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Response to Alic

Christopher Gainor

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rationale beyond the support they provide for the institutional interests of one or another service or service branch.⁸

Therefore, I see no reason why the Atlas decision should have hinged on the availability of thermonuclear warheads, as a matter of technology. It seems at least as likely that the prospective availability of such warheads provided rhetorical leverage that could be exploited in the politico-bureaucratic conflicts that surround all U.S. weapons programs. These are matters of the low politics of organizational behavior within and among the services, sometimes rising, especially for strategic systems, to the highest political levels of the White House.⁹ Although Gainor does not ignore these dimensions of the Atlas program, they remain murky in his account, as they do in all others that I have seen. More than technological signposting, bureaucratic politics deserve further exploration. Gainor helps us to understand Atlas, but there is much still to learn.

JOHN A. ALIC

RESPONSE TO ALIC:

John Alic's communication contains many pertinent points relating to the development of nuclear weapons and delivery systems for those weapons during the years following World War II. While we agree on many things, he differs with my conclusion about the importance of lightweight thermonuclear weapons in making ICBMs politically and technically feasible. The sources he cites show that by 1952, lightweight fission warheads were also becoming available. However, none of the evidence I have seen—including the sources Alic refers to—shows that the availability of these warheads caused the U.S. Air Force to consider ICBMs in a new and positive light before 1954. The documentary evidence regarding the air force's decision to proceed with ICBMs being tied to the creation of thermonuclear weapons remains persuasive in my view, especially when considered alongside circumstantial evidence, such as the concerns that the air force had about delivering fission bombs to their targets with bomber aircraft. But I do agree with Alic that more research should be done on this question.

CHRISTOPHER GAINOR

8. John A. Alic, "Managing US Defense Acquisition," *Enterprise & Society* 14, no. 2 (2013): 1–36.

9. The final push for ICBMs came in a September 1955 National Security Council action memorandum revised by President Eisenhower himself: "By substituting the phrase 'maximum urgency' for DoD's 'all practicable speed,' the president gave a decisive 'full speed ahead' to the priority's implementation." See Richard M. Leighton, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense: Strategy, Money, and the New Look, 1953–1956*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, Historical Office, 2001), 3:437.