

Chapter Three

DWIGHT EISENHOWER

The Conservative as Balancer

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DWIGHT EISENHOWER WAS ONE of the most impressive and successful foreign policy presidents of the twentieth century. He ran for the Republican nomination in 1952 as a special favorite of GOP moderates and internationalists, but soon gathered broad national support as a figure of exceptional appeal. Eisenhower's overarching foreign policy goal was to contain communism and preserve America's world role without bankrupting the United States. In an era of repeated international crises, he provided strong, calm leadership and protected American interests while keeping the United States out of violent conflicts. He won over the bulk of Republicans, as probably no one else could have, to a posture of cold war internationalism. He struck balances with unusual aplomb between domestic and international priorities, American nationalism and diplomatic sensitivity, cold war activism and a deep desire for peace. Yet on domestic issues, and even on foreign policy, Eisenhower's brand of "modern Republicanism" had limited appeal to the GOP's conservative base, and fundamentally the party's organization and strength changed little during his time in office. His political successes were based on personal qualities that were virtually unique and did not translate into enduring partisan realignments or outlast his individual prestige.



While president, Eisenhower was viewed by contemporary critics as disturbingly passive and inarticulate—a likable grandfatherly figure, to be sure, but one who would rather play golf than run the government. In

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reality, as we today know from abundant archival evidence, Eisenhower was behind the scenes a commanding, highly intelligent, purposeful, and diligent chief executive, particularly in the realm of foreign policy. Raised in a pietistic, small-town environment in Kansas, Eisenhower was inculcated early on with self-discipline and hard work. As a young man he was athletic, gregarious, and popular, and out of an interest in national service he quickly decided on a military career. After attending West Point he served during the 1920s in an obscure post in Panama where he nevertheless used his time well to study Clausewitz and ponder the appropriate relationship between politics and armed force. Singled out for a series of distinguished staff assignments in the interwar years, he was noted by his superiors to be an unusually promising and capable officer. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Army Chief of Staff George Marshall made Eisenhower head of the Army War Plans Division, and at that point his meteoric rise began. Eisenhower was soon made commander of U.S. forces in Europe, then in 1944 commander of Allied forces in Europe, giving him responsibility over the invasion and liberation of France. In this role he demonstrated great effectiveness and good will in reconciling and winning over both counterparts and subordinates from a wide array of countries, departments, and services. For the American public, the smiling, unpretentious “Ike” had the added quality of embodying managerial and military competence without in the least bit threatening democratic values. By the end of World War II he was a figure of genuinely worldwide popularity and renown. He returned to the United States to become chief of staff for the army, then president of Columbia University, and finally military commander of NATO. In 1951–52, Republican moderates and internationalists such as Governor Thomas Dewey of New York and Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts organized a movement to draft Eisenhower for president. Concerned by what he perceived as the Truman administration’s drift toward fiscal irresponsibility, on the one hand, and the Republican drift toward neo-isolationism on the other, Eisenhower accepted the call, and after a hard-fought convention battle against conservative nationalist Robert Taft (R-OH), won the Republican nomination. Senator Richard Nixon (R-CA) was chosen as the GOP vice-presidential running mate because of his impeccable anti-Communist credentials, his

youth, his obvious political talents, his West Coast base, and his acceptability to every wing of the Republican Party.¹

While Eisenhower's postconvention presidential campaign began in a lackluster fashion, he soon shifted to a more aggressive approach in reaching out to the GOP's Old Guard and adopting many of its long-standing criticisms of Truman. This had the intended effect of energizing Republicans and uniting the party. The strongest critique centered on the Korean War. Eisenhower charged the Truman administration with allowing that war to turn into a costly, lengthy stalemate. While he was vague on specifics, the World War II hero promised in a dramatic election campaign address to "go to Korea" to personally observe and correct the situation. Eisenhower also suggested, more generally, that the Democrats had failed to handle U.S. foreign policy with sufficient competence and resolve, whether in relation to China, Eastern Europe, or the Soviet Union itself. The 1952 Republican Party platform condemned Truman's policy of containment as "negative, futile, and immoral," promising instead to "revive the contagious, liberating influences which are inherent in freedom." During the subsequent campaign, Eisenhower spoke frequently of "liberating captive nations," though he was typically careful to specify that such liberation could only come "by peaceful means." On domestic issues, Eisenhower criticized the Democrats as the party of excessive taxes, excessive spending, and "creeping socialism," thereby demonstrating his substantial agreement with conservative Republicans on economic matters. He promised a "crusade" against corruption in government. Finally, the issue of Communist disloyalty within the United States encompassed both foreign and domestic issues, and was likewise embraced by Eisenhower out of genuine concern, despite his intense distaste for Joseph McCarthy's methods. The general left it to surrogates such as Nixon to make stinging personal attacks, for example in calling Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson a "PhD graduate of Dean Acheson's cowardly college of Communist containment." The outcome was a sweeping electoral victory for Eisenhower, and for a new if narrow Republican majority in Congress. Ike improved on Dewey's 1948 showing across the board, most strikingly in winning the support of upper- and middle-income, urban and suburban white southerners. The issue of communism also helped gain some votes for

Republicans among traditionally Democratic Irish and Polish Catholics. Yet the result was primarily a personal victory for Eisenhower rather than an indication of a new political era. Voters responded strongly to his special appeal and to the notion that he had the unique ability to solve the frustrating stalemate in Korea. The majority of Americans did not indicate, in polls, that they now identified as Republicans, or that they preferred the GOP to the Democrats on domestic economic issues—quite the opposite.²

Eisenhower assumed the presidency with a clear set of policy preferences, as well as a rather unusual administrative style. On domestic economic issues, in spite of popular impressions to the contrary, his instincts were quite conservative, against what he called “big government,” the “welfare state,” and the New Deal “gravy train.” He shared the Republican Old Guard’s concern that recent trends toward centralized federal planning, regulation, inflation, high taxes, and budget deficits would undermine both economic growth and individual freedom. Yet he also realized that a full return to the pre-New Deal era was not in the cards. For one thing, a majority of the American public clearly accepted and favored the basic New Deal framework. As he put it, “should any political party attempt to abolish social security and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history.” Furthermore, he believed that organizational changes in American society required the acceptance of some increased role for government in promoting social harmony and mediating between private group interests. Eisenhower therefore embraced, in practice, a moderately conservative stance on domestic economic issues, partly out of conviction and partly to make the Republican Party electable once again. He called this stance “the middle way” or “modern Republicanism,” a moderate and consensus-building approach to which in any case he was well suited temperamentally. He applied the same centrist model to civil rights, the other great domestic issue of the day. Eisenhower was sympathetic to the goal of racial desegregation but preferred a cautious, gradual policy limited to areas under direct federal jurisdiction, such as the U.S. armed forces and the District of Columbia. Believing that broader social change would have to come voluntarily rather than through governmental coercion, he followed a middling course that frustrated die-

hard segregationists on the one side and African Americans and civil rights activists on the other.³

On foreign policy, Eisenhower's overriding priority was to reconcile America's new global role—which he fully embraced—with a greater sense of fiscal responsibility. He was convinced of the deadly threat from world communism, and that, as he put it in his inaugural address, “forces of good and evil are massed and armed as rarely before in history. . . . Freedom is pitted against slavery; lightness against the dark.” Consequently, he believed that the United States had to maintain and strengthen its position at the head of anti-Communist coalitions worldwide, in support of what he called “collective security.” This required not only military strength but also foreign aid, the expansion of international commerce, and consultation with members of friendly alliances. NATO was to him the single most important such alliance, but he did not rule out extensive U.S. involvement outside Western Europe. On the contrary, he considered much of the Third World to be of vital interest in America's competition with Moscow, both for economic reasons and out of concern for U.S. credibility and reputation. He therefore accepted much of the foreign policy legacy left to him by Truman and, if anything, argued for a more aggressive anti-Communist approach in regions such as East Asia. His main critique of Truman's foreign policy legacy was simply that it was too expensive. Eisenhower feared that indefinite defense expenditures on the scale of 1951–52 would overstrain America's finances, undermine its economic health, and in the end even alter its traditional way of life. As he put it, “we must not destroy what we are attempting to defend.” Such an outcome would subvert the very purpose of the cold war. He therefore sought to keep a strict limit on the militarization of the American economy and to find a more sustainable balance between cold war internationalism and domestic fiscal concerns. This concern over costs led him toward the ready consideration of alternatives to expensive conventional militaries, such as covert action, psychological warfare, and nuclear threats. Eisenhower believed that the tone of U.S. alliance relations had to be respectful. As he said, “a platoon leader doesn't get his platoon to go that way by getting up and saying, ‘I am smarter, I am bigger, I am stronger, I am the leader.’ He gets men to go with him because they want to do it for him, because they believe in

him.” Yet Eisenhower viewed multilateralism as a practical rather than a doctrinal issue; he had no aversion to unilateral action in principle. He simply felt that international support, under certain circumstances, could enhance his ability to achieve U.S. foreign policy goals.⁴ As put by a leading historian of Eisenhower’s policy toward the UN:

The administration . . . embraced the multilateral forum when it was perceived to best serve American interests, but ignored it with virtual impunity when it chose to act unilaterally. . . . Far from viewing the organization as an idealistic attempt at world government, the president considered it to be a useful instrument for protecting and advancing American foreign policy objectives, particularly in the traditional superpower conflict. . . . His rhetoric notwithstanding, [Eisenhower] had limited expectations for what could be accomplished through the UN.⁵

As president, Eisenhower pursued his foreign and domestic policy goals in a distinctive manner. In public, he frequently struck an uplifting yet banal tone, issuing statements that were vague and even garbled. Behind the scenes, however, he was active, precise, and hard-driving, a capable politician and a calculating strategist. His shrewd political sense was matched by an exceptional talent for net analysis. Through his military career, he had learned how to effectively organize and manage the decision-making process, particularly on matters of defense and foreign affairs. His method in these areas was to master the details of policy, utilize a strong staff system, insist on exhaustive, lively debate in regular meetings with advisers, explicitly weigh the costs and benefits of all conceivable alternatives, keep his options open, and maintain firm control of the entire process. While such a model on vital matters of state might seem obvious to an outsider, it is in fact distressingly uncommon. Eisenhower was therefore unusual in that he really did approach foreign policy decision making in a thoughtful, systematic, and careful manner. Moreover, he used the very same banal public style for which he was criticized to avoid controversy and deflect criticism, often in the direction of subordinates. Partly in this way, he maintained exceptionally high support from a public that saw him as above partisan politics altogether. His appointees were left to act as political lightning rods. Eisenhower’s most important such appointment in the area of foreign policy

was John Foster Dulles as secretary of state. Dulles was a leading and respected GOP internationalist with years of experience in diplomacy and ties to both wings of the Republican Party. He was a strong secretary, hectoring in style but very intelligent, knowledgeable, and skillful in negotiation. Eisenhower left Dulles considerable leeway in certain areas such as U.S. policy toward Europe, but on all matters the president retained final control. While Dulles's manner encouraged the perception that he was much more hard-line and more influential in foreign affairs than the president, neither of these things was true. The two men shared a basic worldview—conservative cold war internationalism—and Dulles never questioned Ike's ultimate authority. When it came to foreign policy, Eisenhower was in charge.⁶

Congress presented the most important domestic constraint upon the administration's ability to conduct American diplomacy. Ironically, it was Republicans rather than Democrats that gave Eisenhower the most trouble in this area, at least during his first term in office. The congressional Republican Party in 1953 was still badly divided on foreign policy issues between nationalists and internationalists. GOP nationalists were critical of foreign aid programs, advocates of atomic airpower, champions of Taiwan, opposed to diplomatic contact with Communist countries, skeptical of free trade, hostile toward the State Department, contemptuous of the UN, supportive of Joseph McCarthy, resistant to presidential authority, wary of America's Western European allies, enthusiastic about "rollback" in both Eastern Europe and China, jealous of U.S. national sovereignty, and suspicious of any foreign policy program—past or present—supported by liberal Democrats. GOP internationalists, on the other hand, supported presidential authority, foreign aid, free trade, NATO as well as the UN, and looked for bipartisan cooperation with Democrats on international matters. The nationalists tended to be very conservative on domestic economic issues, often midwesterners, from safely GOP rural and small-town districts. Examples included Senators John Bricker (R-OH), Styles Bridges (R-NH), Homer Capehart (R-IN), Everett Dirksen (R-IL), Bourke Hickenlooper (R-IA), William Jenner (R-IN), William Knowland (R-CA), William Langer (R-ND), Joseph McCarthy (R-WI), and Robert Taft (R-OH). They were frequently unhappy with Eisenhower, and he with them. The internationalists tended

to be more moderate on domestic economics, often northeastern, from competitive, urban, suburban, or high-income regions. Examples included Senators George Aiken (R-VT), Prescott Bush (R-CT), James Duff (R-PA), and Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. (R-MA). Obviously, Eisenhower was both a member and a leader of the internationalist wing—this had been a primary rationale for his presidency. In actual fact, the foreign policy course he followed was fundamentally a reflection of his own cold war internationalist beliefs; he never let the Old Guard determine basic decisions about war and peace. Yet he and Dulles were careful to cultivate and appease GOP nationalists in Congress. This meant that on certain diplomatic issues, especially symbolic ones, Eisenhower frequently tilted in the direction of Old Guard demands. In any case, the two wings of the GOP had more in common by this time than is usually recognized. Both wings were staunchly anti-Communist, hawkish, and economically conservative, committed to the cold war and to American military power; neither faction was truly isolationist, much less liberal in today's sense of the term. Moreover, many Republicans were inclined to support a new and popular Republican president more than they would have a Democrat, regardless of substantive policy concerns.⁷

Congressional Democrats presented no unified or coherent opposition to Eisenhower's first-term foreign policy initiatives. Indeed, on votes concerning diplomacy, foreign aid, and free trade, Eisenhower could usually count on the support of most northern Democrats. Southern Democrats, on the other hand, were moving in a distinctly nationalistic and oppositional direction during these years. Bitterly divided from the northern liberal wing of their own party over the emotional issue of civil rights, many white southerners grew increasingly skeptical of the liberal internationalist agenda altogether, including multilateral institutions and foreign aid programs to Third World countries. Southerners also began to abandon their traditional support of freer trade, partly because of economic changes as the region moved away from a cotton-based economy. This meant that Dixie Democrats were now frequently united with conservative midwestern Republicans in resisting Eisenhower's internationalist agenda on trade and foreign aid. Yet congressional southern Democrats remained staunch advocates of a strong national defense, if anything calling for higher levels of military spending than Eisenhower was willing to allow. The same was true of many Democrats from

the North. Congressional leaders like Lyndon Johnson (D-TX) may have been skeptical of being dragged into new wartime entanglements, but they were also unwilling to be tagged as heading a party soft on national security. Democrats therefore largely supported the administration's foreign policy during the mid-1950s, in spite of grumbling on specific issues. In this, they matched the popular temper of the period, which was fundamentally deferential toward the president in pursuit of cold war anticommunism. Eisenhower and Dulles, for their part, were conscientious in consulting with opposing leaders in Congress, especially after the Democrats retook control of both chambers in the November 1954 midterm elections. Relations between the president and congressional leaders such as Johnson were generally remarkably good, and Old Guard Republicans could be forgiven for suspecting that Eisenhower preferred working with the Democrats to working with his own party on foreign affairs.⁸

The first and most pressing foreign policy matter on Eisenhower's agenda was to address the stalemate in Korea. Upon winning the 1952 presidential election, he visited the Korean peninsula, reviewed various military options, and came to the conclusion that the existing approach was bankrupt. Eisenhower therefore directed that the United States make contingency plans for tactical nuclear strikes against Chinese forces along the Yalu if armistice negotiations failed. The administration sent out subtle diplomatic signals to Beijing in May 1953 indicating that American nuclear use was a real possibility in the absence of successful talks. Chinese sources suggest that these particular signals were either dismissed or never received. Fortunately, China was by this time prepared to make significant diplomatic concessions on the critical issue of POW repatriation, not so much because of any specific nuclear threats but out of a more general fear of military escalation in the region. The death of Joseph Stalin in March 1953 also brought to power a new set of Soviet leaders interested in wrapping up the Korean conflict. The USSR consequently encouraged China and North Korea to make the needed concessions in order to reach a settlement. In July 1953, an armistice was finally signed, dividing the peninsula roughly halfway between North and South, and bringing the war to an uneasy close. Some conservative Republicans bemoaned the failure to reunite the Korean peninsula under non-Communist control, but for the great majority of the

American public, the war's end was a relief and a demonstration of Eisenhower's competence.⁹

Even as he brought the Korean War to a conclusion, Eisenhower faced a serious challenge in 1953–54 on foreign policy matters from within his own party. Having retaken power for the first time in twenty years, conservative GOP nationalists were determined to reassert congressional authority, stamp out any hint of Communist subversion, and repudiate the legacy of FDR and Truman. The 1952 fall election campaign represented only an uneasy truce between the major wings of the Republican Party. Once in office, Eisenhower's behavior was much more continuous with the Truman administration than Old Guard conservatives would have liked. Within its opening weeks, for example, the new administration nominated Charles Bohlen as ambassador to Moscow. Bohlen, a career diplomat, had assisted FDR at the Yalta conference, and was therefore anathema to GOP nationalists. Yet the administration managed to secure his nomination against the opposition of leading Old Guard senators. A similar uproar occurred at the very same time on the right over the question of an "Enslaved People's Resolution." Many GOP conservatives wanted a congressional resolution condemning previous Democratic administrations for entering into the Yalta agreements, but the new administration would not approve such a resolution. Eisenhower was willing to formally condemn the "enslavement" of Eastern Europe, but he would not condemn the Democrats or prior administrations for any supposed perfidy at Yalta. After heavy lobbying by the White House, debate was forestalled, and conservative nationalists never won the resolution they sought. A protracted intraparty dispute also occurred over the question of the Bricker amendment. For several years running, Senator John Bricker (R-OH) had called for a constitutional amendment preventing the federal government from using international agreements to enlarge its own jurisdiction over domestic issues. Specifically, Bricker proposed giving Congress the power to regulate "executive agreements" with other countries, agreements that had ballooned in number under FDR and Truman. The Bricker amendment embodied conservative GOP concerns over the erosion of congressional authority, national sovereignty, limited international commitments, and American constitutional traditions all at once. It gathered support from

a wide variety of groups, including business interests, professional associations, and southern segregationist Democrats, the last of which were especially alarmed by the possibility of foreign or UN interference in southern racial practices. Eisenhower, characteristically, refused to fight the Bricker amendment in an open or direct fashion, and instead engaged in backstage bureaucratic maneuver to encourage its defeat. In the end, the amendment failed to pass through the Senate by a single vote—an outcome that represented something like Pickett's charge for the Old Guard of the Republican Party.¹⁰

Perhaps the most famous or infamous partisan dispute in 1953–54 was over the conduct of Joseph McCarthy. Eisenhower despised McCarthy's reckless tactics but genuinely shared the popular concern over Communist disloyalty, and out of the need for party unity he refused to take on McCarthy in 1953. The president initiated new internal security measures that were even stricter than those left behind by Truman. Congressional critics were allowed to drum a number of old China hands out of the State Department on suspicion of Communist sympathies, but still McCarthy was not satisfied. As the attention of the Wisconsin senator turned in 1954 to more powerful targets—notably, the U.S. Army—his popularity declined, and Eisenhower began to speak out against what he called “disregard of the standards of fair play.” Working to undermine McCarthy behind the scenes, Eisenhower encouraged the senator's self-destruction during the Army-McCarthy hearings of 1954. In December of that year the Senate voted to censure McCarthy, dividing numerous Old Guard senators from many of their own Republican colleagues. Eisenhower was happy with the result and exasperated with continuing resistance from GOP arch-conservatives on one issue after another. As he put it, “I've had just about enough. If they want to leave the Republican Party . . . I'll go up and down the country, campaigning against them. I'll fight them right down the line.” Yet Old Guard influence in the GOP on foreign policy matters was already ebbing significantly. Senator Robert Taft's untimely death from cancer in July 1953 robbed conservative nationalists of their most respected and influential leader. Numerous Old Guard members retired during the mid-1950s. In other cases, leading nationalists such as Everett Dirksen (R-IL) were gradually converted to the notion of an active presidency and a global

role for the United States, in cooperation with the Democrats. Eisenhower repeatedly demonstrated that he would preserve executive authority and pursue a bipartisan internationalist foreign policy, whatever the Old Guard might say. Moreover, he did so without attacking or alienating most GOP conservatives. Indeed, he gave them much of what they wanted: an emphasis on atomic airpower, staunch support for Taiwan, strongly anti-Communist policies, and a commitment to the “liberation” of Eastern Europe. The result was a growing and truly broad consensus behind the basic foreign policy goals laid out by the administration. Rank-and-file Republicans, following Eisenhower’s lead, were won over to a more internationalist stance. By 1955 the vast majority of Democrats and Republicans alike were ready to give the president the authority he requested to face crisis situations in East Asia, the Middle East, and elsewhere. In effect, the Old Guard had been not so much confronted by Ike on foreign policy matters as smothered and co-opted. In strictly political terms, it was a remarkable achievement.¹¹

While the media’s attention was focused on political pyrotechnics like those of McCarthy, Eisenhower began a substantial and thorough review of American national security policy. His central fear was that excessive defense spending not only risked turning the United States into an overly regimented “garrison state” but in the long run undermined the economic basis for U.S. military power. His goal, as he said, was therefore to achieve “security without paying the price of national bankruptcy.” In an influential 1952 *Life* magazine article, John Foster Dulles had floated the concept of what became known as “massive retaliation,” arguing that the United States should adopt a more aggressive strategy in relying on the open threat of immediate and overwhelming air strikes with nuclear weapons against the USSR in the case of any Soviet bloc aggression. While Eisenhower found Dulles’s exact phrasing to be overly provocative, he was sympathetic to the notion of greater reliance on nuclear deterrence, in order to regain the cold war initiative from Moscow while keeping defense expenditures down. Eisenhower understood perfectly well that the consequences of any nuclear war would be “too horrible to contemplate.” He did not believe that Soviet leaders really wanted a nuclear conflict any more than Americans did. As he put it, “these Communists are not early Christian martyrs”; they would not

risk losing their own lives simply in order to spread their doctrine. This very fact meant that the United States could use the threat of such a terrible war to prevent and deter not only Soviet aggression but any limited Korea-like conflict as well. Eisenhower therefore settled on a national security strategy—the “New Look,” as it was eventually called—that explicitly emphasized U.S. readiness to resort to nuclear retaliation against Soviet bloc advances. The new approach was formally approved in October 1953 after systematic debate with National Security Council directive 162/2, the basis for subsequent policies and revisions. This change in strategy allowed the administration to cut manpower levels as well as conventional military costs, reducing the total personnel of America’s armed forces from 3.6 million to 2.8 million. Obviously, the conclusion of the Korean War helped in this regard, but the president also played a critical role in setting and maintaining a strict ceiling on defense spending. Total national security expenditures were reduced to under \$50 billion for fiscal year 1954—significantly lower than Truman had envisioned—and were never to exceed that number for the rest of Eisenhower’s time in office.¹²

Eisenhower also led a dramatic change in Republican Party positions on matters of foreign economic policy. The GOP had long been the party of protectionism; it had also been a party opposed to foreign assistance programs. Eisenhower, however, was openly committed to the expansion of world commerce, and to the multilateral trade regime established under FDR and Truman, not so much because of concern over particular corporate interests but rather as an essential component of America’s global strategy in combating the spread of communism. For the same reason, Eisenhower had no interest in completely dismantling the set of foreign assistance programs established in the 1940s. Rather, he sought to prune existing foreign aid programs around the edges, in the hopes that private investment and “trade not aid” would act as primary engines for economic growth in the developing world. Ike’s stance on commerce and foreign aid was controversial within the Republican Party. He faced stiff opposition on both issues from Old Guard and midwestern Republicans, who resisted freer trade and foreign assistance altogether. Yet the economic, ideological, and institutional bases for protectionism were not what they had once been, and congressional opposition was

tactical rather than absolute. As on many other issues, Ike's preference was to avoid open schism within the GOP. He therefore compromised with congressional leaders on foreign economic policy. The resulting foreign aid levels and tariff reductions were less than Eisenhower would have liked, and controversy over foreign assistance continued, but the GOP in effect accepted executive leadership on the maintenance of an open international trading system. Presidential authority over reciprocal trade, as it was called, was extended for one year in 1953, then again for a year in 1954, after which time a new Democratic Congress was content to renew it in a more long-term fashion. A Republican president had successfully put his party's stamp of approval on America's postwar commitment to freer trade. This in itself was a major victory for the administration and a historic shift in GOP priorities.¹³

In relation to Western Europe, Eisenhower's first-term foreign policy emphasized the restoration and integration of America's allies in the hopes of allowing U.S. ground forces to come home. Eisenhower viewed Western Europe as central to the global balance of power, and was a firm supporter of NATO. He accepted the temporary stationing of American troops in Europe as a tripwire against any Soviet attack designed to trigger a U.S. nuclear response. He also believed that America's allies would soon have to provide the bulk of their own defense, especially in terms of manpower: "We cannot be a modern Rome guarding the far frontiers with our legions." Extensive overseas American military deployments, if unchecked, would according to Ike eventually lead to "national bankruptcy" for the United States. He therefore favored the integration of Europe as a "third great power complex in the world," one capable of standing up to Soviet pressure on its own. This could only mean German rearmament. In strictly military terms, the administration's initial proposal to that end was a transnational European defense community, to which Germany would contribute, but the French legislature balked at such a dramatic step and rejected it in August 1954. After Dulles threatened an "agonizing reappraisal" of America's European defense commitments, the British hit on an alternative: West Germany would be rearmed and admitted to NATO, with its sovereignty restored, but with a promise not to produce nuclear weapons and with allied troops stationed on German territory as an implicit control. This was sufficient to

satisfy the French, and it proved to be a remarkably stable long-term solution. Yet Eisenhower never accepted the indefinite presence of a large American ground commitment in Europe. He continued to try to find ways of reducing that presence, even going so far as to initiate a process of “nuclear sharing” by which German and other allies were given effective tactical control over U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe. While Soviet leaders stewed over the alarming possibility of nuclear-armed German forces, Eisenhower simultaneously gave his blessing to the economic and political integration of Western Europe through the creation of a new European Economic Community.¹⁴

In Latin America, as in the rest of the developing world, Eisenhower's highest priority was anticommunism. In many cases this meant supporting autocratic regimes friendly to the United States against radical nationalist movements. Eisenhower believed, as he said, that “in the long run, the United States must back democracies.” Nevertheless, he faced a dilemma that was also faced by every cold war president of either party: namely, whether to pressure allied yet autocratic regimes in the direction of democratic reform, when the very process of such pressure might simply undermine an American client and substitute a hostile autocracy in its place. Eisenhower's instinct in such cases was to bolster American allies. He also understood that numerous Third World nationalist and anticolonial movements were not directly controlled by either Communists or the Soviet Union. Yet he feared that the success of such movements might play into the hands of local Communist parties, and ultimately the USSR—even if unintentionally—by depriving the Western world of allies, bases, resources and credibility in its global contest with Moscow. Eisenhower was therefore sometimes very aggressive in opposing radical nationalists in the developing world, particularly when they appeared dependent on Communist support.¹⁵

Guatemala was a case in point. A nationalist government under Jacobo Arbenz had come to power in that country in 1951, introducing sweeping land reforms and expropriations against the interests of traditional elites as well as the United Fruit Company. For Eisenhower and Dulles, bananas were really not the issue. The administration's concern was that Arbenz was turning Guatemala toward communism. Nor was this fear completely unrealistic. By 1953–54, Arbenz did in fact consider

himself a Communist, making most of his important decisions with a kitchen cabinet of local Communist Party leaders. As his wife later put it, Arbenz believed that “the triumph of communism in the world was inevitable and desirable.” Anti-Arbenz forces in Guatemala—of which there were many within the army, the church, the landowners, and a discontented populace—turned to the United States for assistance. The discovery of Czech arms shipments to Arbenz’s government in May 1954 provided an immediate justification for Eisenhower to act. He decided to authorize CIA support for a coup d’état the following month. The United States used air raids and radio broadcasts to convince Arbenz that an American invasion was imminent, at which point he fled the country, allowing an anti-Communist military government to take power. Both the Eisenhower administration and its critics drew mistaken conclusions from the outcome. The administration concluded that future covert actions against anti-American regimes would be easier than they really were. It also concluded that Moscow must have had a direct hand in local events. The administration’s critics on this issue—of which there were many overseas, and a growing number in the United States over time—concluded that Arbenz had been a great democrat, that Communist influence on him had been nonexistent, that Washington had acted primarily in order to preserve the economic interests of the United Fruit Company, and that local events had been entirely dictated by the machinations of the United States. Neither set of conclusions testified to the fact that Guatemalans, through the struggle between local factions, had largely determined their own fate, which was to forcibly replace a thuggish and increasingly repressive left-wing government with a thuggish, repressive right-wing one. The American role in these events was significant but by itself insufficient; the Soviet role was virtually nonexistent. Nevertheless, the coup encouraged a false and growing legend of CIA omnipotence, and was widely resented in Latin America.¹⁶

In East Asia, the administration’s policy was to bolster U.S. allies against China, the Soviet Union, and local Communist parties. This included, for example, military aid to American clients, as well as the 1954–55 creation of a Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) with Australia, France, Great Britain, New Zealand, the Philippines,

Thailand, Pakistan, and the United States as members. Ike's greatest challenges in East Asia came over Taiwan and Indochina. In relation to Taiwan, Eisenhower entered office committed to the more aggressive support of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government. One of the first actions Eisenhower took as president was to "unleash" Chiang by removing the U.S. Seventh Fleet from the Taiwan Strait. The implication was that Chiang's Nationalists were now free to roll back Communist control of mainland China. In reality, Eisenhower had no intention of being dragged into a Nationalist military effort to retake the mainland, but he was determined to defend Taiwan against any threat from Beijing. In 1954-55, Mao Zedong tested that commitment and initiated a series of crises by shelling Nationalist positions on the islands of Quemoy and Matsu. Eisenhower responded by (1) winning bipartisan support in Congress for an American military response, (2) threatening nuclear retaliation against a mainland invasion of Quemoy or Matsu, and (3) signing a formal defense pact with Taiwan. While the issue dragged on for years, no invasion ever came. Eisenhower and Dulles also took a consistently unyielding position against China's admittance to the United Nations, and against any formal U.S. diplomatic recognition of the Beijing government. The administration's uncompromising support for Taiwan on such issues was especially popular among Old Guard Republicans and the congressional China lobby. It was also part of a deliberate strategy to force a diplomatic wedge between Moscow and Beijing. Eisenhower and Dulles understood that Communist China was no Soviet puppet, and that the possibility existed of even greater Sino-Soviet discord. Yet they sought to encourage that discord by taking a very hard line against Beijing and thereby forcing it to make demands of Moscow—including full support against the United States over Taiwan—that Moscow could not accept without the unwanted risk of general war. This hard-line U.S. "wedge" strategy had its intended effect, as crises over Taiwan helped drive China and the Soviet Union farther apart, but it was a rather risky strategy, both in terms of alienating other U.S. allies and in terms of increasing the possibility of Sino-American war. Whether any other strategy would have promoted U.S. interests much more effectively is an open question; the evidence suggests that Mao was in fact profoundly hostile toward the United States during the

1950s and would probably have been hostile regardless of specific changes in American policy.¹⁷

In French Indochina, a Communist-led anticolonial movement, the Viet Minh, made dramatic military gains during Eisenhower's first year in office. By March 1954, a Viet Minh siege at the fortress of Dien Bien Phu left the French reeling. Eisenhower, his advisers, and congressional Republicans agreed that a Communist success in Indochina would constitute a terrible loss for the credibility of America's alliances in the region and throughout the world. Indeed, it was in relation to this crisis that the president came up with the so-called domino theory, saying, "you have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly." Yet Eisenhower was equally strongly opposed to the introduction of U.S. troops into Indochina. He said he "simply could not imagine the United States putting ground forces anywhere in Southeast Asia" and described himself as "bitterly opposed . . . to such a course of action." Nor was the prospect of sending American troops to the relief of Dien Bien Phu popular with U.S. public opinion, even among Republicans. This still left the possibility of American air strikes against the Viet Minh, including the use of tactical nuclear weapons, something that Eisenhower and his advisers seriously considered in a series of no-holds-barred debates in the National Security Council. Consultation with Democratic and Republican leaders in Congress, however, revealed that they were deeply skeptical of any air strikes whatsoever, especially in the absence of British support or French colonial reforms. Their main objection was that air strikes were simply a halfway measure inevitably leading to ground intervention—a point with which Eisenhower was quite sympathetic. His belief on military matters, he said, was that "when you finally decide to resort to force you should plan no limits to its use." He therefore developed a set of necessary criteria for a U.S. military intervention in Indochina, precisely to avoid any sort of unsuccessful halfway approach. First, it would have to be done with the support of allies, notably Great Britain. Second, it would have to be done with the support of Congress. Third, the French themselves would have to make significant reforms in the direction of self-government for Indochina, as well as in their military efforts. Since the British refused to participate, that ruled out congressional support, which in turn ruled out U.S. inter-

vention. Dien Bien Phu fell in May, the French position collapsed, and negotiations began in Geneva over the future of Indochina. Eisenhower seems to have known that the satisfaction of all three of his chosen criteria was highly unlikely, but by allowing Congress, the British, and the French to cancel one another out, he allowed responsibility for America's nonintervention to be dispersed. He also maintained the impression that the United States might intervene against the Viet Minh under different circumstances. This impression proved to be useful at the Geneva conference, in that the Viet Minh were pressured by Beijing to settle for half a loaf to avert U.S. countermeasures. In July 1954 Indochina was given its independence and divided into two halves, a Communist north and a non-Communist south. The Eisenhower administration refused to formally condone these results, partly out of domestic political concerns, but began to provide considerable U.S. military and economic aid to South Vietnam under the new government of Ngo Dinh Diem.¹⁸

In the Middle East, Eisenhower acted to oppose any trends that he thought might ultimately play into the hands of the Soviet Union. Sometimes this meant siding with local nationalist regimes, as he did with Egypt over the Suez in the fall of 1956; sometimes it meant acting against them. A leading example of the latter was the Iranian coup of August 1953. Iran's nationalist prime minister, Mohammed Mossadeq, had come to power two years earlier, calling for the expropriation of his country's oil resources from foreign companies. American oil majors hardly needed to buy Iranian oil, but the British felt threatened and urged covert action against Mossadeq. Moreover, Mossadeq's government seemed to U.S. officials to be headed toward a breakdown, with the Iranian Communist Party or Tudeh well positioned to pick up the pieces. It was the prospect of such a breakdown and the subsequent cutoff of oil supplies to U.S. allies in Western Europe that concerned Eisenhower and Dulles the most; they realized that direct U.S. oil interests were minimal, and that Iran's prime minister was no Communist. Soviet leaders were in fact deeply suspicious of Mossadeq. In a series of increasingly desperate and autocratic moves, the Iranian leader tried to play off Washington and Moscow, foreign and domestic opponents against one another, but the effort boomeranged as he alienated all of them simultaneously. Oppositional forces within Iran—including leading members of the military, landowning, and clerical classes—rallied around the country's