt that the Secretary of Defense was seeking to substitute his judgment for that of the military, and that this was dangerous. For congressional leaders like Russell, Stennis, Jackson, and Thurmond, the stakes were the national interest as defined by the military.

PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON

President Johnson assumed the Presidency of the United States without any strong commitments to particular foreign policy positions. His own concerns and interests were tied up mainly with domestic issues. Johnson does not appear to have seen any major national security stakes in the decision whether or not to deploy the ABM. Because it was an issue that generated intense passion in others, he was concerned, but he did not ascribe to it any intrinsic importance in terms of his conception of American security or America’s role in the world. He was apparently wary of possible Chinese irrationality, having recently received a number of reports that the Russians believed the Chinese to be dangerous. Therefore an ABM against China, while not imperative, made sense to him. As will be discussed below, Johnson was interested in Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) with the Russians, but evidently did not share McNamara’s fear that an American ABM deployment would impede agreement.

The issue for Johnson tended to be defined in terms of his relations with the other participants, including the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and congressional leaders concerned with defense matters—particularly those on the Senate Armed Services, Joint Atomic Energy, and Appropriations Committees. He was also, of course, sensi-
Johnson's relations with McNamara had become uneasy during this period because of their growing disagreements about the conduct of the Vietnam war. Though prepared to overrule McNamara on Vietnam issues, Johnson was—at least until he made the decision to move him to the World Bank—interested in keeping McNamara on board, and he recognized that this meant supporting him on a number of other issues. Johnson could have had no doubt that McNamara felt strongly that a ballistic missile defense system should not be deployed, certainly not a large area defense system against the Soviet Union.

If the Chiefs' assertion of vital interests was not enough to settle the issue, neither was it something to be dismissed out of hand. Johnson clearly viewed the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a separate entity. He did not believe that he could leave the job of managing them to the Secretary of Defense. In general, he was reluctant to overrule the military; he viewed them as a group to be bargained with, in large part because of their power and influence on the Hill. He also was not prepared totally to discount their views on issues of national security. If the Chiefs said that an ABM was vital to the security of the United States, Johnson was not prepared to dismiss that as the rhetoric of the military who always want every new system.

For Johnson, certain of his former colleagues in the Senate constituted a major reference group on national security matters. He had had a close relation with Richard Russell, who was then the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, as well as with such men as John Stennis and Henry Jackson. Johnson did not like to challenge their positions. He also took their views on national security seriously, and knew that they all felt very strongly that the United States should deploy a ballistic missile defense designed to deal with a Soviet attack against the United States.

The domestic political stakes could not be ignored by the President. There could have been little doubt in his mind that the Republican nominee, whether he be Richard Nixon or Nelson Rockefeller, could well make defense a major issue in the campaign. At the urging of his Secretary of Defense and under intense budget pressures, Johnson had permitted the non-Vietnam portion of the defense budget to decline, at least in real terms, and he was regularly rejecting proposals from the Joint Chiefs to develop and deploy a whole array of new strategic systems (for instance, a new manned strategic bomber) and new general-
purpose systems. Opposition to his defense program was building, particularly among leaders of the Senate and House, and the Republicans were beginning to sense the possibility of a defense issue in the next presidential election. The ABM was rapidly becoming a symbol of defense preparedness. Johnson had to recognize that, if he did not deploy an ABM, he was open to the charge that he had failed to take a step which would save American lives in the event of a war. Although political scientists may point out that issues of defense procurement rarely swing votes in an election, Presidents are not so certain. Kennedy had apparently scored effectively against Nixon in 1960 on the missile-gap issue, and Johnson was reluctant to run the risk that the “defense-gap” issue would be used effectively against him.

Thus, Johnson saw the stakes largely in terms of his relations with the Secretary of Defense, with the military, and with the senior members of the Congress concerned with defense, especially inasmuch as implications for the 1968 election were involved. As the President saw it, McNamara was strongly against a deployment (as was Secretary of State Dean Rusk), while congressional leaders and the military were strongly in favor. All claimed to be reasoning from the point of view of national security. Johnson’s own instincts would have led him to search for a compromise which would minimize the damage to his relations with his advisers.

The other participants were maneuvering and putting forward arguments in an effort to alter his perception of domestic or international consequences. The way in which they struggled to define an issue for the President and to seek the outcome they desired was biased by the images that are taken for granted in the top hierarchy of the United States Government, the rules of the game, and the fact that the deployment of the ABM could be carried out only by the United States Army and only by the use of existing procedures.

Rules of the Game

The most important rule of the game which affected the nature of the ABM debate in the executive branch was the one requiring the President to make budget decisions once a year and to defend his decision publicly. This is a rule that derives from the system of government and applies to any President. Since the ABM had aroused great congressional and public interest, the President could not duck the issue in his budget messages. Instead, he had to discuss the subject and state clearly why he was for or against an ABM. This meant that the option
of trying to keep the issue away from the President was not open to
the opponents of the ABM. Because it was an annual budget issue,
proponents of the deployment of an ABM system had no difficulty
reaching the President, and opponents had to persuade the President
not only to rule against deployment but to take a public stand. Thus,
at each budget cycle McNamara had to devote considerable effort and
energy to developing a rationale against deployment which the Presi-
dent would be prepared to accept and to embrace publicly as his own.

Other rules of the game were peculiar to the Johnson administration.
The nature of the President’s relationship with his Secretary of Defense
affected the outcome of the ABM debate. McNamara tended to deal
privately with the President on issues of major concern to him. Formal
memoranda, which he would clear throughout the Defense Depart-
ment and send to the President, were prepared only after he and the
President had privately agreed on a position. The President’s meeting
with the Joint Chiefs on the budget tended to be a routine and for-
malistic opportunity for the Chiefs to appeal the Secretary of Defense’s
decisions. McNamara’s annual meeting with the President’s National
Security Adviser, Science Adviser, and Budget Director was equally
formalistic. Although this procedure eventually broke down on Viet-
nam, it did not do so on defense-budget issues. This meant that there
was no open debate within the administration. Because of the private
nature of McNamara’s relation with the President, other agencies such
as the State Department, ACDA, and the President’s Science Adviser
were not able to make inputs to the decision in an orderly way before
McNamara and the President had reached tentative agreement.

The rules of the game under which the Joint Chiefs of Staff operated
also influenced the outcome of the ABM question. During the 1950’s the
Joint Chiefs of Staff tended to split on major issues, particularly on
those affecting the deployment of systems for one Service. Each Service
tended to support its own deployment, and except where specific deals
were made, to oppose controversial deployments for the other Services
—particularly expensive ones which might upset the existing arrange-
ment allocating shares of the defense budget. Because they did not see
any threat to their autonomy from the Secretary of Defense in the
1950’s, the Chiefs were prepared to deal separately with the Secretary
and with the President. Robert McNamara’s approach changed the
procedures dramatically.

Unlike his predecessors, McNamara saw himself as a decision-maker
on strategic issues and not simply as a business manager who left policy
to the military. The Joint Chiefs discovered that when they split,
McNamara would use their disagreements to reject programs supported by just one of the Services. In order to counterbalance this influence, the Joint Chiefs developed a policy of compromise—to unite in support of each Service. Thus, by 1965 the Army was able to make a strong enough case for an ABM to get the support of the other Chiefs. The Navy was apparently brought along by Army support for a development of the concept of a ship-based ABM system and some other Navy programs. The Air Force appears to have been brought along by Army support for Air Force strategic programs, and by the Army’s willingness to forego ABM protection of Minuteman silos. As a result of these arrangements, the Secretary of Defense and the President were confronted by the Joint Chiefs’ unanimous position that ballistic missile defense was vital to the security of the United States, even though really only the Army favored it strongly. Congress was informed that the Chiefs unanimously supported a deployment.

**Shared Images**

The debate within the executive branch was founded on a set of widely shared images about the role of the United States in the world and about the nature of the threats to its security. All participants in the debate accepted the notion that the Soviet Union and China were potential enemies of the United States who would engage in military threats and who might use military force, if not against the United States, at least against our allies, unless the military power of these countries was counterbalanced by that of the United States.

There was also the widespread belief that nuclear power was an important component of national power. It was widely accepted that the United States had to maintain strategic superiority over the Soviet Union and China since these countries were aggressive and expansionist and the United States was defensive and peaceful. It was also assumed that any military capability which would enhance the ability of the United States to survive a nuclear war should be procured; many believed that the United States should procure any weapons system which the Russians had.

Although McNamara began to argue against some of these beliefs beginning in the mid-1960’s, they were by and large accepted by most of the participants, and the debate was carried out within these terms. McNamara was forced to construct his arguments largely within the framework of the images held by the rest of the participants. The proponents of ABM deployment found that the shared images biased the debate in their direction.
ARGUMENTS

Within these constraints, proponents and opponents of an ABM deployment put forward arguments designed either to convince other participants or to demonstrate that a decision reached because of organizational or political interests could effectively be defended before domestic audiences.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF DEPLOYMENT

1. *This will save American lives.* Supporters of the ABM argued that in the event of a nuclear war the ABM system would shoot down incoming Soviet missiles and hence would save American lives. The extreme form of this argument, as has already been mentioned, was presented by Senator Richard Russell. Others pointed out that even if 60 million Americans were killed in a nuclear attack, the expenditure on ABM would be worth saving a possible 120 million other Americans.

2. *The Russians have it.* Throughout the postwar period the United States has felt obligated to match Soviet deployments. It has been argued that if we let the Russians have something that we do not have, they would gain a psychological or political advantage in dealing with us. Similarly, if the Russians were to develop something while we did not, they would gain a technological lead. Thus, in the public debate, and even within the bureaucracy, the argument that “we need it because the Russians have it” has carried great weight.

3. *It works.* Proponents of the ABM sought to counteract technological arguments against deployment by asserting its effectiveness. They pointed to tests in which a single ABM had intercepted a single incoming warhead, and they expressed confidence that the entire system would in fact work in the event of a nuclear attack. If it worked, it should be deployed.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST DEPLOYMENT

It was more difficult to find clear and simple arguments against the deployment of the ABM system that would appeal to the President and be persuasive in dealing with Congress and the public. Over time, the Secretary of Defense developed a series of arguments against an ABM deployment, and specifically against a large-scale deployment directed

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against the Soviet Union, which was the system that the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the senior congressional leaders were proposing.

1. **The system is not technologically ready.** Up to 1963, McNamara was able to argue, with wide support from the technological community, that the Army-proposed Nike-Zeus system simply could not be effective against the kind of decoys and other penetration aids that the Soviets were fully capable of producing.\(^{11}\) If we went ahead with a deployment, he argued, we would wind up with a second-rate system. On the other hand, if we waited, we had hopes of developing a new and more effective system. By 1963 this argument was no longer valid because a new and more technologically efficient system had been developed, and it appeared unlikely that additional breakthroughs would occur in the foreseeable future.

2. **This will bring less return than expenditures on other systems.** After 1963, the Secretary of Defense introduced arguments of cost effectiveness. He pointed out that a large ABM system designed to protect American cities would be aimed at reducing American casualties in a nuclear war. He suggested that one had to examine alternative ways of reducing casualties and determine which would be the most effective for any given sum of money. McNamara examined a number of alternative ways of reducing casualties, including air defense and civil defense. He argued that the studies made clear that the installation of a nation-wide system of fall-out shelters would produce the largest saving. Thus, if the United States were to commit itself to a "damage-limiting" program designed to save lives in the event of a nuclear war, it should build a shelter system. Only after the shelters were completed should one consider spending money on other measures, such as ballistic missile defense.\(^{12}\) The civil defense argument was a complicated one. It depended on people understanding marginal utility and accepting that one should always proceed in the most efficient way. McNamara appears to have put this argument forward not to make a case for civil defense, but to make one against ballistic missile defense.

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3. There will be an equal and opposite reaction negating the value of the system. McNamara next turned to the argument of the equal and opposite reaction. As he explained it to Congress, if the United States deployed a large ABM system which would cost between $20 and $40 billion, it would, against the currently expected Soviet threat, save a number of American lives in the event of a nuclear war. McNamara then proceeded to show that the Russians could offset our ABM deployment at substantially smaller cost, and casualties would return to the previous level. Thus, he argued, our ABM system would bring an equal and opposite reaction from the Soviet Union which would totally negate the value of the ABM system—producing the same amount of casualties at a higher expense to us. Although sophisticated critics were able to point out that there was nothing in the history of the arms race to suggest that in fact an equal and opposite reaction was inevitable or even likely, McNamara’s argument was a simple and effective one. It summarized in a crude way the truth that over time the Soviets would build decoys and MIRV’s if the United States built an ABM, and that in the end there would not be the savings in lives that ABM proponents suggested.

4. We must resist the mad momentum of the arms race. In his speech announcing that the United States would deploy a light area defense directed against China, McNamara introduced a new argument against an ABM deployment directed at a large Soviet attack. He talked about the history of the arms race and argued that the United States on a number of occasions had built a larger force than it needed for deterrence. He suggested that in turn this had stimulated the Soviets to build more. Such an interaction, which he called “the mad momentum of the arms race,” was, he said, a danger to the security of the United States, and therefore the United States should take the initiative in exercising restraint.

5. We must negotiate arms limitation with the Soviet Union. Encouraged by Johnson’s interest in strategic arms limitation talks, McNamara sought to utilize this presidential concern to delay the decision to deploy ABM. He argued that a public call for talks would serve as a reasonable rationale for delaying deployment. He also argued that an American commitment to deploy ABM’s would decrease the likelihood of Soviet agreement.

Having examined the stakes as the participants saw them, as well as the constraints and the arguments that were used, we can now consider in detail the questions we posed at the outset.

1. Why, in January 1967, did President Johnson ask Congress to appropriate the funds to deploy an ABM, but state that he would defer initiating the deployment pending an effort to get the Soviet Union to engage in talks on limiting the arms race?

As preparations for the budget for the fiscal year 1968 neared completion in the closing months of 1966, time appeared to be running out on McNamara’s efforts to prevent deployment of a Soviet-oriented ABM system. A number of pressures seemed to be coming to a head, including the following:14

**Technological improvement.** The technology of ballistic missile defense had improved drastically in the preceding few years. Those responsible for the program in the scientific community, in DDR & E and its operating arm, the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), as well as in the Army, were now arguing that an effective ABM system could be built and could ultimately be improved to handle even a large Soviet attack. In previous years, the testimony of these scientists had effectively served to offset the pressure exercised by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and had enabled McNamara to persuade the President and the Congress that the technology was not yet ripe for an ABM deployment. They were no longer prepared to play this role.15

**Soviet ABM deployment.** There was growing evidence that the Soviet Union was beginning to deploy an ABM system around Moscow. In the past the intelligence community had been split as to whether the so-called Tallinn system being deployed across the northern part of the Soviet Union was in fact an ABM system. (Although some military intelligence agencies were pressing the view that Tallinn was an ABM system, the majority of the intelligence community believed that it was an air defense system.) However, there was no dispute at all that the system being deployed around Moscow was an ABM. This added to pressures to begin an American deployment in order to avoid an ABM gap.

**JCS pressure.** In part because of the changes in technology and the Soviet ABM deployment, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were no longer willing to concur in delaying ABM deployment; they were determined to

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14 The documentation for this section is drawn from Jayne (fn. 5).
go firmly on record before Congress in favor of a deployment now, and in particular for a deployment that would develop into a large anti-Soviet system.

Senate pressure. Pressure was also mounting from Senate leaders for initial ABM deployment. Among others, Russell, Jackson, and Thurmond had spoken out in favor of an early ABM deployment. The general expectation in the executive branch was that Congress would put great pressure on the President to agree to a deployment if he did not include it in his budget message.16

Republican pressure. It was also becoming evident that the Republican Party planned to make a campaign issue out of an alleged ABM gap. Governor George Romney of Michigan, then believed to be a leading Republican candidate for the presidential nomination in 1968, had, on a “Meet the Press” broadcast in November, talked of an ABM gap and made it clear that this would be an issue in the campaign. Moreover, the GOP Congressional Policy Committee led by Melvin Laird had decided to make the ABM a vehicle to challenge Lyndon Johnson’s strategic policies. Senator Strom Thurmond, a leading Republican expert on defense matters, had also attacked the failure to deploy an ABM.17

There was no doubt that JCS demands for an immediate ABM deployment would be made known to leaders on the Hill, as would the growing evidence of a Soviet ABM deployment around Moscow. Congress had in the previous year included funds for the ABM deployment which the President had not requested; the stage was set for a confrontation should Johnson again accept the advice of his Secretary of Defense and delay an ABM deployment.

The President’s choices seemed to be rather narrow. He could reject ballistic missile defense, embrace McNamara’s arguments against deployment, and prepare to take his case to congressional leaders and the public. Alternatively, he could proceed with a ballistic missile defense deployment at the cost of overruling his Secretary of Defense. The odds were high that the President would proceed with the ballistic missile defense deployment being pressed on him by the Joint Chiefs and the Senate leaders. Only if he could find another option did McNamara stand any chance of again delaying a presidential commitment to ballistic missile defense.

16 See, for example, Baltimore Sun, November 21, 1966 and December 3, 1966; Washington Post, November 24, 1966.
17 Jayne (fn. 5), 346.
It appears that McNamara first discussed the subject with the President at meetings held on his Texas ranch on November 3rd and 10th. These discussions were reported to focus on the ABM and the question of extending the bombing to additional targets in North Vietnam.18

Following the meeting with the President on November 10th, McNamara reported at a press conference that the Soviets were now believed to be deploying an ABM system around Moscow. McNamara's initiative in releasing this information made it possible for him to preempt an inevitable news leak and, at the same time, to air his view that the Soviet ABM deployment required improvements in American offensive capability rather than a matching deployment. McNamara noted that the United States was moving ahead with Minuteman III and Poseidon, and therefore was fully confident of its ability to deter this Soviet ABM. He declared that it was too early to begin deployment of an anti-Chinese system, and that no decision had been made on other possible reasons for a deployment.19

The decisive meeting with the President appears to have been held on December 6th. At this meeting—attended by McNamara, his Deputy Secretary Cyrus Vance, all the members of the Joint Chiefs, and the President's Special Assistant Walt Rostow—the Joint Chiefs were given the opportunity to put forward their argument for what was then called Posture A, a full coverage of the United States with a system designed for defense against more than a Chinese attack. The Joint Chiefs made it clear that they intended to see that Posture A would develop into Posture B, a larger anti-Soviet system designed to reduce casualties in the United States in the event of a large Soviet attack, and that they would accept nothing less. McNamara countered by presenting the arguments against an anti-Soviet system emphasizing that the Soviets would eventually have an offensive capability which would fully offset the value of the ABM. At this point he appears to have presented the President with two possible compromises. The first, which he was ultimately able to persuade the President to accept, called for a procurement of production items requiring a long lead-time, with no specific decision as to what system, if any, would be deployed; this was to be accompanied by an effort to begin arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union. The second option was to begin deployment of a small anti-Chinese system. The meeting ended with Johnson agreeing that the State Department should begin to probe the Soviets on the possibility

18 These meetings are described by Jayne (fn. 5).
of talks, but apparently withholding any decision on ABM deployment.

The State Department thus proceeded to explore the possibilities of arms limitation talks with the Soviets. At the same time McNamara wrote up and presented to the President a Draft Presidential Memorandum (DPM) summarizing his arguments against an anti-Soviet system, but suggesting that an ABM defense against China might prove useful.

To demonstrate that he was not the only opponent of a large Soviet-oriented ABM system, McNamara arranged for the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to meet early in January 1967 with past and current Special Assistants to the President for Science and Technology and Directors of Defense Research and Engineering. None of the scientists present dissented from the view that an ABM to defend the American people against a Soviet missile attack was not feasible and should not be built. There was some discussion of a Chinese-oriented system and some divergence of views, but a majority was opposed to deployment.20

Following this meeting, McNamara was apparently able to persuade Johnson to delay any deployment, whether anti-Russian or anti-Chinese, and to pursue the option of procuring long lead-time items, and to concentrate on the effort to open arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union.

The proposal for such talks seemed to be a vehicle for the pursuit of a number of presidential objectives. Johnson was haunted, as all of his postwar predecessors had been, by the specter of nuclear war. He was anxious to try to do something to bring nuclear weapons under control. Moreover, here was an issue on which the President could appeal to the desire of the general public for peace, and specifically to the left wing of the Democratic Party, which was becoming increasingly disaffected on Vietnam. It was also an issue that could make history for Johnson as the man who had made the decisive move to end the nuclear arms race which threatened mankind’s doom. Johnson was quick to sense these possibilities.

McNamara was able to argue that a decision to proceed with ballistic missile defense would hamper arms limitation talks with the Russians, since one of the main purposes of such talks would be to seek

20 The scientists present were Science Advisers James R. Killian, Jr., George B. Kistiakowsky, Jerome B. Wiesner, and Donald F. Hornig; and Directors of Defense Research Herbert York, Harold Brown, and John S. Foster, Jr. The meeting is described in York (fn. 7), 194-95.
an agreement by both sides to avoid any ballistic missile defense deployments. Further, he could argue that a dramatic act of restraint by the United States would increase the probability that the Russians would respond favorably, and that the talks would begin. In any case, a bold gesture for peace on the part of the President would undercut much of the opposition to his decision not to proceed right away with a ballistic missile defense deployment.

At the same time, by asking for funds for ballistic missile defense and implying that he would be prepared to spend them if talks did not get under way, the President was able to avoid making the argument that the United States should unilaterally forego deployment of a ballistic missile defense. Johnson would be able to tell the Joint Chiefs and the senior congressional leaders that he had certainly not ruled out a ballistic missile defense; that in fact he had taken a major step toward such a deployment, but that he was postponing the actual deployment pending an effort to get an arms control agreement with the Soviet Union. Though the military and congressional leaders might be somewhat uneasy about the further delay, they could not effectively mount a campaign against an effort to seek agreement with the Soviet Union, given the widespread popularity of such efforts.

Thus, the proposal to link the two issues enabled McNamara to gain a further delay, which he hoped would last indefinitely as the talks continued. The President could avoid paying any major price in his relations with McNamara, the Joint Chiefs, or the congressional leaders who favored an ABM deployment. He could put off a hard choice and open up the possibility of arms control negotiations which would substantially enhance his domestic position and solidify his prospects for a favorable place in the history books.21

2. Why was the decision to deploy an ABM announced at the tail end of a speech whose whole structure and purpose was to explain why an ABM defense against the Soviet Union was impossible? 3. Why did the Secretary of Defense describe the system as being directed against China, while the Joint Chiefs of Staff and their congressional allies described it as a first step toward a full-scale defense against the Soviet Union?

What has been said thus far should make it clear that the answers lie in the bargaining between McNamara and Johnson, with each taking account of the positions of the Joint Chiefs and the congressional leaders.

The effort to get the Soviets to agree to set a date for arms limitation

21 On the tendency to make the minimum decision necessary, see Warner Schilling, "The H-Bomb Decision," Political Science Quarterly, lxxvi (March 1961), 24-46.
talks was unsuccessful. When President Johnson met with Soviet Premier Kosygin at Glassboro, New Jersey, on June 23rd and 25th at a hastily arranged summit conference, there was still no Soviet agreement to talk. Johnson brought McNamara along; while the two leaders ate lunch, the Secretary of Defense gave them a lecture on nuclear strategy, previewing his San Francisco speech and emphasizing the value of an agreement to both sides. The Soviet leader was unyielding; he described ABM as defensive and unobjectionable and was not prepared to agree to talks.22

Following the Glassboro Conference there could be little doubt that talks would not be under way before the President’s next budget message in January 1968. Almost immediately Johnson informed McNamara that some kind of ABM deployment would have to be announced by January at the latest.23 At that time the President would have to account for the disposition of the ABM contingency funds he had requested and state whether he was seeking additional sums for deployment of an ABM system. Given his stakes as we have defined them, and given the implicit commitment that he had made in January of 1967 to go forward in the absence of arms limitation talks, the President’s decision was not difficult to predict. January of 1968 would be Johnson’s last chance to announce the deployment in a budget message before the presidential elections in November. To hedge again, stating that he was still seeking talks, would have seemed unconvincing since Johnson had been unable to secure Kosygin’s agreement to talks at the Glassboro meeting. The intermediate options had run out. The President was determined to go ahead, even if it meant paying a price in his relations with the Secretary of Defense. Apparently, Johnson also felt that by beginning to deploy an ABM he might convince the Soviets to enter into arms limitation talks.24

Having decided to proceed with an ABM deployment, Johnson was obviously concerned about reducing the cost in terms of his relations with McNamara. He was willing to let the Secretary announce the deployment in any way he chose. For the sake of military and congressional acceptance, the President may have insisted that the deployment be such that others could describe it as the first step toward an anti-Soviet system.

McNamara’s primary goal remained to prevent deployment of a large system directed at the Soviet Union. If the United States were to go forward with any ABM deployment, it was important to do whatever possible to create in the public mind a clear difference between

22 Jayne (fn. 5), 366-69. 23 Ibid., 372. 24 Ibid., 373.
the system being deployed and a large system, at the same time vigorously putting forward the case for not deploying a large system against the Soviet Union. It was therefore in McNamara's interest to be able to explain his view of the arms race, explain his opposition to a large anti-Soviet system, and then announce an ABM deployment. The apparent contradiction in the speech was designed by McNamara as a way of emphasizing that this was not a large ABM deployment against the Soviet Union. He may also have hoped that his speech would generate substantial public opposition to an ABM deployment.

McNamara had recognized several years earlier that he might lose the battle against deploying any kind of ABM system and had begun laying the groundwork for a fall-back position in the form of a small ABM system directed against China. In February 1965, he publicly raised the possibility of ABM protection against a small nuclear attack from China, but argued that even on those grounds the decision was not then needed because "the lead-time for additional nations to develop and deploy an effective ballistic missile system capable of reaching the United States is greater than we require to deploy the defense."25 In the following year McNamara indicated that the ABM system now being developed would not be effective against a larger attack, but could deal with a small Chinese threat.26

Thus, in September of 1967, McNamara could announce that the lead-time for an ABM deployment was now about the same as the lead-time for the Chinese deployment of an ICBM system of significant size. Therefore, it was now prudent to proceed with this deployment which he had been discussing for several years. And McNamara appears to have been convinced that, in its own terms, ABM defense against China was, as he described it in his speech, "marginal" but nevertheless "prudent." In announcing the decision to deploy an ABM system against China, McNamara was putting forward arguments which he believed.

Even more important was the fact that McNamara's major concern was to try to prevent a large deployment directed at the Soviet Union which would force the Soviets to respond, setting off another round

of the arms race. An anti-Chinese system could be limited more easily than a small system directed against the Soviet Union. One alternative was to describe the system as one designed for protection for Minuteman installations, although it would be difficult to justify on grounds of cost effectiveness. Moreover, a system deployed only around missile sites would have been resisted by the Joint Chiefs and the Senate leaders; it did not pave the way for a larger system against the Soviet Union and could not be described as the beginning of one. It is not clear whether McNamara himself or the President ruled out this alternative.\(^27\)

4. Why was the system authorized for deployment one which was designed and deployed as if its purpose was to protect American cities against a large Soviet attack?

Once a presidential decision is made on a policy issue, the details of implementation must be turned over to an individual or organization. In the case of the ABM, there was no choice but to assign responsibility to the Army. Although McNamara could and did attempt to monitor how the Army would deploy the system, he was unable or unwilling to direct that the system be designed and deployed so as to minimize the possibility of growth. The Army's freedom may have been enhanced by the fact that McNamara's scientific and technical advisers themselves tended to favor keeping open the option for growth into a large ABM system. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze, to whom general responsibility for much of the day-to-day administration of the Pentagon fell as McNamara devoted more and more of his time to Vietnam, also tended to favor keeping open the option for a large system.

But there was a more fundamental problem. Once the decision had been made to proceed with a ballistic missile defense directed against China, there was strong pressure to move forward quickly. The President could not admit at that point that we had no hardware for such a system and that three or four years of research and development would be necessary before deployment would begin: one had to start

\(^{27}\) In his San Francisco speech McNamara stated, with regard to Minuteman defense, that "the Chinese-oriented ABM deployment would enable us to add—as a concurrent benefit—a further defense of our Minuteman sites against Soviet attack, which means that at modest cost we would in fact be adding even greater effectiveness to our offensive missile force and avoiding a much more costly expansion of that force." A short time later, in an article in *Life* (September 29, 1967, pp. 28 A-C), elaborating on the speech, he stated unequivocally that the Minuteman defense would be deployed. However, following a trip to Europe for a meeting of the NATO Nuclear Planning Group, McNamara declared that no decision had been made as to whether the option to defend Minuteman sites would be exercised.
with deploying the components that were already developed, even though they were not the optimum ones for a defense system against China that could be kept from growing into a large ABM system against the Soviet Union.

Geography also worked against a limited system. Both Russian and Chinese ICBM's approach the United States through the same corridor over the pole. The same radar could be used for an anti-Chinese system and an anti-Russian system, and long-range missile launchers would be useful against both threats.

DDR & E, which favored a large Soviet-oriented system, had no incentive for using its ingenuity to develop components that could be effective against China but had little potential for a large anti-Russian system. And, in making precise decisions about the location of radar and missile-launching sites, the Army in fact opted for sites close to cities, to permit the eventual deployment of a large anti-Russian system.

McNamara's control over the implementation of this decision was simply not great enough to prevent these developments. His attention was increasingly absorbed by Vietnam and he was clearly on his way out. He did not have the support of the President in seeking to limit the system. His principal assistant did not share his desire to reduce the possibility of growth, and the Army, charged with deployment, favored a large anti-Soviet system. Thus, despite McNamara's efforts in his statements to distinguish sharply between an anti-Chinese and an anti-Russian system, the Army was able to tell the Congress that actual deployment was not different in any significant way from the projected first stages of an anti-Russian system, and that the system being deployed was expected to grow.

**Conclusions**

The decision of the Johnson administration to deploy an ABM system, the way in which it was announced, and the preparations for deployment which followed illustrate the pulling and hauling of many different players with different interests that is characteristic of the foreign policy process in the United States. No single player's views, including those of the President, of what should be done, dominated, although the President's views played a major role in shaping the general direction in which American actions moved.

Two independent decisions were involved, with different actors influencing the course of each. The first decision was simply whether or not to deploy the ABM at all. This was necessarily a presidential
decision; there was no end run around him. As the ABM decision illustrates, the President is qualitatively different—not simply a very powerful player among less powerful players.

The second decision related to the timing, substance, and shape of deployment, given the previous decision that there was to be an ABM of some kind. In this latter decision the President played a much less central role, and other players were somewhat more influential. Johnson was both less interested and less in control.

The decision to announce some sort of deployment by January of 1968 can thus best be explained by exploring the multiple constituencies and interests that the President had to balance. The foreign policy interests of all postwar Presidents have come to focus on relations with the Soviet Union as they affect the nuclear balance and the need to avoid nuclear war. These concerns, while from time to time stimulating interest in arms control, have mainly led to support for defense efforts. At the same time, the Presidents have all been concerned with their image in history and have developed a desire to go down as men who contributed to a peaceful international environment. All of them felt, as Johnson did, the responsibility to avoid a nuclear holocaust that would destroy civilization.

Moreover, no President can ignore the pressures exerted by the bureaucracy, especially the military and the senior cabinet officers, or by senior congressional leaders and the public, when a presidential campaign is around the corner. All of these pressures came to bear on Lyndon Johnson as he faced the ABM decisions during the course of 1967. Johnson appears here in the characteristic presidential role of conciliator: a man who attempts to give as much as he can to each of a number of his principal subordinates and the permanent bureaucracies while seeking a position that avoids any conflict between his own various interests and constituencies beyond the government. The limited ABM which Johnson ultimately directed be deployed could be described by Robert McNamara as anti-Chinese and therefore not a danger to Soviet-American relations in general or future arms talks in particular. At the same time, the Joint Chiefs and Senate leaders had their own payoffs. Despite McNamara's statement, they could describe it as a first step towards an anti-Soviet system. Moreover, the small anti-Chinese system which Johnson approved was much larger than the system the Soviet Union was deploying around Moscow. Given these ambiguities and the simplified nature with which the public views such questions, the Republican Party had effectively been deprived of a missile gap issue. That was the President's payoff.
Johnson was also able to reconcile his own concern, to seek an end to the nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union, with the need to maintain American military strength. Early in 1967 he was prepared to go along with McNamara’s proposal that arms talks with the Soviet Union be sought before a firm final decision was made to proceed with an ABM deployment. After talking with Kosygin, he concluded that the Soviets would not enter talks under the current circumstances. He believed that perhaps the pressure that would be put upon the Soviet leaders by the beginnings of an American deployment would constitute a leverage on the Russians to agree to talks. In ordering the deployment, Johnson was not abandoning his efforts for arms talks and an arms agreement with the Soviet Union; rather, he was structuring the issue, making an American ABM deployment a way to get the very talks that both he and McNamara desired.

If the decision to order a deployment can be most clearly understood in terms of the conflicting pressures on the President, the precise nature of the deployment can be understood largely in terms of pressures within the bureaucracy below the President, constrained by the operating procedures of the Army and of the Pentagon as a whole. Although McNamara himself favored no deployment or a limited deployment, the staffs on which he had to depend to monitor and implement the President’s decision were unanimous in their belief that an ABM system should be built that could grow into a large anti-Soviet system. His science adviser, John S. Foster, who would have to have the major role in monitoring both the research on the ABM system and its development and production, believed strongly that the option for a large system should be left open, as did Paul Nitze, McNamara’s Deputy Secretary of Defense (following the departure of Cyrus Vance who more closely shared McNamara’s views). The Army itself favored a big system. No imaginative thought had gone into the design of components for a specifically anti-Chinese system. In fact, the implementers were straining as hard as they could to design and deploy a system that could be expanded as far as possible. McNamara’s power, as suggested above, was weak in this game; he lacked strong presidential directive as well as strong staff support to keep the system small. His primary attention was focused on Vietnam, and his days as Secretary of Defense were obviously numbered.

One of the truisms of bureaucracy is that it resists change. Innovation, when it occurs, must generally be explained. The history of the ABM appears to be an anomaly. McNamara, the defender of the status quo, had to take the initiative to prevent an ABM deployment, since
the system seemed to be grinding inevitably towards it. The explanation for this lies in the fact that the system was heavily biased toward the deployment of new weapons systems under certain conditions; ABM deployment was not seen as change. A number of components of the rules of the game, the shared images, and the organizational procedures of the American government produced a situation from the time of the Korean War through the end of the 1960's in which the procurement of new systems was part of the routine.

As has already been noted, the budgetary process itself creates a unique set of pressures. The fact that ABM decisions had to be recorded in the budget meant that the issue would reach the President without any effort on the part of its proponents. This was particularly true because of the rule giving the JCS the right to appeal to the President any decision of the Secretary of Defense or the Budget Director. No other career service enjoys this right. Moreover, the President had to make a decision and announce it publicly, in keeping with a deadline brought about by the budget. To urge him to delay was equivalent to urging him to take a public stand against an ABM deployment at that time.

The operating rules of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as their access to congressional leaders and congressional committees, also produced a bias towards deployment of weapons systems that were favored strongly by one of the Services. Given strong Army support for an ABM, and given the judgment of scientists that it was technically feasible, unanimous JCS support for the system was forthcoming under the logrolling rules which the Chiefs had begun to use in the McNamara period. The fact that they would report their views to the Congress when asked meant that the President could not keep differences hidden and, in order to prevent a deployment, would have to challenge the JCS in public.

The sequence of the private decision-making process involving negotiations of the President and the Secretary of Defense with the Joint Chiefs also biased decisions toward deployment: the normal desires of the Budget Bureau to avoid expensive weapons systems, the skepticism of the scientists on the President's Science Advisory Committee, and the opposition of some parts of the State Department to a deployment could not be brought into play early enough in the process to affect presidential decisions.

Shared images which, according to official belief, dominated American society also biased the system towards an ABM deployment. There was a widely accepted view that the United States needed to have
strategic superiority over the Soviet Union and that the United States needed to match any system the Soviets deployed. The general view was that the United States should deploy any strategic system which worked well and which appeared to have the prospect of reducing damage if war should occur. The existence of these shared views made it difficult to put forward arguments within the bureaucracy against an ABM deployment, and even more difficult to shape arguments which the President would consider to be effective with the Congress and with the public. Given this situation, the President had to be concerned with the domestic political effects—particularly on his prospects of re-election in 1968—if he appeared to be opening an ABM gap, failing to match the Soviet system, and giving up American nuclear superiority.

The organizational procedures of the Pentagon also tended to bias toward a decision to deploy. Research, both in the Army and in the Advanced Research Projects Agency, was dominated by scientists who believed that any feasible system should be deployed. Moreover, the focus tended to be on the greatest conceivable threat, and hence on designing a system against a large Soviet attack. In addition, the desire to make an effective case for deployment led to underestimates of cost and overestimates of feasibility.

McNamara seemed to recognize that, because of the constraints within the system, success was unlikely. Thus his effort had to be directed as much toward changing the long-standing strategic nuclear biases as toward devising a delaying action against deployment. Although he lost the short-run battle to prevent deployment or to deploy a system that could not grow into a large anti-Soviet system, his efforts to change the terms of the debate within the bureaucracy, with the Congress, and with the public were considerably more successful.

By 1969, President Nixon accepted nuclear sufficiency rather than superiority as the American goal. He also embraced, as his own, McNamara's arguments against an anti-Soviet system. He announced that the United States had no intention of deploying such a system, not only because it was technically infeasible, but also because such a system would threaten the Soviet deterrent. While he proceeded with a system that was against China and in defense of Minuteman sites, Nixon directed that it be designed so that it could not grow—nor appear to the Soviets that it could grow—into a large anti-Russian system. In part as a result of the arguments McNamara had made in his speech announcing the deployment, as well as of his posture statements, the attitude of the Senate changed dramatically on this range of issues.
Perhaps the most successful conversion was that of the Russians. Kosygin had argued at Glassboro that ABM's were purely defensive weapons and that the American effort to prevent their deployment was immoral. However, by 1971 the Russians were pressing for an agreement at the strategic arms talks simply to limit ABM's. Even the fact that the talks were under way at all can be attributed to McNamara’s efforts to prevent an ABM deployment.

Changes in the rules of the game and the shared images of the bureaucracy, the Congress, and the public have altered the biases of the system. However, the actions of the Nixon Administration can only be explained by considering the new set of players and their interests. It is a new tale, but one not unaffected by this one.