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# Two Concepts of Liberty

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## U.S. Cold War Grand Strategies and the Liberal Tradition

**R**ealist, liberal, constructivist, and hybrid theories of international relations agree that the United States made historic commitments to the defense of Europe shortly after World War II.<sup>1</sup> These commitments, however, were neither as intense nor as sweeping as many claim. Initially, Washington sought withdrawal from Europe through a strategy of buck-passing. Only after a decade and a half did it adopt the familiar balancing grand strategy providing for a permanent presence in Europe. This shift suggests the need for a new theory to explain U.S. grand strategy, both past and present.<sup>2</sup>

I argue that differences between the liberal ideas of the administrations of

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1. Realist explanations of U.S. grand strategy include Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979); and John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001). Prominent liberal and constructivist explanations are, respectively, G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Jeffrey Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005). Important hybrid explanations that focus on the interplay of power and ideology or economic interests include Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006); and Charles A. Kupchan and Peter L. Trubowitz, "Dead Center: The Demise of Liberal Internationalism in the United States," *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Fall 2007), pp. 7–44.

2. The classic work on variation in U.S. Cold War strategy, which sees only minor variations in a general balancing approach, is John L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Post-war American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). My conclusions about the depth and endurance of the U.S. buck-passing strategy are deeply informed by recent Cold War historiography, including Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945–1963* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); Michael Creswell, *A Question of Balance: How France and the United States Created Cold War Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006); James McAllister, *No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943–1954* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002); and Mark S. Sheetz, "Exit Strategies: American

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Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy explain the change in U.S. grand strategy during this period. The key distinction is between the notions of “negative liberty” and “positive liberty.”<sup>3</sup>

For fifteen years after World War II, particularly under President Eisenhower, the United States’ key decisionmakers were primarily “negative liberals” who pursued a grand strategy of buck-passing. They sought to avoid a permanent security commitment to Europe, lest the costs of such a commitment threaten American liberties. Instead, the United States aimed to establish an independent European pole of power that could contain the Soviet Union with minimal U.S. aid. This approach manifested itself in support for European integration, attempts to make Western Europe a de facto nuclear power, a nuclear-centric U.S. military posture, and an unwillingness to settle major Cold War crises through a permanent continental commitment.

In contrast, the Kennedy administration was dominated by “positive liberals” who supported a balancing grand strategy. Their goal was to preserve liberalism in Western Europe by relaxing Cold War tensions over Germany. A tacit deal with the Soviet Union—which included the independence of West Berlin, a permanent U.S. continental commitment, and the absence of a European pole—ratified the status quo. U.S. military strategy became more conventionally focused, seeking to raise the nuclear threshold and prevent a nuclear West Germany, while U.S. diplomacy lost its interest in European unification.

I develop this argument in several stages. First, I situate my research design within the geopolitical constraints of the Cold War. Next, I briefly review the literature on liberal ideology and explain my theory of liberal foreign policy. I then explore primary documents to measure the concepts of liberty present in the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations and generate testable predictions for these cases. Subsequently, I show how the shift in U.S. Cold War grand strategy was a product of changes in the liberal ideas of the two administrations. Finally, I examine three alternative explanations for the strategic change. I conclude with some thoughts on the future of U.S. liberalism and grand strategy.

### *Cold War Cases and Geopolitical Constraints*

Geopolitical factors heavily constrained U.S. grand strategy during the Cold War. Given the importance of protecting West European resources from the

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Grand Designs for Postwar European Security,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (October 1999), pp. 1–43.

3. Isaiah Berlin introduced these notions in “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in Henry Hardy, ed., *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 166–217.

Soviet Union, the United States was unlikely to have adopted a strategy of nonentanglement (or isolation): the threat to these important sources of power was too great. Conversely, a strategy of primacy (or rollback) was equally unlikely: the Soviet Union was too powerful and the risks of a disastrous war too high. Facing a major geopolitical threat such as the Soviet Union, the United States had essentially two strategic options: buck-passing or balancing. Buck-passing is a strategy distinguished by “cheap-riding” on the efforts of others. In doing so, a buck passer usually has to accept less influence over international power configurations. Balancing involves “forward commitments” of power resources for the purpose of managing such configurations. Balancing thus emphasizes influencing the international system over cutting costs.<sup>4</sup>

The potential to detect the influence of liberal ideas is enhanced by this constrained and partially controlled environment. The degree to which scholars can generalize from this setting, however, is limited. Predictions in this case do not imply analogous behavior in other contexts, particularly in the geopolitical periphery, where there are more strategic options and other variables may operate with increased power.

### *A Theory of Liberal Foreign Policy*

At its core, liberalism is an antirealist ideology.<sup>5</sup> War is caused by realist behavior such as arms races, secret diplomacy, and shifting alliances. Illiberal elites profit from this behavior at the expense of the common interest. Instead of embracing national prosperity through democracy, free trade, and peace, they enrich themselves through mercantilism, autarky, and war. This antirealist diagnosis suggests a liberal treatment: the promotion of democracy, free trade, and basic international laws and rules.

Liberal ideology, however, poses twin conundrums for policymakers. First, can states administer a liberal cure for power politics without engaging in power politics themselves? Second, can the evils of power politics be avoided without allowing illiberal threats to flourish?

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4. For similar arguments about the range of U.S. options during the Cold War, see Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, pp. 93–96; Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 146–152, 170–175; and Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 36–39, 122–128. Mearsheimer argues that the choice between buck-passing and balancing is the central dilemma for states confronted by threats. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, chap. 5, especially pp. 157–162.

5. On the antirealist orientation of liberal thought and its basic assumptions, see Samuel P. Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981); Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America's Anti-Statism and Its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*; and Robert Endicott Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest in America's Foreign Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

This tension has led American liberalism to adopt a Janus-faced approach to foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> There are two liberal solutions to power political problems—exemplarism and crusading—and they differ on three important questions: (1) does involvement in power politics threaten liberalism at home? (2) does U.S. security depend on a liberal world order? and (3) can a more liberal international system be built through engagement in world politics?<sup>7</sup>

“Liberal exemplars” answer that (1) power politics poses a great threat to liberal institutions at home; (2) recusal from power politics will protect against security threats; and (3) the harmonious development of world politics is slow but inexorable, and interference with this development is both fruitless and unwise. Therefore, the United States should promote global liberalism through its own example, rather than through international engagement.

In contrast, “liberal crusaders” respond that (1) the domestic costs of international engagement are manageable; (2) a lack of liberal progress is dangerous, because if the illiberal causes of war flourish, they will surely threaten the United States; and (3) the liberal millennium will not develop on its own—history needs a push. Thus, the United States must use foreign policy to reform world politics, for the sake of both its own security and liberalism abroad.

There are few direct explanations of when liberalism produces exemplars or crusaders.<sup>8</sup> I argue that the seemingly Janus-faced nature of liberalism in for-

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6. Scholars widely regard the United States as a uniquely liberal society, in that political discourse has been dominated by liberal ideas at the expense of communist, fascist, or aristocratic political theories. See, inter alia, Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, 1955); Huntington, *American Politics*; Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973); J. David Greenstone, *The Lincoln Persuasion: Remaking American Liberalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993); and David F. Ericson and Louisa Bertch Green, *The Liberal Tradition in American Politics: Reassessing the Legacy of American Liberalism* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

7. The dual liberal approaches to foreign policy that I refer to were most famously discussed in H.W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), although Brands uses slightly different terms. Others who recognize the Janus-faced nature of U.S. liberal ideology include Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001); Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*; and Jonathan Monten, “The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy,” *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Spring 2005), pp. 112–156.

8. Offering direct explanations are Michael C. Desch, “America’s Liberal Illiberalism: The Ideological Origins of Overreaction in U.S. Foreign Policy,” *International Security*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Winter 2007/08), pp. 7–43; and Monten, “The Roots of the Bush Doctrine.” Desch argues that liberal foreign policy varies according to the balance of power, whereas Monten sees it as a product of changing forms of U.S. nationalism in the nineteenth century. Neither sees any variation during the Cold War period. Several additional works address distinct but related issues in liberal thought and foreign policy, particularly as regards the imperial periphery, including Jennifer Pitts,

eign affairs is the result of the contest between two rival liberalisms, which interpret the central liberal concept of freedom differently.

“Negative liberty” connotes “freedom from” external obstacles; that is, one is free only to the extent that coercion or other man-made obstacles do not prevent or restrain one’s actions. Negative liberty consists in the freedom to choose among options. As such, it represents an “opportunity concept.” The less coercion, the more opportunity for choice; the more such opportunity, the more freedom.<sup>9</sup>

“Positive liberty” indicates the “freedom to” take action; that is, one is free only to the extent that valued options can actually be chosen or valued faculties exercised. Positive liberty is therefore an “exercise concept.” A lack of freedom involves more than coercion or obstacles: it is the failure to realize desired goals. The capacity to act on one’s goals can be denied by internal impediments, social norms or institutions, or insufficient resources. Positive liberty therefore represents a kind of autonomy or self-realization: freedom requires control over the shape of one’s life.<sup>10</sup>

Negative and positive liberals have different visions of domestic politics. Negative liberals possess an antistatist orientation. They are hostile to centralized power, which they argue threatens opportunity and restrains free choice. They thus advocate a minimal role for government, one focused on preserving liberty through the provision of order, the administration of justice, and the protection of property rights.

Positive liberals possess a friendlier attitude toward state power. Because citizens often lack the capacity to achieve their goals, government should be responsible for redistributing resources, developing capabilities among the citizenry, and changing entrenched social mores. Positive liberals thus tend to support a welfare state that provides the general preconditions for the exercise of freedom.<sup>11</sup>

Negative liberalism and positive liberalism generate different foreign policy preferences for U.S. policymakers. Negative liberty produces exemplarism and restraint, whereas positive liberty produces crusading and reformist impulses.

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*A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Uday S. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

9. Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” pp. 168–178. On opportunity concepts and exercise concepts, see Charles Taylor, “What’s Wrong with Negative Liberty,” in Alan Ryan, ed., *The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isaiah Berlin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 177.

10. Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” pp. 178–191.

11. These are ideal types. History’s most famous negative liberals have often supported appropriately justified types of limited state intervention, as noted in John Gray, *Liberalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 73–81. Similarly, positive liberals, qua liberals, recognize limits on the power of the state, even in promoting welfare.

The kind of liberalism that foreign policymakers embrace therefore has a large strategic impact.

#### FOREIGN POLICY'S THREAT TO NEGATIVE LIBERTY

Negative liberals perceive a fundamental trade-off between commitments abroad and liberty at home. Motivated reasoning helps to resolve this tension between a liberal United States and a realist world: negative liberals generally perceive foreign commitments as internally dangerous, externally unnecessary, and ideologically unwise. They thus have an affinity for the whole range of exemplarist beliefs.

Overseas commitments impose a variety of restrictions on negative liberty. First, foreign commitments require the extraction of resources from society, depriving citizens of the fruits of their labors. Second, these commitments demand a strong military, which requires mustering manpower (often through a coercive draft) and potential loss of life. Finally, a strategy that risks major war often requires increasingly centralized management of the economy, which not only restricts free enterprise but also imposes choices on businesses and individuals.

Additionally, foreign commitments dangerously increase government power. Funding such projects requires constructing intrusive tax, administrative, and regulatory structures, which outlive their original ends. Military bureaucracies can become powerful political interest groups, making themselves a constant drain on public finances. Furthermore, a larger national security establishment tends to concentrate political power and capacity in the executive branch, undermining the equilibrium aimed at by the separation of powers.

Motivated reasoning encourages negative liberals, driven by their desire to protect liberty at home, to embrace other exemplarist beliefs.<sup>12</sup> They minimize the importance of outside threats, regarding the United States as materially secure. Negative liberals are also skeptical about spreading liberal values internationally. They view the creation of liberal order as an organic and delicate process, amenable only to the unfolding historical forces favoring freedom. From their perspective, the United States lacks the capacity to cleanse the world of illiberalism and, in any case, illiberal regimes are ultimately doomed.

Negative liberals thus prefer exemplarist grand strategies with lower costs at home and fewer commitments abroad. During the Cold War, negative lib-

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12. On the issue of motivated cognition, especially as it contributes to the construction of ideologies, see Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976); Robert Jervis, "Deterrence and Perception," *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Winter 1982/83), pp. 3–30; and Ziva Kunda, "Motivated Inference: Self-Serving Generation and Evaluation of Causal Theories," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (October 1987), pp. 636–647.

erals should have therefore pursued a buck-passing strategy, looking for opportunities to trade influence abroad for reduced domestic costs.

#### FOREIGN POLICY'S PROMISE FOR POSITIVE LIBERTY

Conversely, positive liberals see no inherent trade-off between overseas commitments and liberty at home; what intervention can achieve for liberty domestically, it can also achieve internationally. This view encourages an alternate pattern of motivated bias: positive liberals generally perceive foreign commitments as internally manageable, externally necessary, and ideologically essential. They thus embrace a wide range of crusading beliefs.

Positive liberals see foreign policy as a natural extension of their domestic agenda: if state intervention works at home, why could it not also work overseas? At home, they seek to use state power to expand liberty by providing the preconditions for effective action, for instance by redistributing wealth. Internationally, positive liberals seek to use strategic commitments to foster global liberty: democratic regimes, open trading systems, and international organizations and law. They consider these preconditions for free societies abroad, much the way the provision of resources is a building block for freedom at home.

Motivated reasoning encourages positive liberals, driven by their desire to promote liberty abroad, to embrace other crusading beliefs. They are unlikely to ignore material threats that negative liberals may dismiss, and will further fear the ideological dangers that the liberal tradition has always highlighted, such as autocratic and autarkic regimes. At the same time, positive liberals will be sanguine about their ability to meet such threats by promoting liberalism. The psychological motivation to see "the necessary as possible" offers incentives to believe in the efficacy of promoting liberalism: liberalism can be spread because it must be spread. Otherwise, illiberal threats could overwhelm the United States' domestic order.<sup>13</sup>

Positive liberals will thus favor crusading grand strategies with more commitments and more influence abroad. Under Cold War constraints, positive liberals should therefore have pursued a balancing strategy, seeking the influence to defend liberal values even at increased costs.

#### OTHER POSSIBILITIES?

Although unlikely, negative liberals could hold crusading beliefs and positive liberals could hold exemplarist beliefs. Doing so would require that they ac-

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13. On assuming that the "necessary is possible," see Jack L. Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 18.

Table 1. The Logics of Liberal Grand Strategy

	Basic Liberal View of World Politics	Negative Liberal Exemplarism	Positive Liberal Crusading
Liberal values	Peace, free trade, and democracy are normative and natural causes of peace.	Liberal values advance best on their own and through U.S. example.	Liberal values must be vindicated for both U.S. and global welfare.
Response to power politics	War, economic closure, and security threats are caused by illiberalism and power politics.	The United States is generally secure and would find its values corrupted by involvement in power politics.	The United States should meet foreign dangers by spreading its liberal values.
Source of motivated bias	Differs according to variant of liberalism.	Plays down threats and effectiveness of value promotion abroad to avoid the need for a powerful state.	Sees more threats, especially from foreign illiberalism, and sees the effectiveness of value promotion abroad as analogous to state action at home.
Effect on grand strategy	Janus-faced; varies by type of liberalism.	Tends toward less commitment; buck-passing under Cold War conditions.	Tends toward more commitment; balancing under Cold War conditions.

knowledge a trade-off between their core values at home and the requirements of international peace and security. Realist beliefs, such as a strong distinction between anarchical and hierarchical politics, would likely be required to buttress these alternate outlooks. These arguments are summarized in table 1. Given the dominance of the liberal tradition in the United States, its pervasive antirealist orientation, and the motivated bias under which policymakers operate, negative liberals will tend toward exemplarism and positive liberals toward crusading.

#### MEASURING LIBERTY

In measuring the two concepts of liberty in different administrations, I take several methodological steps to ensure that the ideas I coded are not epiphenomenal, tautological, or instrumental. First, I code the ideas of statesmen before they take office. Measuring liberal ideas before individuals begin to make foreign policy minimizes the risk that their ideological expressions are only post hoc justification for actions required by the pressures of international politics.<sup>14</sup> Second, I code these ideas outside a foreign policy context, which en-

14. In coding ideas during a pre-decision time period, I follow the best scholarship on ideas:

sures that I do not confuse elements of my dependent variable—for instance, rhetorical support for certain kinds of strategies—with my independent variable of liberal norms. Third, I concentrate as much as possible on primary documents that provide the clearest picture of individual beliefs. I also rely on sources where expressed ideas are least likely to be instrumental, such as private discourse and public discourse unconnected to political campaigning.<sup>15</sup>

I code concepts of liberty from ideological statements across three areas central to the history of twentieth-century American liberalism: explicit philosophical statements about politics, views on the centralization of power, and economic views.<sup>16</sup>

A word of caution before proceeding: one should resist superficial measurements of contemporary domestic politics. In particular, the assumption that Democrats are all positive liberals and Republicans are all negative liberals is historically false. Negative liberty as outlined here may well have been in eclipse for some time. Although relevant to contemporary foreign policy debate, the concepts here do not map onto it in a simple fashion. Indeed, as demonstrated in the next section, a substantial coding effort is required to determine the dominant concept of liberty in a presidential administration.

### *Eisenhower's Concept of Liberty*

Dwight Eisenhower was a negative liberal. His private discourse reveals a classic negative approach to liberty, a deep fear of centralization, and a spirited defense of free enterprise. The idea of liberty as freedom from constraint permeates his views.<sup>17</sup>

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Elizabeth N. Saunders, "Transformative Choices: Leaders and the Origins of Intervention Strategy," *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Fall 2009), pp. 135–137; and Sheri Berman, *The Social Democratic Moment: Ideas and Politics in the Making of Interwar Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 22–24.

15. On the use of non-instrumental "hard" primary sources, see Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 80–85. I present here only the measurement of each president's views. In broader research, I measure the liberalism of the most important foreign policy decisionmakers in each administration. Empirically, it happens that both Eisenhower and Kennedy were the dominant forces in their administrations' foreign policy and were also surrounded by like-minded advisers.

16. My interpretation of the relative salience of these categories is drawn from the literature on U.S. political development, which is large. I rely, inter alia, on the following accounts: James P. Young, *Reconsidering American Liberalism: The Troubled Odyssey of the Liberal Idea* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1996); Huntington, *American Politics*; Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State*; Arthur A. Ekirch, *The Decline of American Liberalism* (Oakland, Calif.: Independence Institute, 2009); Robert Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes in the Growth of American Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998); and Russell L. Hanson, *The Democratic Imagination in America: Conversations with Our Past* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

17. Eisenhower's reputation as a moderate president willing to work within the New Deal order should not obscure the nature of his private views, which are discussed here. Philosophic ideas are

PHILOSOPHY: THE PRIMACY OF INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY

Ira Chernus succinctly sums up Eisenhower's philosophical approach: "When laid out the general's ideological views constituted a sort of primer in the popularized Lockean theory that underlay so much of the discourse of his day." The key features of the U.S. system were its design to secure "a maximum of individual liberty" and an "insistence on individual freedom [that] springs from the unshakeable conviction in the dignity of man, a belief—a religious belief—that through the possession of a soul he is endowed with certain rights."<sup>18</sup>

Eisenhower thought that the great threat to these rights was the central state. He explained this threat in a family discussion of a proposal to make a movie version of his life. Writing to his brother Milton, he expressed skepticism, yet hoped that the project might demonstrate "the virtues of the American system." Eisenhower thought that "the theme of the picture could take the slant of glorifying opportunities presented under the American system and tend to support initiative, effort, and persistence in the average American family, as opposed to the idea of collectivity that discards self-dependence and is ready to trust to regimentation for a secure future." Writing to his wife, Mamie, Eisenhower expressed hope that the movie "might encourage the kids to work, and to depend on themselves, rather than become too complacent with respect to the State's obligation to the individual."<sup>19</sup>

In other private remarks, Eisenhower displayed similar concerns. As president of Columbia University, he defended teaching undergraduates about communism in a personal letter: "I believe all of us should be taught the inevitable results of adopting statism either through inevitably drifting into it or through conquest from without. . . . [A]t first hand I know something of the human stultification that comes about through paternalism that finally results in complete loss of freedom and in the surrender of all personal initiative to absolute governmental regimentation."<sup>20</sup>

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more constrained in domestic politics than in foreign policy, where the executive has significant autonomy.

18. The first quote is in Ira Chernus, *General Eisenhower: Ideology and Discourse* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2002), p. 85. The other quotes are from Eisenhower's speech to the Daughters of the American Revolution, May 1947, in Rudolph L. Treuenfels, ed., *Eisenhower Speaks: Dwight D. Eisenhower in His Messages and Speeches* (New York: Farrar and Straus, 1948), pp. 190–191.

19. Eisenhower to Milton Eisenhower, May 31, 1944, in Alfred D. Chandler and Louis Galambos, eds., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), Vol. 3, p. 1897, hereafter *PDDE*; and Eisenhower to Mamie Eisenhower, May 31, 1944, in Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Letters to Mamie*, John S.D. Eisenhower, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1978), p. 184.

20. Eisenhower to Louis Smith, May 25, 1948, *PDDE*, Vol. 10, p. 85.

STATE CENTRALIZATION: LIMITED FEDERAL POWER

Eisenhower advocated a limited state that could “carry on necessary central functions, including the basic one of security.” For these purposes, it needed “rules and laws to control relationships among individuals and protect the whole from without.” At the same time, Eisenhower feared government centralization. Writing a letter to a friend on the now mundane subject of federal funding for education, he pronounced, “[O]ne of my abiding convictions is that the more we permit the Federal Government into such matters, except on the basis of research, the more we are drifting towards an undesirable centralization of authority and power. That I am against.”<sup>21</sup>

The agent of the central state was the bureaucracy. Writing in his diary, Eisenhower worried that “the trend towards government centralization continues—alarmingly. In the name of ‘social security’ we are placing more and more responsibility upon the central government—and this means that an ever-growing bureaucracy is taking over an ever-greater power over our daily lives. Already the agents of this bureaucracy cover the land . . . they nag, irritate, and hound every businessmen in the U.S.” Talking to his friend William Robinson, Eisenhower railed that “the unlimited growth of bureaucracy in Washington is a national disgrace . . . unless this is cleaned up completely and thoroughly, our Federal government in any hands faces a doubtful future.” Chernus nicely sums up Eisenhower’s negative liberal fear of central authority: “[I]n his political vocabulary, freedom was not primarily the ability to make rational choices, but the freedom from external constraint, the freedom to control oneself.” Therefore, society must either be “governed by justice or enslaved by force.”<sup>22</sup>

ECONOMIC VIEWS: CAPITALISM AND FREE ENTERPRISE

Eisenhower prioritized capitalism and a free-market economy: “[I]f the individual is to be truly free, he must be provided with the opportunity to gain a livelihood through means of his own choosing.” When the state interfered in the economy, individuals “would necessarily respond only to orders from the government.” In his diary, Eisenhower noted in passing that “as between the so-called concept of the welfare state and the operation of a system of competitive enterprise there is no doubt where I stand.” He came to detest the

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21. The first two quotes are from Eisenhower’s speech to the Daughters of the American Revolution, pp. 190 and 191, respectively. The third quote is in Eisenhower to Roger Williams, September 15, 1948, *PDDE*, Vol. 10, p. 194.

22. Eisenhower diary entry, January 14, 1949, *PDDE*, Vol. 10, quotes at p. 431; and Chernus, *General Eisenhower*, pp. 87, 91.

New Deal: the problem with Roosevelt's program was that it "sought to substitute SECURITY for OPPORTUNITY."<sup>23</sup>

Such free-market support led Eisenhower to be skeptical of the labor movement. Although sympathetic to some labor goals and irritated with high-handed management tactics, he believed that the government had little place in disputes over wages. In his view, labor leaders were "forever seeking laws to hamstring management," instead of enhancing productivity by becoming more efficient. Instead of profiting through the voluntary cooperation of the free market, labor unions "have become so unreasonable in their demands that they are defeating their own ends." Writing to labor leader Phillip Murray, he confessed, "I most earnestly believe that whenever these matters can be solved locally or by private institutions we are badly advised to permit federal participation."<sup>24</sup>

### *Kennedy's Concept of Liberty*

John Kennedy was a positive liberal whose private discourse reveals basic support for the welfare state, an increase in the centralization of federal power, and expanded government intervention in the economy. Although occasionally voicing the negative liberal views of his father, Joseph P. Kennedy, in anticommunist contexts, he had great concern about the potential selfishness of negative liberal individualism.

#### PHILOSOPHY: REDISTRIBUTION AND GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

Kennedy's starting point for political analysis was the importance of redistribution and government intervention for creating real freedom. He began to develop these views on a pivotal summer trip to Europe between terms at Harvard College. There he had the opportunity to observe aristocracy, fascism, and communism, while struggling with the different systems in his trip diary. Of the French, he wrote that "while they all like Roosevelt, his type of government would not succeed in France which seems to lack the ability of seeing a problem as a whole. They don't like [Premier Léon] Blum as he takes away their money and gives it to someone else—that to a Frenchman is *très mauvais*." In attacking both sides in the Spanish Civil War, he noted that "at the beginning the government was in the right, morally speaking, as its program was

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23. The first two quotes are from Eisenhower's speech to the Daughters of the American Revolution, pp. 190 and 191. The third quote is from Eisenhower's diary entry, January 1, 1950, *PDDE*, Vol. 11, p. 886. The final quote is in Chernus, *General Eisenhower*, p. 87 (capitalization in original).

24. Quotes in *ibid.*, p. 91; Eisenhower diary entry, January 1, 1950, *PDDE*, Vol. 11, p. 886; and Eisenhower to Phillip Murray, January 17 1949, *PDDE*, Vol. 10, p. 439. On Eisenhower's relationship with labor, see also Chernus, *General Eisenhower*, pp. 174–176.

similar to the New Deal.” He defended the New Deal political order after World War II, arguing that liberty “is not the ruthless, the unbridled will. It is not the freedom to do as one likes. . . . A society in which men recognize no check upon their freedom soon becomes a society where freedom is only the possession of a savage few: as we have learned to our sorrow.”<sup>25</sup>

Kennedy’s own vision of freedom emphasized the effective action and the development of important capabilities characteristic of positive liberty. In his senior thesis, he wrote that democracy was valuable “because it allows for the free development of man as an individual,” founded on democracy’s “high standards of living.” Reflecting privately for his memoirs on audiotape before assuming the presidency, Kennedy recalled that “I saw how politics filled the Greek definition of happiness—a full use of your powers along lines of excellence in life-affording scope.” He argued that “everything now depends upon what government decides. Therefore, if you are interested, if you want to participate, if you feel strongly about any public question,” politics was the answer. His list of what counted as a “public question” included subjects as broad as “labor, what happens in India, [and] the future of American agriculture.”<sup>26</sup>

#### STATE CENTRALIZATION: GREATER FEDERAL POWER

Influenced by his father’s views, Kennedy occasionally emphasized negative liberal themes in public speeches, especially in an anticommunist context. He sometimes warned against the “scarlet thread that runs throughout the world” and noted that “the right of the individual against the state is the keystone of our Constitution.” Along these lines, he voted in Congress for the Twenty-second Amendment limiting a president to two terms and would also defend congressional committee prerogatives against centralization of authority in the party leadership.<sup>27</sup>

These were minor themes, however, against a backdrop of skepticism toward undirected individualism, which Kennedy regarded as inefficient and selfish. His senior thesis argued that British humiliation at the 1938 Munich

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25. JFK Diary, July 9, 1937, John Fitzgerald Kennedy Presidential Library (JFKL), Personal Papers (PP), box 1; JFK to Joseph P. Kennedy, July 25, 1937, quoted in James MacGregor Burns, *John Kennedy: A Political Profile* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), p. 48; and “Why I Am an American,” speech in Mineola, New York, May 18, 1947, JFKL, Pre-Presidential Papers (PPP), box 94, pp. 1–2.

26. John F. Kennedy, “Appeasement at Munich,” honors thesis, 1940, JFKL, PP, box 2, p. 141; and JFK Tape 39, “Memoir Entry Concerning Entrance into Politics,” October 1960, JFKL, recordings.

27. Speech to a Medical Center, April 25, 1949, JFKL, PPP, box 93, p. 1; “Some Elements of the American Character,” Independence Day Oration, Boston, Massachusetts, July 4, 1946, JFKL, PPP, box 94, p. 13; and Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917–1963* (New York: Little, Brown, 2003), p. 217.

conference resulted from an unwillingness to pay for rearmament—a product of negative liberal illusions and the free play of self-interest in a democracy. Even as war in Europe approached, “every group wanted rearmament, but no group felt there was any need for it to sacrifice its privileged position.” This was a general problem of negative liberty: “[W]hen it requires a period of years to build up an industrial system able to produce this armament, we see the disadvantages of democracy’s position. She is forced to pay for everything out of her budget, and she is limited by the laws of capitalism—supply and demand.” Kennedy believed that, without the ability to control prices, direct production, and increase revenues, liberal democracies confronted tremendous threats. The lesson for the United States was clear: “[I]nstead of claiming that our great national wealth and high standard of living are due to our democratic capitalist system, we should realize the great natural resources we have. Maybe they were the best form for developing the country,” but that did not make them the best today. The modern world called for greater state centralization and control.<sup>28</sup>

Kennedy returned to these views throughout World War II. He detested efforts to gainsay wartime government, fuming in a private letter that “[t]his war is not a debate over war potentials and possible production limits . . . it is not a war that can be won by the blue-prints of bombers that some day will cover the sky. This war must cease to be run as a political battle. Generals must take charge—must, if necessary, regiment the country to the extent that makes the Nazis look like starry eyed individualists if we are ever going to come out on top.” He concluded in another letter that the war was much more important than “parity prices, 40-hour weeks, cost-plus contracts, what happens to the U.S.A.” Such complaints were just an example of how America was succumbing to British negative liberal decadence: “[I]n a war like today’s, tradition and way of life and a great past history are merely excess baggage that impedes movement.”<sup>29</sup>

#### ECONOMIC VIEWS: GOVERNMENT-GUIDED CAPITALISM

Kennedy’s economic views developed in part through his examination of the weakening New England economy. Rather than support economic decentralism or market adjustment, Kennedy encouraged port workers and managers alike to embrace cooperation with government: “[I]f this war has taught us anything in the domestic field, it is that from here in the employer and the employed have the same responsibility to the state.” Economic planning at all

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28. Kennedy, “Appeasement at Munich,” pp. 91, 146.

29. JFK unpublished manuscript, February 1942, JFKL, PP, box 11, p. 1; JFK to Lady Astor, March 3, 1942, JFKL, PPP, box 73; and JFK to Kick Kennedy, March 10, 1942, JFKL, PP, box 4A.

levels was the answer. “We must think nationally, talk nationally and plan nationally, and internationally as well,” he argued. If New England failed to do so, it would learn that “[t]he only self-contained community is a graveyard.”<sup>30</sup>

More generally, Kennedy favored a form of government-guided capitalism that created effective freedom for all. He argued that “the complexity of economic affairs, the growth of huge enterprises, national in scope, and the complete interdependence of our whole economy, made necessary the abandonment of a strict constitutional construction viewpoint.” Fortunately, “[t]he commerce clause proved flexible enough to support badly needed legislation in labor and finance.” Although occasionally expressing balanced budget views and a reluctance to go as far economically as some of his working-class constituents, his interventionist arguments became increasingly typical. He wrote to one constituent in 1951 that “voluntary economic controls, which have proved unworkable, must be replaced by wage, price and material controls of a mandatory nature, backed by the power of the law. I believe we have made a mistake by not putting such controls on sooner.” By the time he reached the Senate in 1953, Kennedy held conventional positive liberal views on the economy.<sup>31</sup>

### *Predictions*

Given the geopolitically constrained environment of the Cold War, the theory presented here makes three predictions. First, as a negative liberal, Eisenhower should pursue buck-passing and, as a positive liberal, Kennedy should adopt balancing. Second, the Eisenhower administration should emphasize reducing costs, whereas the Kennedy administration should stress increasing U.S. influence over international power configurations. Third, distinctive liberal rationales should motivate each strategy: buck-passing should be driven by a desire to reduce state intervention across a range of areas, and balancing should aim to preserve liberalism abroad.

### *Eisenhower’s Buck-Passing Strategy*

The basic concept of Eisenhower’s grand strategy was the “third force”: the United States would build Western Europe into an independent pole of power that could balance the Soviet Union by itself. The United States would then

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30. Port of Boston Speech, December 1945, JFKL, PPP, box 94, p. 5.

31. “Why I Am a Democrat,” speech in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 3, 1947, JFKL, PPP, p. 3; and JFK to Peter MacGowen, January 18, 1951, JFKL, PPP, box 69. On Kennedy’s early fiscal conservatism, see Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, pp. 142–143.

pass the buck, withdrawing its forces from the continent and positioning itself as the balancer of last resort. Eisenhower's desire was to build an integrated Europe and to lower U.S. costs and commitments by cheap-riding on this pole.

#### U.S. DIPLOMATIC POLICY UNDER EISENHOWER

U.S. diplomatic efforts toward building a European pole centered on supranational European integration. I examine two major integrative efforts here: the European Defense Community (EDC) and the European Economic Community (EEC).

EDC. The EDC was a treaty integrating the militaries of France, Germany, and the Benelux states. The EDC solved the United States' central strategic problem: the military disposition of West Germany. Other European states were terrified of a resurgence in German military power. But without a strong defense contribution by West Germany, the United States would have to defend Europe in perpetuity. A supranational army would ensure Franco-German military cooperation to balance Soviet power, while keeping the German military under West European control.<sup>32</sup>

A U.S. diplomat aptly described negative liberal cost concerns: "[O]ur policy in essence has been based on the premise that if Europe is to be defended, the major part of such defense must be borne by the Europeans. . . . If Europe remains weak and divided, the United States will be frittering away its resources, which are not unlimited, in a program which has no real meaning." The EDC also embodied the negative liberal desire for limited commitments and corresponding allied independence. "The American people were not avid for power or leadership," Secretary of State John Foster Dulles reminded French Prime Minister Laniel. "They wanted to see the age-old leadership of the Western World flower again under France."<sup>33</sup>

Although the EDC was nominally a French project, the government was very skeptical of it. The French feared, correctly, that the United States intended to abandon them to their German neighbor. As Eisenhower complained bitterly to Dulles, "After all that we have done to try to help Europe to help itself—and that, of course, was what EDC was—the Europeans come back to us seeking further commitments. They are absolute masters of the art

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32. On the EDC, see Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 110–125; and McAllister, *No Exit*, chap. 5 and, especially, pp. 222–224.

33. MacArthur-Laniel Meeting, December 4, 1953, *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1952–1954* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), Vol. 5, pp. 1740–1744, quote at p. 1742; and Eisenhower-Laniel Meeting, December 5, 1953, *ibid.*, pp. 1769–1774, quote at p. 1771. Throughout this article I have occasionally edited documents to reflect Standard English or my sentence structure.

of getting us to do for them things which they ought to do for themselves." U.S. diplomats refused to offer France anything more than empty promises, privately described as "nothing more than an effort to get timid men to overcome their own uncertainties." This negative liberal fear of overcommitment probably doomed the EDC. In August 1954, the Mendès-France government in Paris allowed the defeat of the EDC treaty on a procedural motion.<sup>34</sup>

EEC. The death of the EDC did not represent the end of the third force policy and the project of supranational integration. As Dulles noted, "[A]lmost any instrumentality was desirable if its use could develop the European rather than the national principle."<sup>35</sup>

An instrument appeared in 1955 that seemed to suit U.S. buck-passing purposes: a European customs union, the EEC. Eisenhower saw the EEC as a supranational body aimed at creating the foundation of "a third great power bloc, after which development the United States would be permitted to sit back and relax somewhat." If Western Europe could mobilize its economic potential, it would become "a solid power mass." Moreover, an integrated West European economy could develop the supranational military strength of an EDC. In short, "with the common market Europe would be a third world force along with the US and the Soviet Union. If Europe does not have a common market, it will remain weak."<sup>36</sup>

Thus, the implications of the EEC for negative liberty were considerable: reduced U.S. commitments and lower costs. In its current condition, Dulles argued, Europe was seen "as subject to being captured by the Russians or as representing some kind of charge on the US which the American public is not prepared to carry indefinitely. A united Europe, by contrast, could be as powerful as the United States or the Soviet Union," certainly strong enough to resist the Russians unassisted. Indeed, Dulles believed that "the Europeans have an obligation to tie themselves together and to attain strength in that way so that it will not be necessary to call upon the US again."<sup>37</sup>

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34. NSC Meeting, February 26, 1954, *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. 7, pp. 1221–1232, first quote at p. 1230; and NSC Meeting, March 4, 1954, *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. 5, pp. 886–890, second quote at p. 887. For a State Department estimate that the United States had never committed to station troops in Europe for any length of time, see McAllister, *No Exit*, p. 236 n. 213.

35. NSC Meeting, November 21, 1955, *FRUS, 1955–1957*, Vol. 5, pp. 803–806, quote at p. 806.

36. Dulles-Adenauer, June 12, 1956, *FRUS, 1955–1957*, Vol. 19, pp. 150–153, first two quotes at pp. 151 and 150, respectively; and Dulles-Strauss, May 14, 1956, *FRUS, 1955–57*, Vol. 4, pp. 438–441, third quote at p. 441. On European economic potential, see Eisenhower-Mayer, February 8, 1956, *ibid.*, pp. 408–409. On the U.S. approach, in general, see Geoffrey Warner, "Review: Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Unity of Western Europe, 1955–1957," *International Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (April 1993), pp. 319–329.

37. Dulles-Adenauer, May 4, 1957, *FRUS, 1955–57*, Vol. 26, pp. 230–243, first quote at p. 240; and Dulles-Erhard, June 7, 1955, *FRUS, 1955–57*, Vol. 4, pp. 291–292, second quote at pp. 291–292.

Negative liberty's impact on U.S. grand strategy is further reflected in the Eisenhower administration's desire for European independence, even at the cost of U.S. influence. In response to concerns about "any danger of separateness on the part of a unified Europe," Eisenhower stated that, in addition to being unlikely, a divided Europe was worse: "[W]eakness could not cooperate, weakness could only beg." Dulles believed that, as such, even the crisis over the 1956 British and French invasion of Suez could become "a very healthy development" if it spurred "these nations to try and mold themselves into a third force." These projects were not, according to the secretary of the Treasury, "purely philosophical as far as the nation's check-book was concerned." Rather, they were essential to reducing long-term U.S. burdens. It was not a typical piece of bluster, then, when Dulles told West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer that "complete sovereignty for the many nations of Europe . . . is a luxury which European countries can no longer afford at US expense."<sup>38</sup>

#### U.S. MILITARY POLICY UNDER EISENHOWER

Eisenhower reinforced his political plans with a military strategy that transitioned Europe toward self-defense while reducing U.S. costs and government intrusiveness. This strategy, called the "New Look," found its operational expression in NATO war plan MC-48 and in Eisenhower's plans for sharing nuclear weapons.

**THE NEW LOOK.** The New Look reflected a buck-passing military posture: the United States would draw down and eventually remove its ground troops from Europe by focusing on air power, naval power, and above all, nuclear weapons. The New Look envisioned a division of labor between the United States and Europe. "We would do the 'big stuff' (large-scale retaliatory attack). Our allies were expected to handle local hostilities," Dulles summarized. Eisenhower agreed: "[O]ur policy should be that our friends and allies supply the means for local defense on the ground and that the United States should come into the act with air and naval forces alone." As the basic strategy document NSC 162/2 concluded, "In Western Europe, a position of strength must be based mainly on British, French and German cooperation in the defense of the continent."<sup>39</sup>

Negative liberal concerns drove this cheap-riding impulse: fears of inflation

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38. The first five quotes are in Warner, "Review: Eisenhower, Dulles, and the Unity of Western Europe, 1955-57," pp. 325-326. The Dulles threat appears in Dulles-Adenauer, May 4, 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-57, Vol. 26, pp. 230-243, quote at p. 240.

39. NSC Meeting, February 28, 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-1957, Vol. 19, pp. 425-442, first two quotes at p. 429; and Draft of NSC 162, September 30, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, Vol. 2, pp. 491-514, third quote at p. 507.

eroding the value of work, budget deficits destroying the value of the dollar, and taxes stealing the fruits of labor. Early drafts of NSC 162/2 argued that “excessive government spending leads to inflationary deficits or to repressive taxation, or to both” and that “tax rates are so high and the structure of the tax system so bad that normal economic incentives for long term growth are seriously restricted.” Such concerns prompted Eisenhower to make his Treasury secretaries and budget directors permanent members of the National Security Council throughout his administration.<sup>40</sup>

Even worse for negative liberals, large military commitments posed the threat of a controlled economy and an end to the system of free enterprise. As Eisenhower argued:

The United States was confronted with a very terrible threat, and the truth of the matter was that we have devised no way of meeting this threat without imposing ever-greater controls on our economy and on the freedom of our people. We had been trying, in other words, to have our cake and to eat it at the same time. We were engaged, continued the President, not only in saving our money or in defending our persons from attack; we were engaged in the defense of a way of life, and the great danger was that in defending this way of life we would find ourselves resorting to methods that endangered this way of life. The real problem, as the President saw it, was to devise methods of meeting the Soviet threat and of adopting controls, if necessary, that would not result in our transformation into a garrison state.<sup>41</sup>

Eisenhower insisted that it was not just the Soviet Union’s military power that threatened the United States, but also the internal U.S. responses that this power might prompt. He fought ferociously against the idea that “we should do what was necessary even if the result was to change the American way of life. We could lick the whole world, said the President, if we were willing to adopt the system of Adolph Hitler.”<sup>42</sup>

Negative liberals such as Eisenhower also believed that defense policy might also threaten individual rights, especially through conscription. NSC 162/2 argued against continuing policies that might extend the draft “unless we are prepared to move towards further restrictions upon the freedom of individual citizens. Significant moves in that direction would tend to alter the character of the free institutions and values which our security programs are

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40. Draft of NSC 162, September 30, 1953, *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. 2, pp. 491–514, especially pp. 500–503, quotes at p. 501. See also Richard H. Immerman, “Confessions of an Eisenhower Revisionist: An Agonizing Reappraisal,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (June 1990), p. 321 n. 21.

41. NSC Meeting, September 24, 1953, *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. 2, pp. 464–475, quote at p. 469.

42. NSC Meeting, October 7, 1953, *ibid.*, pp. 514–534, quote at p. 519. On fear of the garrison state, in general, see Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State*.

designed to preserve.” Some of the administration’s individualist rhetoric also assumed an anti-Red Scare: “[T]he morale of the citizens of the United States must be based both on responsibility and freedom for the individual. . . . It is essential that necessary measures of protection should not be so used as to destroy the national unity based on the lasting values of freedom.”<sup>43</sup>

All of these reasons led Eisenhower to consider the New Look as nothing more than a return to the old look in U.S. strategy: “[A] minimum military establishment and mobilization base that could be expanded promptly in case of need.” U.S. forces in Europe were a “temporary expedient” and a “stop-gap operation” toward a strategy where allies defended themselves. Once implemented, this strategy would “restore Japan and Germany as strong defenders against Russia, allowing the United States to be a central ‘keep.’” Motivated by Eisenhower’s negative liberal concerns, the New Look was simply a “reaffirmation and clarification of what he had always understood.”<sup>44</sup>

MC-48 AND NUCLEAR SHARING. The operational output of the New Look was MC-48, NATO’s plan for rapid escalation to nuclear war. MC-48 called for using tactical nuclear weapons on concentrations of Soviet armor to even the conventional balance; whence NSC 162/2’s famous phrase: “In the event of hostilities, the United States will consider nuclear weapons to be as available for use as other munitions.” Because this policy opened the door for Soviet nuclear use, NATO’s tactical nuclear defense was coupled with plans for a preemptive strategic nuclear attack, with launch authority delegated to local commanders.<sup>45</sup>

Dependence on nuclear weapons put the West European allies in an awful position, because in a war there was a strong chance Europe would be a radiating casualty of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. The allies needed their own protection. “The strategic concept contemplated that everyone should have an atomic capability,” the British stressed in meetings with Dulles—even German units would need nuclear arms.<sup>46</sup>

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43. Draft of NSC 162, September 30, 1953, *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. 2, pp. 491–514, quotes at pp. 502 and 511, respectively. For some of the repeated military worries about the draft, see *ibid.*, pp. 446, 448, 469–471.

44. NSC Meeting, September 24, 1953, *FRUS, 1952–1954*, Vol. 2, pp. 464–475, quote at p. 470; Cutler-Dulles, September 3, 1953, *ibid.*, pp. 455–457, quote at p. 456; and Legislative Leadership Meeting, December 14, 1954, *ibid.*, pp. 824–827, quote at pp. 825–826. See also Eisenhower-Dulles, September 8, 1953, *ibid.*, pp. 460–463.

45. NSC 162, October 30, 1953, *ibid.*, pp. 577–597, quote p. 593. Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 156–160 has a good summary of the basic military situation. For penetrating analysis of the U.S. preemptive doctrine, see David Alan Rosenberg, “The Origins of Overkill: Nuclear Weapons and American Strategy, 1945–1960,” *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Spring 1983), pp. 33–44.

46. Anglo-American Meeting, December 11, 1956, *FRUS, 1955–1957*, Vol. 4., pp. 123–133, quote at p. 125.

This policy horrified large segments of the U.S. strategic establishment, but top administration officials enthusiastically embraced helping the Europeans develop atomic independence. “For God’s sake, let us not be stingy with an ally. . . . [I]nstead of being generous, we treat many of our allies like step-children,” Eisenhower argued. Eisenhower “had always strongly favored the sharing of our [U.S.] weapons,” because there should be “no monopoly” on the possession of nuclear weapons within NATO. If Europe was to eventually bear the burden of balancing the Soviets, the United States must forgo monopoly control over the most fundamental source of national power.<sup>47</sup>

The Eisenhower administration developed several ruses to give the allies de facto control over nuclear weapons, while circumventing congressional restrictions. Among these were German fighter-bombers guarded only by a single private and dual-key missiles where the second key went missing. Both Eisenhower and the allies understood that these measures were controls in name only. As Eisenhower said to French President Charles de Gaulle, the dual-key system was “an illusory precaution,” and “it would not be too difficult to obtain the key in a real emergency. . . . [The French could] always arrange to seize control of the key.” He was just as blunt with the NATO Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR): “[W]e are willing to give, to all intents and purposes, control of the weapons. We retain titular possession only.”<sup>48</sup>

Eisenhower’s long-term solution was an independent European deterrent: the Multilateral Force (MLF). The United States would deploy intermediate-range nuclear missiles on NATO submarines manned by international crews. SACEUR would command the force, but in a major change, this individual would now be a European general. “When there was an American commander,” Eisenhower told a startled de Gaulle, “other countries looked too much to the United States to help them and did not accept their own responsibilities.” The heart of the plan was to turn NATO over to the Western allies. There would be no U.S. veto power over the use of the proposed force, and a European general at the head of a largely European alliance would make decisions surrounding it. Although Eisenhower’s term ended before the MLF could be launched, the departing president considered it his gift to Kennedy—“a legacy of the finest ideas and plans this administration could develop.”<sup>49</sup>

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47. NSC Meeting, November 21, 1955, *FRUS, 1955–57*, Vol. 19, pp. 150–153, quote at p. 151; and Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, p. 197.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 209, see also pp. 193–200; Eisenhower-Norstad Meeting, June 9, 1959, *FRUS, 1958–1960*, Vol. 7, pp. 461–464, quote at p. 462. On the training and manning of German units, see Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 187–192; and Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 194–196.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 215, see also pp. 204–215 for in-depth analysis of the MLF under Eisenhower; and NSC Meeting, November 17, 1960, *FRUS, 1958–1960*, Vol. 7, pp. 648–660, final quote at p. 654.

THE BERLIN CRISIS UNDER EISENHOWER

Eisenhower demonstrated his commitment to buck-passing during the Berlin crisis of 1958–62. In November 1958, Soviet President Nikita Khrushchev initiated the crisis by threatening war unless the Western powers accepted a settlement normalizing the status of Berlin. In the absence of an agreement, the West would either have to surrender its position in Berlin or risk nuclear war to maintain it.

In private, Eisenhower showed a great willingness to compromise. He and Dulles could accept *de facto* recognition of East Germany, odious though it might be. Additionally, Eisenhower considered the U.S. troops stationed behind Soviet lines a mistake and was willing to negotiate an end to the U.S. military presence in Berlin. Indeed, he was interested in various disarmament proposals that might help to facilitate a U.S. exit from Europe more broadly.<sup>50</sup>

In practice, Eisenhower's negative liberal views prevented him from accepting compromises. He was unwilling to adopt the British position of finding a graceful means of withdrawal from Berlin. If the United States was unwilling to risk nuclear escalation over Berlin, "we would first lose the city itself and, shortly after, all of Western Europe. If all of Western Europe fell into the hands of the Soviet Union and thus added its great industrial plant to the USSR's already great industrial might, the United States would indeed be reduced to the character of a garrison state if it was to survive at all." The stakes in Berlin were geopolitical in nature, with awful consequences for negative liberty if U.S. credibility was doubted.<sup>51</sup>

Moreover, Eisenhower's buck-passing strategy made him unwilling to agree to a nuclear-free West Germany. The Soviets made clear early in the crisis that wresting away the *de facto* nuclear control enjoyed by West Germany was their primary objective. Although acknowledging, "the importance which he felt the Russians attached to a confirmation of the post-war German borders, and of the real fear they have of a reunited, armed Germany," the Eisenhower administration was unwilling to budge from its nuclear-sharing policy. He told Prime Minister Harold MacMillan "flatly that he would take a strong Germany. He pointed out that the West was afraid of a strong Germany only when there was a weak Soviet Union. Now the central problem was the strength of the Soviet Union." The balance of power required either a strong

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50. On U.S. willingness to make a deal and to accommodate its allies, see Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 258–261. On the crisis, more generally, during the Eisenhower period, see Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy*, pp. 185–215, especially n. 56 on Eisenhower's attraction to disarmament and disengagement. Dulles was less willing than Eisenhower to tolerate the loss of Berlin.

51. NSC Meeting, May 1, 1958, *FRUS, 1958–1960*, Vol. 3, pp. 79–98, quote p. 89.

Germany or a forward-deployed United States, and Eisenhower was unwilling to sacrifice American liberties through a permanent commitment.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, maintaining the buck-passing approach meant deferring to the allies. Eisenhower “thought that he could strike a bargain with Khrushchev . . . but he knew our [U.S.] allies would not accept his acting unilaterally.” To build their military strength, the Europeans, especially the West Germans, had to be permitted a policy of political strength. Eisenhower therefore refused to push for a settlement that violated Adenauer’s hard line of no East German recognition. “A great deal is to be said in favor of the status-quo,” Dulles argued, but “that is a position we cannot take publically.” Eisenhower perceived a long-term geopolitical threat that required a European pole of power. Thus, his short-term solution to the Berlin crisis ultimately amounted to pure deterrence: “a very simple statement to the effect that if the Russians want war over the Berlin issue they can have it.”<sup>53</sup>

### *Kennedy’s Balancing Strategy*

In contrast to Eisenhower, Kennedy adopted a grand strategy of balancing, which sought to manage European politics through alliances and institutions. He believed that balancing offered the surest way to preserve liberalism abroad: his strategy was intended in part to protect the open system of democracy and free trade that had developed in Western Europe after World War II. The aim was to balance not just against the Soviet Union, but effectively against Western Europe as well, buying liberal political stability and increased international influence at the cost of a permanent U.S. commitment to Europe.

#### THE BERLIN CRISIS UNDER KENNEDY

Kennedy made clear his strategy in the continuing Berlin crisis. He sought not deterrence, but *détente*: a negotiated settlement and corresponding decrease in superpower tensions.

Unlike Eisenhower, Kennedy was willing to make two major concessions in return for the guarantee of U.S. rights in Berlin: a permanently nonnuclear West Germany and a permanent U.S. commitment to Europe, ensuring West German quiescence. Even before the erection of the Berlin Wall in August 1961,

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52. Eisenhower-Macmillan Meeting, March 28, 1960, *FRUS, 1958–1960*, Vol. 9, pp. 258–262, quotes at pp. 258–259, 260–261.

53. Eisenhower-Herter Meeting, October 16, 1959, Declassified Document Reference System (DDRS), 1982/2219; Dulles to Eisenhower, February 6, 1959, *FRUS, 1958–1960*, Vol. 8, pp. 334–335, second quote at p. 335; and Eisenhower-Herter, November 22, 1958, *ibid.*, pp. 113–114, third quote at p. 114.

Kennedy had assured Khrushchev “that the US is opposed to a buildup in West Germany that would constitute a threat to the Soviet Union.” After the wall was up, Kennedy instructed the State Department to prepare to negotiate “a limitation or prohibition of nuclear arms in either part of Germany . . . [and] a non-aggression pact between the NATO and the Warsaw pact countries.” Kennedy was also willing to commit to ensuring German good behavior: just before Kennedy’s assassination, it became official American policy that “the United States will maintain in Germany ground forces equivalent to six divisions as long as they are required.”<sup>54</sup>

Also unlike Eisenhower, Kennedy valued influence over European policy more than reducing U.S. costs. He seized control of NATO policy to offer a superpower deal. By 1963, Franco-U.S. relations had ruptured over Washington’s unilateral tactics, and Adenauer was denouncing Washington’s policy publicly and privately. Kennedy refused, however, to countenance allied expectations “either to threaten nuclear war to preserve the present status quo in Berlin with the fairly clear indication that if Khrushchev called his bluff he would in fact be asked not to start the war he was threatening” or “to make concessions in order to reach an agreement with the Russians which the French and the Germans could then blame him for.” Balancing meant that Washington would call the shots.<sup>55</sup>

#### U.S. DIPLOMATIC POLICY UNDER KENNEDY

Kennedy abhorred and feared the creation of a European third force. In his view, European institutions such as the EEC were economic losers, and valuable politically only if they could be used to buttress liberalism in Europe and manage West European politics. They were positively dangerous if they threatened to produce an independent third force.

**ECONOMIC INTEGRATION.** The positive liberal desire for greater influence over Western Europe was evident in the Kennedy administration’s approach to integration. The State Department’s intelligence arm noted that NATO and other European institutions served to inculcate a “sub-balance of power rivalry” that “offers certain advantages to the United States. . . . As one state moves into disagreement with specific American policies . . . the others tend to move nearer the U.S.” The new strategy did not go unnoticed. After being castigated by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, the French ambassador to the

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54. Kennedy-Khrushchev Meeting, June 4, 1961, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 14, quote at p. 91; Kennedy-Rusk Meeting, September 5, 1961, *ibid.*, quote at p. 393; and NSAM 270, October 29, 1963, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 9, pp. 98–100, quote at p. 99.

55. On friction with Western Europe over U.S. Berlin policy, see Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 329–348, especially pp. 346–348, quote at p. 343.

United States, Herveé Alphand, observed that “the U.S. would sometimes be accused of playing one European power against the other, sometimes of favoring a United Europe in order to be able to dominate it better.”<sup>56</sup>

The key to managing Europe was to include Britain in the EEC. In the words of one top U.S. official, “[W]e hoped that if England went into Europe, it would take a sense of ‘special relationship’ with it, and that we would then have a ‘special relationship’ with Europe.” Former Secretary of State Dean Acheson put the matter with characteristic bluntness: the United States must get England in the EEC to “act as our lieutenant (the fashionable word is partner).” The basic point was clear: Britain would help to steer European unity toward U.S. ends.<sup>57</sup>

Among those ends was the protection of liberal values abroad: historically liberal Britain would help to preserve economic openness among the allies. The lead Europeanist in the State Department, George Ball, fretted that “both Germany and France have strong potential which would tend over the long run to make the EEC an inward-looking organization,” and he damned European “moves toward autarky and the third force delusion.” At the nadir of U.S. relations with de Gaulle, Charles Bohlen, ambassador to France under Kennedy, still argued that the European “community will and should survive. Therefore we must bend our efforts to seeing that, as far as it lies within our power to influence events, it develops [as] an outward looking community.”<sup>58</sup>

Including Britain in the EEC would also bolster weak democratic institutions in France and Germany. The Kennedy administration perceived continental politics as prone to collapse and disintegration if overly stressed by nationalism; free trade and free elections could quickly turn into autarky and autocracy. As Ball told Kennedy, “France conceals within her body politic deep

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56. Frank Costigliola, “Kennedy, the European Allies, and the Failure to Consult,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 110, No. 1 (Spring 1995), first quote at p. 110; and Rusk-Alphand Meeting, May 28, 1962, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 13, pp. 708–713, second quote at p. 713.

57. Unnamed official quoted in Costigliola, “Kennedy, the European Allies, and the Failure to Consult,” p. 111. Acheson is quoted in Frank Costigliola, “The Pursuit of Atlantic Community: Nuclear Arms, Dollars, and Berlin,” in Thomas G. Patterson, ed., *Kennedy’s Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961–1963* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 27.

58. Ball-Caccia Meeting, May 2, 1961, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 13, pp. 9–12, quote at p. 10; Ball to Bruce, March 14, 1963, *ibid.*, pp. 527–528, quote at pp. 527–528; and Bohlen-State, February 3, 1963, *ibid.*, pp. 171–173, quote at p. 172. Oftentimes the point about economic openness was made in the language of “stability.” As Ball put it, “We were betting that the addition of a third major pillar in the European edifice would render it structurally stable and proof against the erosion of any one pillar.” Kennedy also took this line: “As to the Common Market, the President said that if Great Britain joined, Europe would be strengthened and stabilized.” That is, Great Britain would work as a liberal force within a potentially backsliding autarkic community. See Ball-Kennedy, June 20, 1963, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 13, pp. 204–213, quote at pp. 205–206; and NSC Meeting, January 22, 1963, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 8, pp. 457–462, quote at p. 459.

divisive forces. Only by diluting those forces within the larger caldron of Europe can Frenchmen achieve lasting political stability." De Gaulle, he warned, was taking France down the wrong path domestically: "[E]ach week de Gaulle's France grows perceptibly more absolutist. . . . France conceals a profound political malaise. De Gaulle will not last forever and the hazards involved in France's ultimate return to constitutional government is an omnipresence that hangs heavily over Europe." In some regards, Germany was even worse, as the United States "face(s) dangerous weather in the Federal Republic." After detailing the nationalist threat to Germany, Ball concluded, "I am not overstating the dangers. No one can speak with assurance of the pressures and counter-pressures that may shape the future of a post-Adenauer Germany."<sup>59</sup>

The administration's solution was to dilute these antiliberal tendencies in institutions that stronger, more liberal states dominated. Writing later, Ball summed up the positive liberal goals of the U.S. balancing strategy:

Britain's application to accede to the Rome Treaty is epic in its implications. . . . For three hundred years Britain has been a stranger to revolution, while France has endured absolutism, two empires, five republics, two constitutional monarchies, and two dictatorships. In the ninety-five years since it became a nation, Germany has averaged one violent change of government every twenty-four years. The Weimar Republic and the Fourth Republic each saw twenty-two governments during their brief life spans, while in contrast, Britain has had only six governments. Intimate British participation . . . could moderate these latent instabilities and provide a permanent balance, securing democracy in Europe.<sup>60</sup>

For the Kennedy administration, European institutions were valuable insofar as they bolstered liberal regimes, which meant including liberal Britain and making them amenable to control from Washington.

THIRD FORCE. The wrong kind of European unity was cooperation that smacked of independent European action. Rusk attacked the third force in a meeting with the French ambassador, emphasizing that "this touched a very sensitive nerve. The concept that Europe could be the arbiter between the US and the Soviets was basically fallacious." Rusk threatened further that "[i]f ever Europe decided to play an independent role, issues between the US and USSR would be greatly reduced. In a sense, the US rather than Europe was the 'third force' in this combination." Kennedy was even more blunt, arguing to the French that "we did not fear a third force would be neutralist. We were

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59. Ball-Kennedy, June 20, 1963, *FRUS, 1961-1963*, Vol. 13, pp. 204-213, quotes on pp. 206-208.

60. Quoted in Pascaline Winand, *Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the United States of Europe* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), pp. 273-274.

concerned, instead, about whether there would be a wholly separate, independent force unrelated to American responsibility and interest.”<sup>61</sup>

These concerns were soon realized: in January 1963, de Gaulle vetoed Britain’s entry into the EEC and signed a treaty of friendship with West Germany that promised independent military cooperation. Administration officials were unremittingly hostile to de Gaulle’s proclamation of “a ‘European’ Europe under French leadership capable of functioning as third great power concentration of international political force.” They worried about his appeal throughout NATO, arguing that the third force themes of European economic, military, and political independence “have considerable political potential in the hands of de Gaulle and perhaps other European leaders who are convinced that nineteenth century nationalism is the motor force of international affairs. Effective manipulation of these nationalistic forces could result in serious erosion of American position.” A third force would reduce U.S. control of the diplomatic situation in Europe and might trigger the antidemocratic and nationalistic forces that Washington was trying to eliminate. As one official put it, a united Europe “would present us with a more formidable challenge than the present divided Europe.”<sup>62</sup>

The Franco-German treaty of friendship sent the administration’s third force fears into overdrive. It “created a new situation,” one where “de Gaulle might try to organize the Six [EEC nations] and create a nuclear force responsible to this grouping.” Yielding this kind of political control was unacceptable to Kennedy. “As soon as the French have a nuclear capability . . . we have much less to offer Europe,” the president argued, making the emerging European political bloc more appealing to the Germans. That result would signal the end of a balancing policy, because “if we are not vital to Germany, then our NATO strategy makes no sense.” Kennedy went so far as to urge an investigation into “the possibility that de Gaulle had concluded that he would make a deal with the Russians, break up NATO, and push the U.S. out of Europe.”<sup>63</sup>

The Kennedy administration responded by threatening to withdraw all U.S. troops from Europe if the Germans ratified the treaty without reservations. Kennedy recognized that “the threat of withdrawing our troops was the only sanction we had” and the source “of our bargaining power.” Acheson put the point best: “[T]he Germans either thought the Americans were stupid or . . .

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61. Rusk-Alphand Meeting, May 28, 1962, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 13, pp. 708–713, quote at p. 709; and Kennedy-Malraux Meeting, May 11th, 1962, *ibid.*, pp. 695–701, quote at p. 697.

62. Bohlen-State, February 3, 1963, *ibid.*, pp. 171–173, first two quotes at p. 171. Third quote in Costigliola, “Kennedy, the European Allies, and the Failure to Consult,” p. 111.

63. NSC Meeting, January 31, 1963, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 13, pp. 156–163, quote on p. 158; and NSC Meeting, January 25, 1963, *ibid.*, pp. 487–491, quotes on pp. 488, 491.

the Germans were admitting that they were duplicitous." They could have French cooperation or U.S. protection, but not both.<sup>64</sup>

#### U.S. MILITARY POLICY UNDER KENNEDY

The Kennedy administration's change to a new military doctrine, often called "Flexible Response," further reflected its positive liberal preferences. The essence of this doctrine was to reduce the operational importance of nuclear weapons in NATO strategy, providing a rationale for ending the Eisenhower nuclear-sharing schemes and the European political independence that came with them. Centralizing the control of nuclear weapons with the U.S. government ensured there could be no third force.<sup>65</sup>

The Kennedy administration came to office intent on making itself the nuclear master of Europe. The famous "Acheson report" on NATO nuclear policy bluntly stated that "use of nuclear weapons by the forces of other powers in Europe should be subject to U.S. veto and control." National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy was more precise: it was a "fixed point" of U.S. policy "that Germany should not have independent control of nuclear weapons."<sup>66</sup>

The administration took a series of important policy decisions that placed military control of nuclear forces, and political control of Western Europe, in U.S. hands. Militarily, the administration placed permissive action links on all U.S. nuclear weapons throughout Europe; these devices secured nuclear weapons against unauthorized independent use. Politically, SACEUR would no longer be an essentially independent political actor representing European interests. Predelegation launch authority was curtailed; SACEUR became merely another U.S. general, and the current SACEUR was removed from the position when he objected to the changes.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, the administration killed plans to make Europe an independent strategic entity, rejecting a proposal for a NATO land-based missile force that could make NATO a "fourth nuclear power." Additionally, the Kennedy administration changed the MLF from a force designed to empower European independence to one with a U.S. veto. The proposal lived on for years, but it was a "debating trick" and a "fraud," "not a real force, but a façade" aimed at promoting the illusion of European nuclear participation amid the reality of American control.<sup>68</sup>

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64. NSC Meeting, February 5, 1963, *ibid.*, pp. 173–179, quotes on pp. 178, 179.

65. The operational changes under Kennedy have sometimes been overstated. See Francis J. Gavin, "The Myth of Flexible Response: United States Strategy in Europe during the 1960s," *International History Review*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (December 2001), pp. 847–875.

66. Policy Directive, April 20, 1961, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 13, pp. 288–290, first quote p. 289; and Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, second quote at p. 284.

67. This follows the account in *ibid.*, chap. 8, especially pp. 298, 301–302, 309.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 310. Descriptions of the MLF are in Bundy to Kennedy, June 15, 1963, *FRUS, 1961–*

All of these changes increased U.S. influence over European policy. Kennedy worried that because the allies were “no longer dependent on the U.S. for economic assistance, the European states are less subject to our influence. If the French and other European powers acquire a nuclear capability they would be in a position to be entirely independent and we might be on the outside looking in.” But if the United States was going to defend Europe, it was going to call the military and political shots: Kennedy stressed “our [the United States’] inability to accept the notion that we should stay out of Europe’s affairs while remaining ready to defend her if war should come. . . . We cannot and will not stand apart from these [policy] questions as long as our strength and will are committed to the defense of Europe against any Soviet attack.”<sup>69</sup>

### *Alternative Explanations*

Three alternative explanations for the U.S. Cold War strategic shift could be raised. The first two center on imperfectly controlled variables: shifting partisan politics at home and a changing nuclear balance internationally. A third might question my interpretation of U.S. grand strategy under Eisenhower and Kennedy.

#### PARTISAN POLITICS

One might argue that the underlying forces of American party politics, rather than the variation in liberalism that I suggest, changed U.S. Cold War grand strategy. Foreign policy change would therefore be a casualty of electoral competition. The opposition party looks for any stick with which to beat the incumbent party, and foreign policy may have been a worthy cudgel in 1960. Once in office, Kennedy might have been trapped by his own rhetoric into a more committed U.S. strategy abroad.<sup>70</sup>

Alternatively, Eisenhower and Kennedy may have simply represented the views of their parties. The Republican and Democratic Parties might be the ideological vehicles for liberalism, or for some other kind of coalitional politics, with changing partisan tides naturally causing strategic variation.<sup>71</sup>

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1963, Vol. 13, quote at p. 593; Bohlen-Kennedy, February 16, 1963, *ibid.*, quote at p. 730; and NSC Executive Committee Meeting, February 12, 1963, *ibid.*, quote on p. 499.

69. NSC Meeting, January 22, 1963, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 8, pp. 457–462, quote p. 460; and Kennedy-Gavin, May 18, 1962, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 13, p. 704.

70. The classic example of this argument—policy as a product of office-seeking behavior—is Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

71. Although I know of no argument that specifically applies partisan logic to the cases studied here, the general form abounds. Brian C. Rathbun argues that political parties serve as key ideological vehicles. Rathbun, *Trust in International Cooperation: International Security Institutions, Domestic Politics, and American Multilateralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Other scholars root coalitional politics in sectoral economics, with political parties as the key reservoir of

These arguments do not have strong support. As far as electoral concerns go, most historical accounts note that the 1960 election was very close and that a number of factors might have swayed the outcome. These accounts tend to downplay foreign policy as a decisive factor. The leading study of foreign policy's impact on Cold War elections concludes that "the most astonishing thing about the foreign policy debate in 1960 is how little difference there was between the candidates." It seems unlikely, then, that sea changes in the electorate or the effects of electoral competition were responsible for the Cold War strategic shift.<sup>72</sup>

It is also unlikely that the parties themselves were agents for U.S. strategic change, either as ideological or coalitional vehicles. Ideologically, there were diverse positions within each party. Historians have long remarked upon "the liberal Nixon," and by the late 1950s, he was advancing a more active economic policy, one that Kennedy would soon put into place once he was in office. For example, in 1958 Nixon sought to outline a pro-business approach, but one that "will have a progress touch to it other than the stand-pat conservative economics that [Eisenhower Treasury Secretary Robert] Anderson and his crowd are constantly parroting." Not coincidentally, Nixon differed little from Kennedy in his foreign policy position toward Europe—a fact borne out by comparing the European policy of his later administrations with Kennedy's. Indeed, Eisenhower was probably an outlier in his party by the time of the 1960 election, one of the last negative liberals of an older generation.<sup>73</sup>

More broadly, partisan control of the executive changes far more rapidly than U.S. grand strategy. Buck-passing during the Cold War started under Democrat Harry Truman, whereas balancing continued under the Republican Richard Nixon. There is also variation within political parties on basic liberal philosophy. During the first part of the twentieth century, the Democratic Party was home to many negative liberal decentralists, while the Republican Party held many positive liberal reformers. Political parties

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such interests. For example, see Kevin Narizny, *The Political Economy of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007). Jeffrey Legro argues that parties pick up on ideological trends in the broader electorate. Legro, *Rethinking the World*.

72. Robert A. Divine, *Foreign Policy and United States Presidential Elections, 1952–1960* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1974), p. 286. See also Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President, 1960* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009). Kennedy's foreign policy views were developed long before the election. Note his trip to Europe during the 1951 "great debate" that served to provide political cover for a stronger U.S. commitment. JFK Travel Journal, January–February 1951, JFKL, PP, box 11.

73. Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon: The Education of a Politician, 1913–1962* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p. 486. On the "liberal" Nixon, see, for example, Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

are surely important vehicles of political change, but it is unclear whether grand strategy falls within their ambit.<sup>74</sup>

#### THE CHANGING NUCLEAR BALANCE

Some scholars might argue that the changing nuclear balance drove the United States' strategic change. During the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, growing Soviet weapons production and delivery capability gradually eroded U.S. nuclear superiority. Daryl Press, for instance, argues that the coming of parity made Eisenhower's plan for preemptive nuclear escalation untenable and forced Kennedy into a military strategy more suited to strategic stalemate. Sebastian Rosato argues that the resulting permanent commitment to Europe was not costly, because it became clear to the Kennedy administration that the Soviets were sufficiently chastened by the threat of mutual assured destruction that they would not risk starting a war. Balancing was just an admission of the nuclear age's undeniable logic.<sup>75</sup>

These arguments suffer from several empirical difficulties. First, both Eisenhower and Kennedy perceived a decisive U.S. nuclear advantage until at least 1963. Kennedy, in particular, viewed this advantage as a wasting asset that justified a hard line in October 1962: "[I]t might be better to allow a confrontation over Berlin to develop now rather than later," the British reported the president as saying, because "the military balance was more favorable to us now than it would be later on." Thus, despite his earnest desire to find a compromise solution to the Cuban missile crisis, Kennedy was ultimately willing to resort to war. Indeed, even after the crisis was resolved, Bundy noted that Kennedy agreed with the U.S. Air Force's view "that the really neat and clean way to get around all these [military] complexities was to strike first." Thus, both presidents viewed a nuclear first strike as tenable during their administrations, and neither felt compelled by the nuclear balance to change his grand strategy.<sup>76</sup>

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74. For the widespread ideological diversity within the two parties, see, for example, Lewis Gould, *Grand Old Party: A History of the Republicans* (New York: Random House, 2003); and Jules Witcover, *Party of the People: A History of the Democrats* (New York: Random House, 2003).

75. Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), chaps. 3–4; and Sebastian Rosato, "Why the United States Committed to Western Europe," *Security Studies*, forthcoming.

76. Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, quotes at pp. 351, 353, see also pp. 179–183, 294–297 for a fuller discussion of both administrations' views; and Legere Memo, December 10, 1962, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 8, p. 436. For the first time, the U.S. government denied that a first strike was possible. See NSC Meeting, September 12, 1963, *ibid.*, pp. 499–507. Rosato explains the U.S. strategic change as a result of observing Soviet crisis behavior. This argument seems less likely in light of Kennedy's nuclear confidence both before and after the crisis. In addition to the evidence noted here, see, for example, NSC Meeting, January 18, 1962, *ibid.*, pp. 238–242. It is also clear that Kennedy's policy for Europe and the Soviet Union was in place well before the climax of the crises.

Second, both administrations spent considerable effort thinking about the coming of future parity, but arrived at different solutions with the same facts. Dulles and others under Eisenhower pressed for a more conventional defense. Eisenhower, however, led a faction that favored retreating into a pure deterrence strategy, because he “did not believe that limited war was possible in Europe and thought that the NATO [conventional] shield could be symbolic.” Speaking of projected Soviet capabilities, Eisenhower complained in 1958 that he “was sick to death of [nuclear] timetables; he had had experience with them for years, and they never proved anything useful.” The problem of impending nuclear parity was deeply debated in the Eisenhower administration, but it did not change policy.<sup>77</sup>

The same information pushed the Kennedy administration toward Flexible Response, despite its sharing Eisenhower’s view that small numbers of nuclear weapons had big political effects. As shown above, Kennedy had deep fears that nuclear weapons would provide France and Germany with political independence and a credible defense. He had the same view about China, arguing that “we will have a difficult time protecting the free areas of Asia if the Chinese get nuclear weapons,” presumably because the United States would be deterred from nuclear use and conventionally deterred by local inferiority. He also told the British that a small force of air-delivered ballistic missiles “should be capable of deterring Mr. Khrushchev. He pointed out that twenty missiles in Cuba had had a deterrent effect on us.” Indeed, despite believing in the political possibilities of deterrence, Kennedy opted for a balancing strategy that subordinated European politics to U.S. commitments.<sup>78</sup>

#### DISPUTING U.S. GRAND STRATEGY

A third alternative interpretation is that there is no U.S. strategic change to explain: the United States stayed onshore in Europe, did not dramatically reduce its costs, and continued to contain the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War. Or, one might agree with Christopher Layne that Eisenhower possessed a unique perspective, but that the U.S. government pursued an aggressive strategy anyway, with even Eisenhower committed to a nuclear guarantee for the continent. Finally, one could accept Marc Trachtenberg’s implicit argument:

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77. Dulles-Anderson-McElroy Meeting, October 24, 1959, *FRUS, 1958–1960*, Vol. 7, pt. 1, pp. 488–494, quote at p. 489; and NSC Meeting, January 6, 1958, *FRUS, 1958–1960*, Vol. 3, pp. 4–9, quote at p. 7. For the debate in the Eisenhower administration, see Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 183–188.

78. For Kennedy’s views on deterrence, see Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 318–321; NSC Meeting, January 22, 1963, *FRUS, 1961–1963*, Vol. 8, pp. 457–462, quote at p. 462; and Kennedy-MacMillan Meeting, December 19, 1962, *ibid.*, Vol. 13, pp. 1091–1101, quote at p. 1094.

U.S. strategy changed because the buck-passing approach was a failure. Following the inexorable logic of bipolarity, the insoluble German problem eventually drew the United States into Europe.<sup>79</sup>

Although Washington's buck-passing strategy was not fully realized, the analysis above provides ample evidence of its existence: U.S. alliance policy, nuclear strategy, political relationship with the Soviet Union, and overall military posture were all deeply shaped by Eisenhower's approach. If such a range of variation in high-level foreign policy does not constitute a major strategic change worthy of attention, then the study of grand strategy will be seriously impoverished.

Similarly, although Layne is correct that Eisenhower was increasingly isolated within his administration, the president nonetheless set the key policies. It is impossible to do more than speculate about what the end result of a successful Eisenhower policy would have been. Would Eisenhower have kept the U.S. nuclear guarantee in place? What would such a "guarantee" have meant in a world where the extended deterrence problem had been solved? Regardless, there can be little doubt that a world with a European nuclear deterrent, a reduced or eliminated U.S. troop presence in Central Europe, and some kind of effective European political structure would have constituted a vastly different state of affairs. The really interesting question is why the United States ceased pursuing Eisenhower's vision.

Finally, even given Trachtenberg's impressive analysis, it is not obvious that buck-passing was untenable. To defend the U.S. troop commitment in Europe, positive liberals who followed Eisenhower had to make heroic and costly attempts to stabilize the U.S. balance of payments. Moreover, both Eisenhower and Kennedy believed that a nuclear deterrent would provide the Europeans with considerable security. And at the same time, European efforts to build the EEC were based in part on the possibility that the Americans would leave. In short, U.S. incentives to leave, the ability to build a nuclear third force, and some European willingness to build supranational political structures in advance of the potential departure of the United States were persistent features in the 1950s and 1960s. The decisive change with the Kennedy administration is therefore of great note.<sup>80</sup>

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79. Layne, *The Peace of Illusions*, pp. 195–198; and Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*, pp. 201–203, 283–285.

80. On the European efforts to push for a third force, see Sebastian Rosato, *Europe United: Power Politics and the Making of the European Community* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011). On pressures emanating from the U.S. balance of payments problem, see Francis J. Gavin, *Gold, Dollars, and Power: The Politics of International Monetary Relations, 1958–1971* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

## *Conclusion*

The United States did not immediately make sweeping and permanent balancing commitments in the defense of Europe after World War II. Instead, it pursued a grand strategy of buck-passing, attempting to build Western Europe into a political-military power complex capable of balancing the Soviet Union alone. In particular, Dwight D. Eisenhower's desire to reduce the intrusiveness and size of American government at home led him to seek lower costs abroad, deeply shaping U.S. military strategy, diplomacy, and crisis behavior. Only with the presidency of John F. Kennedy did U.S. strategy change to the more commonly recognized strategy of forward balancing commitments. Kennedy's policy was motivated as much by a desire to dominate European politics and thereby stabilize liberal regimes in Western Europe as it was by the threat of Soviet power.

A new theory of liberal ideas best explains this change. Students have long noted but infrequently addressed the Janus-faced character of liberal foreign policy preferences: an inward-focused liberal exemplarism coexisting with a transformative liberal crusading impulse. I argue that these twin approaches to foreign policy are the product of a fundamental debate between negative and positive liberals. Negative liberals understand liberty to be freedom from constraint, and therefore fear that a costly foreign policy will enable a constraining leviathan to violate American liberties at home. Positive liberals see freedom as the exercise of capabilities, perceiving government intervention as both the basis for effective freedom at home and an instrument to promote and defend liberal values overseas. All else being equal, negative liberals will seek to reduce the size and cost of U.S. commitments abroad, even at the price of reduced international influence. Positive liberals will seek to increase U.S. liberty by promoting influence, even at the price of additional costs. It was this philosophical difference, encapsulated in the transition from Eisenhower to Kennedy, that explains the change in U.S. Cold War grand strategy.

This argument has implications for the trajectory of current U.S. foreign policy. Negative liberals such as Eisenhower have been in eclipse since the 1960s, despite what public rhetoric might suggest. Even contemporary critics of the American state are comfortable with government intervention on a scale that would have appalled Eisenhower. The national security elite has assumed a basic comfort level with a large and intrusive government apparatus. At the same time, the United States' major geopolitical rival, and the last major restraint on its strategy, disappeared in 1991. The United States' aggressive post-Cold War grand strategy should not be surprising: a bipartisan positive

liberalism acting within a permissive environment has encouraged expanding alliances, military intervention, and political hegemony.

Changes in geopolitical circumstances and liberal ideas may be afoot, however. The rise of China as a peer competitor may in time constrain the United States as Soviet power did. Similarly, there are plausible signs the negative liberalism may be on the verge of a comeback. Although the “Tea Party” phenomenon is difficult to interpret, there is certainly a libertarian element within the movement, and some of its leaders have begun to voice concerns about U.S. foreign policy similar to those that troubled earlier negative liberals.<sup>81</sup>

In any event, the politics of fiscal austerity may themselves produce a kind of negative liberal revival. Although held static for the purpose of the analysis here, ideologies evolve over time. Even today, the rhetoric of negative liberty runs deep in U.S. political discourse, and it could provide the grist for political entrepreneurs to launch an ideological change.<sup>82</sup> The United States will confront very tough choices in the coming years about how to fund its debt, pay for its welfare state, and manage its defense budget. Although a return to the full blown antistatism of the early twentieth century seems unlikely, a more modern form of negative liberalism might become a force in U.S. politics and make the same links its predecessor did between limits on state action at home and abroad. In sum, both liberalism and U.S. foreign policy are in transition, which provides all the more reason to understand their past relationship.

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81. For an interesting analysis of the Tea Party’s openness to this possibility, see Walter Russell Mead, “The Tea Party and American Foreign Policy: What Populism Means for Globalism,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (April 2011), pp. 28–44.

82. There are numerous studies of how ideologies can change over time, and on how ideological entrepreneurs can revive them, especially during periods of great tumult. For example, see Mark Blyth, *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Craig Parsons, *A Certain Idea of Europe* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003).