In fairness to the Europeans, it must be admitted that Washington rarely spoke with a unified voice as to what the new American doctrine really meant.¹

To what extent did the American government undermine its own efforts to strengthen NATO’s conventional forces in the 1960s? The McNamara proposals, and the analysis upon which they were based, did not meet with uniform acceptance in Washington. Careful examination of the divergent points of view held by Defense Department civilian officials and by the Joint Chiefs of Staff suggests that the policy messages conveyed by American officials to the European allies were not always clear and consistent. Sceptical military officers at the Pentagon, for example, disputed McNamara’s analysis of the NATO/Warsaw Pact military balance and the viability of a conventional defence of Western Europe. Further, McNamara’s attempts in the early 1960s to share more information about nuclear weapons with the allies were undercut by opposition from the intelligence community and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The result was a series of ‘mixed signals’ which stimulated European scepticism regarding the McNamara proposals and the motivations behind them.

Disagreements in Washington were compounded by American actions abroad. The US government presented proposals and deployed weapons which undermined the effort to strengthen NATO conventional forces. The multilateral force (MLF) proposal, for example, was a State Department attempt to address European concerns about nuclear sharing, but it did so in a way which only exacerbated the problem. The MLF proposal also diverted alliance attention away from McNamara’s priority of conventional force improvements. Perhaps the most significant ‘mixed signal’, however, was the increase in the stockpile of US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe by over 100 per cent in the 1960s, which seemed to contradict the American emphasis on conventional defence. These mixed signals were significant factors in shaping the final outcome of the debate.
TENSIONS IN THE PENTAGON

To understand the bureaucratic dissension in the United States over McNamara's proposals in the 1960s, one must start with the Pentagon. The Department of Defense under McNamara was known, among other things, for its antagonistic civil–military relations. McNamara relied heavily on his staff of civilian defence analysts, particularly those in the Systems Analysis Office, to assist him in shaping his defence policy. The tensions between McNamara and the military reflected the fact that vested service interests were being challenged as McNamara attempted to centralise defence planning and institute a shift in strategy, and as the Systems Analysis Office reassessed the NATO/Warsaw Pact military balance. As Alain Enthoven put it: 'General LeMay wanted everyone to believe in 175 Russian divisions because of the consequences for the Strategic Air Command. Furthermore, the Army thought that by over-stating the threat, they could get more forces'.

The negative military response to McNamara's initiatives was based on other factors as well. Military officers strongly resented the prominent decision-making role played by McNamara's 'whiz kids', both because they disagreed with them on substantive issues such as the military balance in Europe, and because of the sharp clash in personal styles between the young civilian analysts used to the informal give-and-take of the academic world and senior military officers used to the deference and respect for rank of the military world. Many military officers also felt that McNamara often made up his mind on issues after consulting with his civilian advisers, without giving adequate consideration to the views of the military services. As Henry Rowen, Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs put it:

There was a fantastic amount of antagonism. This was partly for bad reasons: a sheer power struggle, a change in authority; and it was partly for good reasons: the military had a sense that important variables were being left out – such as a feeling for the enemy, his intentions, and other intangibles.

The depth of hostility, based on both vested interests and personal antagonism, is illustrated by the comments of General Thomas S. Power, Commander-in-Chief, Strategic Air Command, at the end of a