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# ***SECURITY ASSISTANCE PERSPECTIVES***

## **The Foreign Military Sales Policy of the Kennedy Administration**

**By**

**Major Philip P. Nardi, USAF**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Administration of President John F. Kennedy was a key factor in shifting the primary means of administering the Military Assistance Program (MAP) from grant aid to military sales. Following World War II the U.S. supplied military equipment in the form of grant assistance to allies because their economies prevented them from producing or buying materials to maintain a military defense against Soviet aggression. A variety of legislative authorizations governed this program. With the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, the U.S. Congress passed the *Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949*. This act became the foundation for the *Mutual Security Acts of 1951 and 1954*, and led to a variety of grant aid and sales programs (Thayer, 1969: 37). This "hastily instituted series of measures to meet communist aggression" led President Eisenhower to appoint a committee to study MAP (President's Committee, 1959: 1).

The committee's task was to evaluate the extent to which future military assistance could advance U.S. national security and foreign policy interests, and provide the President with conclusions to be used in presenting the Mutual Security Program to the next session of Congress (Eisenhower, 1958). In June of 1959 the committee submitted the Report on the Organization and Administration of the Military Assistance Program. This report is hereinafter referred to as the *Draper Report* because the committee had been chaired by retired General William H. Draper, Jr. (President's Committee, 1959: 2).

The Draper Report fully supported MAP and recommended that Congress continue to authorize it. In addition, it recommended that the administration clarify the roles of the Secretary of State and the Department of Defense (DoD), recommending roles of policy guidance and operational execution respectively (President's Committee, 1959: 3). By clearly outlining these roles, MAP was finally tied directly to U.S. foreign policy objectives. As President Kennedy assumed the executive office, his Administration and Congress began to act on a reorganization of MAP, partially as a result of the Draper Committee, but also due to several key foreign policy issues, including Cold War nuclear policy changes, Latin American challenges, and instability in Southeast Asia. A historical study of these foreign policy issues, and the influence of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, illustrates the impact of the Kennedy administration on the evolution of U.S. arms sales policy.

### **THE IMPACT OF COLD WAR POLICY ON FOREIGN MILITARY SALES**

The change from a U.S. national strategy of massive retaliation to a flexible response strategy contributed markedly to a shift from grant military assistance to arms sales. Massive

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retaliation was born in the conflict-laden atmosphere following World War II. In an address to Congress in 1947, President Truman focused on foreign policy. This declaration of policy, later known as the "Truman Doctrine," declared "that wherever aggression, direct or indirect, threatened the peace, the security of the United States was involved" (Truman, 1956: 106). Nuclear weapons were not an issue until the Soviet Union blockaded Berlin after the U.S. and its allies attempted to consolidate their occupied zones in Germany. At this point, the U.S. deployed nuclear forces in 1948 as a sign to the Soviets that we were serious about defending Berlin. Between 1949 and 1950 the Soviets tested their first A-bomb and Truman instituted a crash program to develop additional U.S. nuclear weapons. Two months after the stepped-up weapons production began, the North Koreans invaded South Korea, and Rep. Lloyd Bentsen, D-Texas, called for the use of the A-bomb to stop the North Korean advance. After his election to the Presidency, Eisenhower used the threat of nuclear attack to prompt the Chinese and North Koreans to halt hostilities. These three actions, one in Berlin and two in Korea, gave birth to the policy of massive retaliation (Sweet, 1984: 164-166).

In October of 1953 the Eisenhower administration took two actions to further implement the massive retaliation strategy. First, Eisenhower directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to reorganize the military based on reduced conventional force and increased nuclear capabilities, aimed at deterring Soviet aggression (Clarfield, 1984: 153). In addition he approved *National Security Council Resolution 162/2*, calling for contingency plans for the use of nuclear weapons in limited wars. This strategy quickly became known as the "New Look," and Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson stated that it was "based on more effective defense for less money" (Geelhoed, 1979: 73). In January 1954 Secretary of State John Foster Dulles stated the U.S. intended to respond to Soviet aggression with "massive retaliation," an all out nuclear attack (Sweet, 1984: 166).

The shift to flexible response also started with the Eisenhower Administration. The Draper Committee, although commissioned to study MAP, actually became one factor in the undoing of massive retaliation. The committee concluded that "it would appear that substantially larger local conventional forces are required together with a substantial buildup in the capacity of the U.S. to rapidly support these local forces in the event deterrence breaks down" (President's Committee, Vol. 11, 1959: 15). This statement highlights the strong point of the massive retaliation policy, its deterrence, and the weak point, the lack of conventional forces ready to deal with the failure of deterrence.

In 1954, then Senator John F. Kennedy, expressed his misgivings about the Eisenhower strategy. He believed the strategy lacked credibility due to its reliance on deterrence, and he advocated increased spending for both conventional and strategic forces (Clarfield, 1984: 232). Kennedy clearly outlined his beliefs concerning the Eisenhower strategy during the 1960 presidential campaign. He stated, "Under every military budget submitted by this administration, we have been preparing primarily to fight the one kind of war we least want to fight" (Kennedy, 1960: 184).

Kennedy's first move in changing the overall military strategy of the U.S. was the appointment of Robert S. McNamara as the Secretary of Defense. McNamara was viewed by Kennedy as an ideal implementer of this expanded military. His corporate background and reputation for cost-cutting and efficiency would be necessary to devise plans for an expansion of missions while keeping the DoD budget under control (Brinkley, 1993: 191). McNamara's strong presidential mandate was to shift the nation's defenses from a massive retaliation posture to one of flexible response.

McNamara's concept of flexible response centered on the most effective means of countering Nikita Khrushchev's view of war. Khrushchev had described three types of wars:

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“world wars, local wars, and liberation wars or popular uprisings,” asserting that liberation wars and popular uprisings were “not only admissible but inevitable” (McNamara, 1977: 71). To counter this type of war, McNamara believed nuclear power was not a credible deterrent, and therefore he argued that we must balance our nuclear strength with non-nuclear forces. This balancing act, according to McNamara, would require sound fiscal planning, and burden sharing on the part of our allies (McNamara, 1977: 72).

McNamara began to look outside the U.S. for assistance in implementing flexible response. He stated that “improved non-nuclear forces, well within Alliance resources, could enhance deterrence of any aggressive moves short of direct, all-out attack on Western Europe” (Nitze, 1962: 95). Fearing that NATO relied too heavily upon the nuclear deterrent, McNamara believed they should also expand their conventional capability, and more equitably share the defense burden of Europe. (Louscher, 1977: 952)

Following up on earlier plans by the Eisenhower administration to persuade the West Germans to begin sharing the burden, President Kennedy sent Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatrick to Germany to pursue the plan once again. Gilpatrick was successful in finally making arrangements for an annual European purchase of \$600 million worth of U.S. equipment (Louscher, 1977: 945-946). This deal was the first of many designed to shift U.S. assistance to European allies from grants to sales. International Security Affairs Director Paul Nitze and Lieutenant General Robert Wood, Military Assistance Program Director, summed up the results of the West German deal. According to them the “Gilpatrick-led negotiations provide a clue to changes, not in Military Assistance Program philosophy, but in emphasis and method” (Nitze, 1962: 96).

Congressional concerns over the new emphasis, and the ability of the NATO allies to share more of the burden came to light during hearings concerning the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. In Secretary McNamara’s testimony concerning the military assistance aspects of the new act, he emphasized a change in approach in furnishing aid to NATO countries as a result of their “increased financial capability.” The *Foreign Assistance Act* of 1961, however, made little change in the actual sales policy. During debate concerning the *Foreign Assistance Act* of 1962, the issue of sales was dealt with directly by Secretary McNamara. He stated, “To the greatest extent possible, military sales are being utilized to replace grant aid” (United States House Committee, 1962: 69).

One of McNamara’s concerns with NATO was the logistics system around which it was built. It appeared to McNamara that each nation had different equipment, and in time of war no single system would be capable of maintaining the organization as a single fighting force. McNamara asked, “Why not integrate all of the allies’ logistics systems?” This question led to a study headed by McGeorge Bundy and Paul Nitze. The study recommended that an office be created in DoD to promote the integration of equipment with U.S. allies by selling the same armaments to all countries (Thayer, 1969: 183).

This office became the International Logistics Negotiations (ILN) Office within the International Security Affairs Division which reported directly to Secretary of Defense McNamara. The ILN was the organization within the DoD that coordinated the sale of military items on the international market. The first Deputy Under Secretary of Defense in charge of the ILN was Henry Kuss. When asked what meaning could be applied to the term “negotiations,” Kuss explained that “the sale of weapons required much bargaining while giveaways apparently required none” (Thayer, 1969: 184).

With flexible response precipitating a need for greater capability on the part of U.S. allies, and problems with the standardization of equipment within NATO, a structure emerged that led

to greater emphasis on military sales as opposed to grant military assistance. Figure 1 illustrates the decline in grant funding for European countries from 1960 to 1964 as compared to the rise in sales over the same period. The shift in nuclear policy had a profound impact on the method of supplying military assistance to our NATO allies. The actual level of sales agreements during this time went from \$159.5 million to over \$1.1 billion, a nearly seven-fold increase. At the same time, grants under the MAP dropped from over \$738 million to just over \$250 million (DSAA, 1990: 144-156).

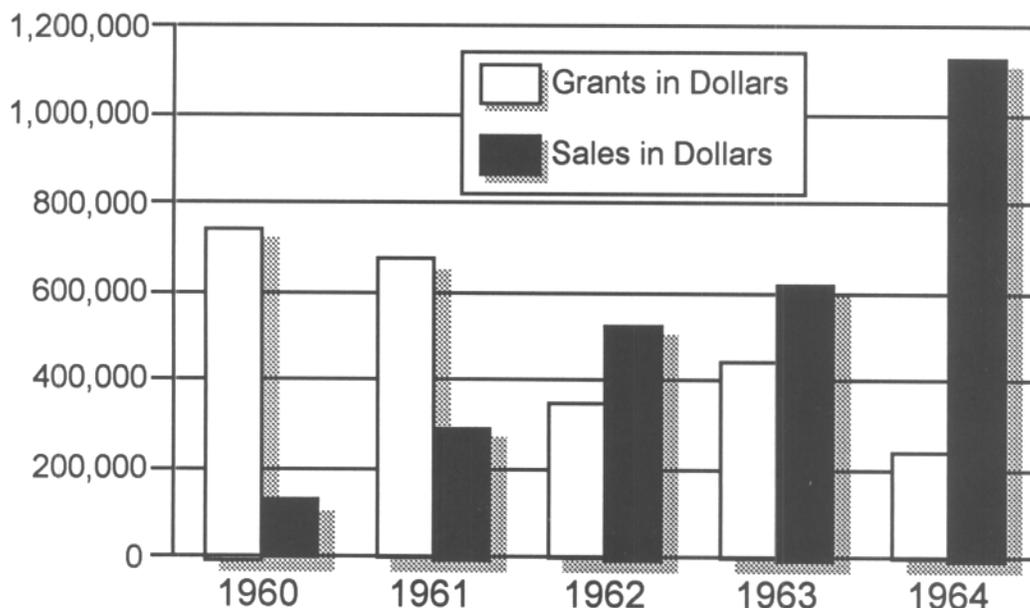
## LATIN AMERICAN POLICY AND FOREIGN MILITARY SALES

When Kennedy assumed office he became concerned with the southern half of our own hemisphere, Latin America. In his initial *State of the Union Message* he outlined several programs aimed primarily at “a free and prosperous Latin America, realizing for all its states and their citizens a degree of economic and social progress” (Kennedy, 1961: 27). The resultant “Alliance for Progress” would lead to other changes in security assistance.

Many Americans believed that military assistance to Latin America led to increased military domination of the region. Their arguments supported the need for emphasis on social and economic development, as opposed to military assistance. To many critics of past policies U.S. military assistance appeared to inadvertently support conservative regimes opposed the social reforms proposed by Kennedy (Fitch, 1979: 362).

Again, Eisenhower’s Draper Committee had planted the seeds of change. The committee categorized Latin America as a region “where the military problem is of secondary importance, and where the most important component of the problem is economic.” They advocated strong economic assistance, but recognized that military assistance in “small amounts may play a constructive political role” (President’s Committee, Vol. 11, 1959, 18-19).

**Figure 1**  
European MAP Grants versus Sales 1960-1964 (Source: DSAA 1990)  
(In Thousands of Dollars)



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While the focus of the Alliance for Progress was to emphasize economic and social programs, military assistance remained a vital component of overall foreign policy in the region. Combating internal aggression and subversion demanded different weapons and training than combating external forces. This demand placed the method of assistance in doubt. Maintaining a moderately stable environment would require a heavy demand for new and different weapons, and new and different training (Child, 1980: 145-146).

In June 1961, Secretary of Defense McNamara testified before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs concerning Latin America, as the Committee began hearings on the *Foreign Assistance Act of 1961*. McNamara outlined the necessary relationship between economic progress and military assistance. He reiterated the administration's objective to continue military assistance to maintain internal stability as "an essential component" of Latin American progress (United States House Committee, 1961: 36).

During his testimony, McNamara made specific reference to restrictions on military assistance to Latin America. A Congressionally imposed ceiling on military assistance was designed to ensure that the focus of our security assistance in the region remained economic and social. McNamara considered this ceiling too restrictive because it included grant aid and sales of weapons and material. The administration was seeking no ceiling on military grant assistance, and the exclusion of sales from any imposed ceiling (United States House Committee, 1961: 73). The restrictions made it difficult to meet the demands of the Alliance. In addition to a ceiling on the dollar amount, Congress had imposed a restriction forbidding the use of military assistance for internal security purposes in the *Foreign Assistance Act of 1961*. This provision stated that internal security should not be a basis for military assistance in Latin America (United States Congress, 1961: 486).

Kennedy strongly opposed this restriction because, when combined with the dollar ceiling, it made the use of military assistance incapable of supporting the Alliance. One year later, in testimony concerning the *Foreign Assistance Act of 1962*, Secretary McNamara stated that within countries fighting internal subversion, civic action was "indispensable" in linking the military with civilians, and that such civic action "substantially" contributed to economic development. Immediately following this statement he outlined the administration's efforts to increase sales to replace grant aid (United States House Committee, 1962: 69). McNamara stated that "To the greatest extent possible, military sales are being utilized to replace grant aid" (United States House Committee, 1962: 69).

Within the *Foreign Assistance Act of 1962*, Congress made significant changes dealing with military aid to Latin America. Previously, the Act set a ceiling of \$57.5 million on military assistance programs to Latin America, both grants and sales. Partially succumbing to the administration's wishes, this phrase was changed to read "grant programs of defense articles." Apparently Congress was willing to allow sales above \$57.5 million (United States Senate, 1962: 2058). Theoretically, the combination of economic assistance, and removal of the Congressional ceiling affecting sales would permit Latin American countries to buy their military needs from the U.S..

As Table 1 indicates, foreign military sales to Latin America rose sporadically throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, while military grant assistance began a slow decline. Administration policy with respect to foreign military sales would gradually shift from grants to sales. Secretary McNamara's testimony to the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and the actual foreign assistance acts of the early 1960s placed increasing emphasis on promoting the sale of military hardware.

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## THE IMPACT OF SOUTHEAST ASIA ON FOREIGN MILITARY SALES

While both flexible response and the formation of the Alliance for Progress had direct impacts on the change of military assistance from grants to sales, conflict in Southeast Asia also played a significant role in reshaping security assistance and military assistance policy. The eventual impact of disproportionate military assistance to Southeast Asia contributed to a shift from grants to sales.

Kennedy viewed Vietnam as the consummate case of a Communist-sponsored "war of national liberation," from which he could not back down. Vietnam was a third-world country struggling for independence, and appeared to be the perfect stage for security assistance, both economic and military. It would, in the end, have a "profound" impact on domestic support for the war in Vietnam, and security assistance in particular (Grimmett, 1985: 21).

**Table 1**  
Latin America: Sales versus. Grants  
1961-1971  
(In Thousands of Dollars)

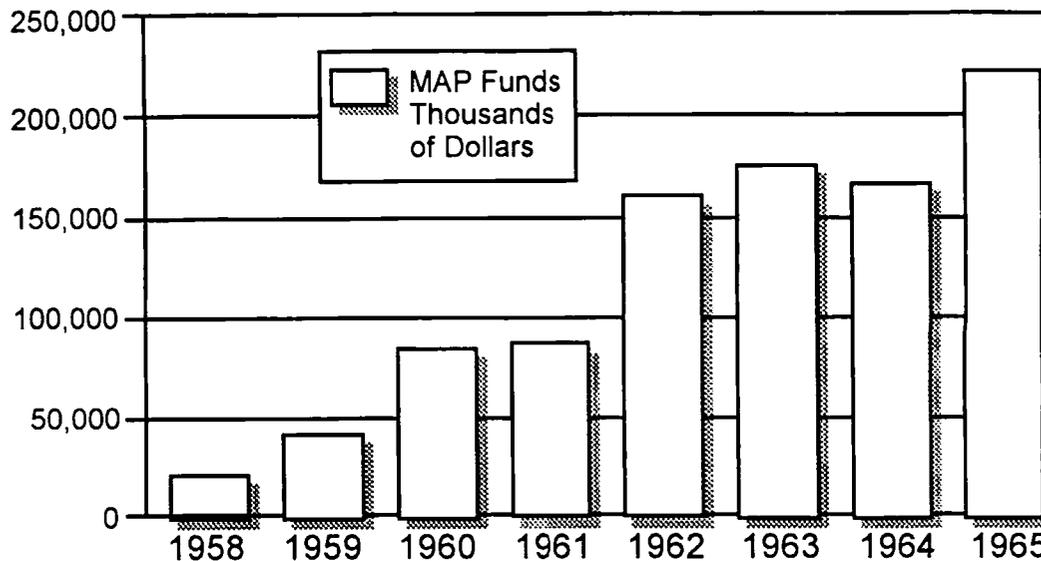
Year	Total Sales Agreements	Military Assistance Grants
1961	7,341	49,862
1962	18,047	47,723
1963	11,939	33,462
1964	16,547	45,435
1965	42,748	54,023
1966	24,512	64,727
1967	51,891	42,268
1968	26,179	16,268
1969	23,365	12,146
1970	24,209	9,258
1971	47,350	5,809

(Source: DSAA, 1990)

Vietnam is the perfect case to illustrate the shift in security assistance grants from the countries of war-ravaged Europe to emergent Third World countries. Richard F. Grimmett believes that, "had it not been for the Vietnam conflict, the MAP program levels would likely have fallen even more precipitously than they did" during the 1960s (Grimmett, 1985: 21). Indeed, when compared to other countries, the MAP funding for Vietnam grew disproportionately, as illustrated in Figure 2. When Kennedy assumed office in 1961 the level of MAP funding for Vietnam stood at just over \$87 million; by 1963 the MAP program was pumping over \$176 million in MAP grant aid into Vietnam. This dramatic rise in grant funding did not go unnoticed by Congress.

Congressional aversion to growing military assistance expenditures became very apparent during debates concerning foreign assistance in the early 1960s. Military expenditures had risen from 29 percent of budgeted items in 1950, to 52 percent in 1960 (Neuman, 1994, 93). When Secretary of State Dean Rusk addressed the House Committee on Foreign Affairs concerning the *Foreign Assistance Act of 1961*, he outlined the requested appropriation of \$1.885 billion for military assistance in fiscal year 1962. Rusk's statement clearly demonstrated to Congress that the largest share of the program was directed toward the Far East (United States House Committee, 1961: 36).

**Figure 2**  
Vietnam MAP Funding 1958-1965 (Source: DSAA, 1990)



In additional testimony concerning the 1961 Act, questions arose concerning diversion of funds from one country to another, and the possibility of increasing sales of military hardware. Administration witnesses stated that reprogramming funds from one country to another was possible to a limited degree, but was not an acceptable practice because it left forces in other areas at undesirably low levels. When asked if the DoD was attempting to increase sales, Major General Frederic H. Miller, a director of International Security Affairs, testified that it was, in fact, trying to increase them (United States House Committee, 1961:131-230). Eventually the Congress appropriated \$1.6 billion for military assistance in FY 1962 (United States Congress, 1962: 2029).

To offset the continuing reliance on military grant assistance in FY 1963, the Administration included a new section within its proposed changes to the *Foreign Assistance Act*. This section dealt with the issue of utilizing military sales to the "greatest extent possible" through purchases on a government-to-government basis (United States House Committee, 1962: 69). This amendment to the Act was warmly accepted by the Foreign Affairs Committee and language was inserted in the resulting law that advocated reducing and terminating grants to all nations with the capacity to fund their own defense (United States Congress, 1962: 3 17). In the legislative history of the Act, the Foreign Affairs Committee also agreed with the importance of aid to Southeast Asia, recognizing that it accounted for 48 percent of the military aid program. In addition, the Committee pointed to the increasing emphasis on sales of military hardware that were helping to offset such large demands for grant assistance (United States Senate, 1962: 2060).

While sales of arms to Laos and Vietnam did not take place during this period, the growth of grant assistance to these two countries had a direct impact on the overall growth of sales worldwide to offset expenditures on grant assistance. David J. Louscher points to 1962 as the time of the first substantial rise in arms sales, and advocates two reasons for the emergence of arms sales that are pertinent to Southeast Asia. First, the sales provided an "inexpensive economic and military assistance instrument" to conduct foreign policy. Secondly, the adverse balance of payments problem could be partially offset by the sale of arms (Louscher, 1977: 936).

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## THE INFLUENCE OF ROBERT S. McNAMARA ON FOREIGN MILITARY SALES

It has been stated that “the administration of John F. Kennedy held a powerful grip on many imaginations during his brief and brilliant career” (Kaufmann, 1964: 1). The appointment of Robert S. McNamara as the eighth Secretary of Defense was one factor in that “powerful grip.” Having been referred to the President elect as a “businessman with innovative ideas,” Kennedy sought McNamara for a position within his administration.

Kennedy’s direction to McNamara was to provide “security for the nation at the lowest possible cost” (McNamara, 1995: 23). This directive led McNamara to two major changes within the DoD. First, McNamara set about redesigning military strategy and the forces to fit the threats. Secondly, McNamara instituted new methods of decision making based heavily on quantitative measurement (Kaufmann, 1964: 3).

Military assistance was viewed as a force multiplier by McNamara. He believed a key function of MAP was “ensuring an effective conventional defense, and limiting the American requirement for general purpose forces by the maintenance and support of strong allied capabilities.” McNamara emphasized the importance of MAP by stating that, “if I had to choose between a billion dollar reduction in economic aid, a billion dollar reduction in military assistance, or a billion dollar reduction in remaining defense requirements, I would choose the latter” (Kaufmann, 1964: 99- 1 00). His approach to these options came to the forefront with regard to burden sharing within NATO.

In the early 1960s the U.S. commitment to NATO was viewed as an economic burden and McNamara pursued agreements with NATO to begin developing conventional capabilities of their own. As previously mentioned, these efforts stemmed from McNamara’s concern about problems in logistical cooperation and standardization of weapons (Louscher, 1977, 936). Ultimately this effort led to the formation of the ILN in 1962. George Thayer saw a clear shift from grant military assistance to sales as a result of McNamara’s business influence. Thayer contends that McNamara’s approach to the ILN was not far removed from what he would have done at Ford Motor Company. Thayer asserts, “the idea of selling arms was solely the product of McNamara’s fertile mind” (Thayer, 1969: 183).

In addition to Thayer, other historians also point to McNamara as the originator of foreign military sales policy. Following prompting from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Kennedy, McNamara appointed a task force to study the problem, and, not surprisingly Henry Koss, a key player in the original arms sales deal with West Germany and the future head of the ILN, was a member of this group. David J. Louscher credits this McNamara-appointed committee as the originator of the “concept of foreign military sales” (Louscher, 1977: 950-95 1). William D. Hartung, author of several studies on arms sales, stated that the pattern of grant assistance continued until McNamara emphasized arms sales as a “cash crop” to offset the balance of trade problem (Hartung, 1994: 25). Finally, Cindy Cannizzo, another arms sales historian, traces the continual decline of grant military assistance and the steady rise in sales to McNamara’s appointment of Kuss as the head of the ILN (Cannizzo, 1980: 4).

## CONCLUSION

The Kennedy Administration instituted the first major foreign policy changes resulting in a shift from military grant aid to military sales. Many factors contributed to this shift: the strategy of Flexible Response, Latin American policy, Southeast Asia, and the influence of Secretary McNamara were clearly four main contributors in changing the primary method of military assistance to foreign military sales.

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Foreign assistance in general, and military assistance more specifically, are integral parts of U.S. foreign policy. Like foreign policy, one cannot point to one issue involving military assistance and state unequivocally that it caused the shift to military sales. On the other hand, by considering several issues over a period of time, it is possible to discern a pattern of tendencies that lead to the perception of a certain policy. Given the events surrounding Kennedy's presidency, the issues discussed are not all-encompassing, but they clearly represent major factors in the foreign policy of that period, and they indicate a clear trend in foreign policy with regard to foreign military sales.

While the *Mutual Security Act* sanctioned the sale of military hardware in the form of a law, it made little specific mention of sales, and focused primarily on grant assistance to stimulate development in war-torn Europe. During the Kennedy administration, however, the *Foreign Assistance Acts* made specific mention of sales and actually promoted the sale of military hardware to allies who had the economic strength to purchase it. House Foreign Affairs Committee hearings during the initial passage of the bill, and subsequent amendments, included debate and testimony that often discussed the pros and cons of foreign military sales. Eventually, forceful language was included within the bill that promoted foreign military sales as an alternative to grant military assistance. In addition to the impact of each of the foreign policy issues discussed, the influence of Secretary McNamara was an obvious factor in the direction of military assistance policy. Many historians have characterized his influence as the primary catalyst in the shift to sales, based on his business approach to problem solving.

The sale of military equipment met the two requirements that emerged from debate surrounding the foreign assistance acts. First, it was an effective means of providing defense capability to foreign nations given the overwhelming concern with Communist aggression during that time. Secondly, the sale of military hardware was an inexpensive and economical method of promoting our own national security while providing security to friendly nations as well. Simply stated, foreign military sales increased the military strength of the U.S. and its allies while at the same time providing economic stability that could not be achieved through continued reliance on grant military assistance.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Philip P. Nardi was graduated from Northern Michigan University in 1981 with a BS in Biology, and from the Air Force Institute of Technology in 1995 with an MS in Logistics Management. He is a Senior Navigator with over 2000 flying hours in the KC-135. Major Nardi is currently assigned to Headquarters, Air Force Materiel Command, Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio.

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