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**Introduction: A Tale of Two Doctrines**

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the Republican Party vacillated between two competing visions of foreign policy. A Republican doctrine of internationalism, which envisioned America playing a large role in global affairs, first emerged under Theodore Roosevelt, and would later be adapted in the 1940s by the “Eastern Establishment” – a group of businessmen, traders, and manufacturers on the Eastern Seaboard who desire a leader who would protect Western Europe during World War II and actively confront the Soviets during the Cold War. Isolationism, which nostalgically envisioned a return to an era when two great oceans insulated America from the problems of the world, gained credence during World War I. That doctrine would play a dominant role in shaping Republican foreign policy both during their years in power (1921-1933) and their years in opposition before World War II (1933-1940). The first six decades of the century saw numerous clashes between the two warring factions both in Congress and in several presidential nominating contests, with both vigorously pushing their vision of America’s role in the world. Yet by the 1968 election, a contest that took place during the controversial Vietnam War, the isolationist – or even the non-interventionist – wing of the Republican Party was nowhere to be seen. There would be no one to really challenge the hawkish ‘heir’ to internationalist Eisenhower – no force to push Nixon to adapt a more non-interventionist stance; by then it would be Democrats like Eugene McCarthy, and later George McGovern, who would represent that anti-war movement in American presidential politics.

A profound change had occurred with in the Republican Party between 1940 and 1968, which all but erased the once dominant isolationist/non-interventionist doctrines
from the Republican ranks. The isolationist wing lost its dominance during the 1940s, as seen by the Republican National Conventions of 1940, 1944, and 1948, but 1952 offered the perfect opportunity for non-interventionism, isolationism’s successor doctrine, to rise again with the candidacy of Senator Robert Taft. Yet rather than allowing the pendulum to swing back, the internationalists brought in a popular external figure, General Dwight David Eisenhower, to pull just enough delegates away from Taft to win at the 1952 Republican National Convention. The first successful postwar Republican Presidential candidate had the opportunity to rewrite the Republican foreign policy doctrine for the new era of global order, and rather than Taft’s cautious non-interventionism, Eisenhower made ‘quiet internationalism’ the new creed of the party. The remaining non-interventionists would fight Ike from their seats in Congress, but as the nominating contests of the 1960s would show, Eisenhower’s restrained interventionist policies would prove to solidify his new doctrine. Neither isolationism nor non-interventionism would resurge as a viable force in Republican presidential politics, and since Taft’s loss in 1952, a non-interventionist has never come close to winning the party’s nomination.

To understand this historic shift, the study must be divided into four parts. The first part explains the history of Republican foreign policy from 1898 to 1940 and explores the origins and successes of internationalism and isolationism within the Republican Party. The second part examines why, after twenty-two years and three Republican presidencies, World War II refuted isolationist dogma and gave a new form of internationalism – and the East Coast businessmen who supported it – the upper hand during the 1940s. The third part looks at how non-interventionism emerged as the moderate successor to isolationism, why non-interventionism resurged in the early 1950s,
and documents the epic 1952 battle to determine whether non-interventionist Taft or internationalist Eisenhower would be the first post-war Republican president. The fourth and final section of the paper explains how the Eisenhower presidency supplanted non-interventionism by implementing an internationalist model that suited the needs of both wings of the party. The paper will conclude by looking at how the presidential elections of the 1960s attest to the permanence of this shift and helped to reinforce it.

**Part I: The Roots of Republican Isolationism and Internationalism**

**Teddy Roosevelt: The Father of Republican Internationalism**

The 1800s had been a largely isolationist century for the United States. Protected by two vast oceans, American leaders had largely followed George Washington and Thomas Jefferson’s warnings against making any “permanent” or “entangling” alliances. Wars were fought with neighbors, invaders, marauders, and rebels, but not against foreign powers for foreign causes, and certainly not for the liberty of others. The Spanish-American War of 1898 marked a significant deviation, and the person who embodied the change was Theodore Roosevelt, the then Assistant Secretary of the Navy who would enter the White House three years later.

The US had more or less fallen into the war, against the desires of the more traditional President William McKinley, who had been forced to escalate due to public pressure surrounding the mysterious sinking of the USS Maine and the great media buzz that followed. The newspaper empires of Hearst and Pulitzer spread stories about the Spanish persecution of the Cubans, which combined with the sinking, had rallied the people to war. Assistant Secretary Roosevelt proudly supported intervention, and would earn fame at home for leading his “Rough Riders” to victory at San Juan Hill. The US
would win not only the war, but also the island of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, marking it the first US military occupation of a land across one of those vast oceans upon which America’s “isolationist tendencies” had relied.

The 1898 War was more than just a historic anomaly, and it tells as much about the public as it does about the individual leaders. Dreams of ‘Manifest Destiny’ across the North American continent had been fulfilled and solidified by the end of the century, and the public reaction to the reports of events in Cuba showed that America’s ambitions could not be contained to the continent. Theodore Roosevelt was the physical embodiment of this – he was a man of the time, or perhaps who made his times fit him. In November of 1898, he was elected governor of the country’s most populous and important state; recognizing and fearing Roosevelt’s popularity, the more traditional Republican Party bosses decided to relegate him to what they considered a political graveyard – the vice presidency. Yet this strategy backfired with the McKinley assassination in September 1901, elevating the 42-year-old Roosevelt to the presidency.

The extent of Theodore Roosevelt’s internationalism was unprecedented in American history. Roosevelt instigated Panamanian independence so he could buy the Panama Canal, increased the size of the US military, negotiated an end to the Russo-Japanese War, presided over the military occupation of the Philippines, and vowed to intervene in the finances of Latin America with his “Roosevelt Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine.¹ Though his brand of internationalism would be more limited, President William Howard Taft, who had served as Governor-General of the Philippines and Roosevelt’s Secretary of War, followed many of his predecessor’s internationalist

policies during his one-term presidency. Taft’s “Dollar Diplomacy” in Latin America was largely peaceful, but certainly not isolationist, and led the United States to invade and occupy Nicaragua in 1912 to preserve American economic interests and aid insurgents who would help in that goal – indeed, economics played a central role in Taft’s foreign policy.\(^2\) Lacking Roosevelt’s pugnacious persona, Taft developed his own style of internationalism, increasing cooperation with China, vetoing anti-immigrant legislation, and diminished trade barriers with Canada. Though both Taft and Roosevelt would lose to Woodrow Wilson in 1912, Wilson was in many ways an heir to the internationalist tendencies of his predecessors. Yet Roosevelt’s more muscular internationalism contrasted greatly with Wilson’s own idealist brand of internationalism, which he would pronounce during World War I and the subsequent League of Nations debate.

**The Golden Age of Republican Isolationism: 1918-1940**

Had Republican Charles Evans Hughes won the very close election of 1916, the history of American foreign policy might be very different. Hughes had been a compromise candidate chosen at the convention, and condemned Wilson’s intervention in Mexico along with key Senate figures like William Borah. Yet Hughes’ policy of preparedness during the Great War and Roosevelt’s endorsement of him led some to believe he was secretly an internationalist.\(^3\) Wilson, who campaigned on the slogan “he kept us out of war”, had his supporters spread rumors that Hughes’ support of preparedness and mobilization would lead to America’s entry into the European conflict if he were elected. Yet it was Wilson who won in 1916, and Wilson who was faced with the decision of whether to enter into the war that had consumed a continent. The public

\(^2\) Hogan 41  
anger after revelation of the Zimmerman Telegram, a German attempt to encourage Mexico to fight the United States, made Wilson’s decision easier. Yet rather than framing America’s entry into the war as an act of defense or self-interest, as did many of the Republicans who voted to declare war, Wilson spoke of making “the world safe for democracy”, calling it as a “war to end all wars” that required America’s entry to end a fight that threaten humanity itself.\textsuperscript{4} His rhetoric, which would be echoed by other leaders throughout US history, appealed to those Americans who felt they had a moral obligation to improve the world beyond their borders even if it required military action, capitalizing on a sentiment that had arisen during the Spanish-American War debate two decades prior.

Yet war-making, whether its cause be ethical or otherwise, is always a bloody and painful endeavor. Wilson had broken a promise to the country, and conscripted thousands of American men, forcing them to risk their lives – and their limbs – for a war publically justified more by universal, internationalist ideas than by solid interests or vital defensive needs. Furthermore, Wilson would use these same abstract ideas to argue that America enter an organization, the League of Nations, that might someday once again draw Americans to fight and die overseas for the liberty of foreigners.\textsuperscript{5} Many Americans were not pleased. Using interest-minded arguments of isolationism, Republicans seized on the discontent over Wilson’s outward-looking worldview and foreign war. They used isolationist rhetoric to capitalize on those who were tired of Wilson’s overreach, his League of Nations support, and his decision to sacrifice American lives to fight a European war. As a result, the Republicans captured both the House of Representatives

\textsuperscript{4} Woodrow Wilson, “US Declaration of War with Germany” April 2, 1917.
\textsuperscript{5} Woodrow Wilson, “Address in Favor of the League of Nations, September 25, 1919.
and the Senate in the 1918-midterm elections. The newly minted Republican Senate
majories blocked US entrance into the League of Nations that Wilson created and
refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles, and internationalism, at least in electoral terms,
seemed firmly discredited.  The doctrine that won the Republicans those 1918 midterms
would guide them for the next two decades, and the political and military battles of that
era would become engrained in the memories of many isolationist politicians.

In this context, Republican Senator Warren Harding of Ohio – a compromise
candidate chosen on the tenth ballot – ran in the 1920 general election on an isolationist
platform promising a “Return to Normalcy”, winning in a popular landslide of historic
proportions, larger than any other non-incumbent in history. Harding was skeptical of the
movement for international organization that the League of Nations offered and
advocated naval disarmament. Though Harding won in the context of the post-war
debates, Harding’s quasi-isolationism was mild compared to that of many in the Senate.
The Republican-led Congress of this era saw a limited role for America in the world. The
Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924 were attempts to literally
keep the world out of America, greatly reducing the number of people who could
immigrate to the country. Like any good Republican President of the era, Harding, and
his successor after his 1923 death, Calvin Coolidge, often deferred to the Republicans in
Congress, whose isolationist tendencies were usually stronger than their own. Though
both Harding and Coolidge spoke in favor of joining the Court of International Justice,
the US never would join, due to Senate reservations and inaction.

Though once a supporter of the League of Nations, President Herbert Hoover

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6 Maddox 64  
7 Maddox 52  
8 Maddox 84
generally continued to follow the lead of the Republican Congress in foreign affairs, even when it was against his best instinct. When the Depression hit, Hoover felt a need to turn his attention entirely to domestic issues. Although businessmen, economists, and his own intuition told him not to, Hoover signed the protectionist Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act after it was passed by the Republican Congress in 1930, a move that isolated American further from foreign markets. The Act may have made life more difficult for most Americans, but either way, Hoover’s reelection chances in 1932 were doomed – the economy had collapsed on his watch, and he had been unable to fix it.

Neither the 1932 nor the 1936 elections highlighted foreign policy – everyone in the nation was focused on the economic crisis that was facing the country. Furthermore, many Republicans realized that the 1936 Presidential contest was a lost cause, a sacrifice election. The colorless Governor of Kansas, Alf Landon, won the Republican nomination, in part because he was one of few Republicans left standing after successive Republican losses starting in 1930. His loss to Roosevelt was so bad that he only won two small northeast states, leading the Democratic chairman to joke, “As goes Maine, so goes Vermont”; Roosevelt’s advisors giggled while suggesting the President sell those two states to Canada to solve the country’s fiscal woes. Yet isolationism continued to prevail in the 1930s, and even intensified during the Republican years in opposition. Republican Senators, with the support of some Southern Democrats, pushed through a series of bills that placed unprecedented restrictions on the executive that greatly limited the President’s ability to aid the allies in Europe. Prompted by the Nye Committee hearings of 1934-1936 that blamed bankers and arms dealers for pushing America into World War I, the leading advocates of the so-called “Neutrality Acts” were isolationist
Republican Senators Gerald Nye of North Dakota, Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan, William Borah of Idaho, and Robert La Follette Jr. of Wisconsin. The four Neutrality Acts enacted from 1935-1939 forbade aiding any countries engaged in war, making it illegal for the US to loan money or sell war materials to the all parties. The Act of 1937 made it illegal to transport any passengers or articles to belligerents, and forbade any American from travelling of an Allied or Axis ship. Meanwhile, a number of prominent figures such as Charles Lindbergh would circle the country advocating isolationism, forming the America First Committee in 1940. As the election approached, it was assumed that most Republicans in the country still held such isolationist sentiments, yet the 1940 Republican National Convention would prove that Republican voters were more dynamic than they appeared.

**Part II: World War II, the Fall of Isolationism, and the Fight to Succeed It**

**The 1940 Surprise: The Isolationists Falter**

After the embarrassing yet unsurprising loss in 1936, the Republicans began to search for a savior. A slight rebound in the 1938 midterms gave Republicans reason for optimism. In 1939, there were also hopes that Roosevelt would not run, or that if he did run, that voters would spur his ‘dictatorial’ attempts as an unprecedented third terms. Three prominent politicians would emerge in 1939 as potential nominees – Senator Robert Taft of Ohio, Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan, and Manhattan District Attorney Thomas Dewey. The foreign policy debate that took place during the nominating campaign showed the three searching for isolationist support around the country and in Congress – they all proved slow to realize that as events unfolded abroad,
the mood of the public, even the mood of Republican delegates, would change, leading to a surprising convention.

Robert Taft (1889-1953), son of the former President and Supreme Court Chief Justice William Howard Taft, was elected as US Senator from Ohio in 1938, after carefully working his way up the Republican totem pole and suffering in 1932 for his support of longtime friend and idol Herbert Hoover. Trying to balance his isolationist personal view with the events occurring in Europe, Taft articulated a foreign policy of “Preparedness”, which involved doing everything to stay out of war – including withholding aid from the Allies – while also staying militarily prepared in case America somehow got pulled in.\(^\text{11}\) The war mattered little to the Midwestern Taft, as he felt America should not be drawn to war by any entangling alliances. Arguments that “we’re next if the Allies fall” failed to persuade him. In many ways, Taft’s quasi-isolationist position in 1940 was the closest match to the policies of Hoover and the other Republican Presidents of the 1920s.

Senator Arthur Vandenberg (1884-1951) of Michigan was the only veteran politician among the serious candidates of 1940. In fact, Vandenberg was so old fashioned that he refused to openly campaign for himself, hindering his candidacy as his opponents raced around the country promoting themselves. He was also the most dogmatic isolationist in the running. His foreign policy doctrine was one of “Insulation”, believing that the US should be entirely unaffected by the war in Europe, claiming “There was no justification for policies which would threaten our neutrality” – although it is interesting to note he did not condemn Secretary of State Hull’s rhetoric on the Pacific

front, where Japanese aggression threatened the rubber plantations of the Dutch East Indies, a resource Michigan automakers relied upon.\textsuperscript{12} Statements like “America is not automatically lost if the allies lose…our prospects must contemplate the ability to survive no matter who wins,” attested to his feelings about the war.\textsuperscript{13} His extreme brand of isolationism, which included in indifference to an Axis victory, may have sounded fine to many Midwestern Republicans, but it unnerved many East Coast businessmen, who had much to lose if Western Europe fell to the Nazis. Vandenberg’s views reflected those of the Republican Congress throughout the 1930s – the sharp isolationism behind the Neutrality Act showed its face in Vandenberg’s candidacy. In the only two contested primaries of 1940, Vandenberg would lose handily to the surging Thomas Dewey, leaving his crippled candidacy hobbling into the Philadelphia Convention as a credible but unlikely underdog.

The 38-year-old Thomas Dewey (1902-1971) had been propelled to the national stage as Manhattan’s successful district attorney, having made headlines for a series of successful high-profile prosecutions. Yet the young Dewey had no foreign policy experience and was a novice in the field of international affairs. While Dewey was a clear front-runner in the polls all throughout 1940, leaving the other candidates in the dust, he lacked the institutional support of Taft and Vandenberg. Realizing that he would need institutional support at the convention and hoping to woo isolationist congressmen as well as conservative Midwesterners, Dewey made a number of isolationist speeches in the spring of 1940. In a well-covered speech in Wisconsin, Dewey said, “If there is one thing we all agree upon, it is that we shall send no American to die on the battlefields of

\textsuperscript{12} Joyner 28
\textsuperscript{13} Joyner 28
Europe”, and also that, “I am convinced that the only way our country can remain
genuinely neutral…is to keep its hands wholly out of a European War and out of any
negotiations that may take place.”¹⁴ Yet Dewey soon realized that these lines was eroding
his support back East without helping him in the candidate-saturated Midwest, and he
moderated his position in a speech in Dallas. Yet the shift did not go unnoticed, as
journalist William White noted, “Mr. Dewey in his early campaign speeches, notably in
Wisconsin, where there is a large German element, seemed to be veering toward
isolationist. He seemed against the allied cause. In a speech in Dallas, he retreated to the
Allied Trenches.”¹⁵

Whether this change was motivated by political opportunism linked to the
location of the speeches, an acknowledgement of changing events in Europe, or as part of
Dewey’s genuine policy shift which is seen in later elections, Dewey’s flip-flopping
compounded doubts concerning his youth and inexperience. Yet if all things were held
constant, Dewey or possibly Taft would have won the nomination in 1940. But the world
was dynamic, and global events would alter the political scene more than any of the three
established candidates would appreciate. Americans, including Republicans, were
watching events in Europe with concern. The invasion of Northern Europe in April, the
Low Countries in May, and France in June 1940 shifted the balance – how could the
Republicans expect their constituents to read the news and not change their opinions?
The public had started to move away from any sort of isolation, and the three politicians
were slow to notice. With the isolationism of Taft and Vandenberg losing popularity, the
door was opening for the most vocal and charismatic internationalist, cooperate lawyer

¹⁴ Joyner 22
¹⁵ Joyner 23
and dark-horse candidate Wendell Willkie.

Wendell Willkie (1892-1944), neither politician nor military man, is perhaps the most unconventional nominee ever chosen at a convention, and is certainly the strangest choice since Horace Greely’s nomination in 1872. Willkie, a corporate lawyer who had never held public office, had been a Democrat until 1938, and supported Roosevelt in 1932. His platform was a full embrace of internationalism, with lines like, “the World is closely knit…so dependent on each other”\(^{16}\), making him possibly the most rhetorically internationalist Republican since Teddy Roosevelt. By proclaiming that America had vital interest in the continuation of the British and French way of life, he won the support of Eastern Republicans, who felt such an interest in their wallets; this new breed of internationalism would differ greatly high-flying Wilsonianism or Roosevelt’s vision of a muscular America. Willkie effectively criticized isolationism, saying that the “Man who felt events in Europe were of no consequence was a blind, silly man.”\(^{17}\) Yet he framed his internationalism in terms of self-interest and self-prevention, claiming that “the most effective way of keeping out of this war will be by helping the democracies in every way possible” and wooing budget hawks by arguing “if Britain and France lick Hitler now, we may be saved billions of dollars.”\(^{18}\) This starkly contrasted with those who thought aid to Europe would lead to war.

Willkie’s rhetoric matched the growing concern among the public about Nazism, showing that perhaps this was not the same old Republican constituency, with journalist and future Eisenhower Press Secretary James Hagerty reporting “that the so-called isolationist belt had changed its traditional point of view, if the audience reaction to

\(^{16}\) Joyner 46
\(^{17}\) Joyner 46
\(^{18}\) Joyner 47
Willkie’s speech was any indicator.”¹⁹ By June, public opinion was shifting toward Willkie – with Dewey fumbling, and Taft running to the wrong goalpost, in the words of historian Conrad Joyner. The polls showed it –

**May 17 Gallup Poll**²⁰

Dewey 62%, Willkie 5%, Taft 14%, Vandenberg 13%

**June 21 Gallup Poll**

Dewey 31%, Willkie 29%, Taft, 5%, Vandenberg 5%

Events that unfolded between June 21 and the first day of the convention on June 24 further helped Willkie’s candidacy. France surrendered to Germany on June 22, while Roosevelt announced the appointment of Republicans Frank Knox, the 1936 Vice Presidential nominee, and former Hoover-appointee Henry Stimson to his cabinet on June 23. Not only did this add bipartisan credence to the war effort, it showed Americans just how serious matters were getting, further weakening support for isolationism, as well as for the young and vacillating Dewey. Willkie attracted the international wing of the party, such as businessmen, trader, and manufactures from the East. When the “real” Republicans realized their three candidates were flawed, there was no obvious replacement the anti-Willkie crowd could find – FDR had just appointed their two most prominent internationalists, and only a big name could be used to counter this charismatic new face. But no one was there, attesting to just how strong isolationists were before 1940. Willkie won the nomination, but went on to lose to Roosevelt in the general election.

**World War II to Korea: Internationalists Dominate, Isolationist Reform**

¹⁹ Joyner, 47
²⁰ Joyner 48
When looking back on 1940, historian Conrad Joyner would note, “The most serious drawbacks of all three defeated candidates – Taft, Dewey, Vandenberg – was the fact that they were isolationist.”

That convention initiated a decade of internationalist dominance of the party, as the isolationist wing would struggle to reassess it relevance after America entered the war in 1941. Earlier in the year, the isolationists had remained strong, with many voting against the Lend-Lease Act and as late as November, a large majority of Republicans in Congress voted against repealing the Neutrality Act, while even isolationist areas of the country were beginning to have doubt about the doctrine.

But the Japanese sneak attack on December 7, 1941 represented a major crisis for the isolationist wing. No one put it better than Arthur Vandenberg, the man who had been the most extreme isolationist candidate in 1940: “In my own mind, my convictions regarding international cooperation and collective security for peace took form on the afternoon of the Pearl Harbor attack. That day ended isolationism for any realist.”

The Pearl Harbor attack was followed by a declaration of war on Japan, which was unanimous except for one pacifist dissenter, and unanimous declarations of war on Germany and Italy. No isolationist could vote against the declarations, not Taft, not Vandenberg, not even Hamilton Fish. We were attacked. In the minds of many Americans, we had been attacked after the isolationist Republicans had done everything possible to keep us from aiding our allies against these clearly dangerous aggressors. Isolationism, as it had been known, would never been the same. Dewey, by then a converted and full internationalist, won the 1944 nomination with ease on the first ballot. Taft had stood aside that year, allowing the Ohio delegation to nominate Governor John Bricker, who, instead of beating

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21 Joyner, 67
22 Joyner 72
23 Joyner 72
Dewey, accepted the VP nod, much to Taft’s chagrin. Dewey’s nomination speech included references to the need for strong post-war cooperation to keep peace, something “we can’t do simply by drawing up a fine-sounding treaty”, implying commitments that would be an anathema to any traditional isolationist.²⁴

Of the three “isolationist” running in 1940, Taft was the only one still standing after the war – Dewey had converted before his nomination, and Vandenberg warmly embraced internationalism in a historic 1945 speech, declaring, “Unity is indispensible” and deriding foreign policy dogmatism.²⁵ Taft and other conservatives realized that their same product could not again be sold. The conservative wing of the party struggled to regain their footing after their war, searching for a way to preserve their isolationist principles while maintaining a realistic doctrine the public could swallow. They needed a doctrine that, unlike traditional isolationism, accepted the most basic lessons of World War II – that America had to stay prepared, that there must be a greater degree of international organization to ensure global peace, and that America was now the world’s dominant power, opposed only by Stalin’s Soviet Union, which posed a real threat to American security. Taft had become the de facto leader of his party’s conservative wing in the years since 1940, and despite the strong performance of the younger Harold Stassen and Earl Warren in the primaries, the 1948 convention would again come down to two figures with establishment support of the wings they led – Taft of the conservatives, and Dewey of the moderate/internationalists. Yet Dewey was still very popular, and Taft could not overcome the power of the Eastern Establishment that Dewey represented in an election so soon after the war. While Taft came in second on the first

²⁵ Arthur Vandenberg “Speech on Foreign Policy in front of the US Senate”, January 10, 1945.
two ballots, he failed to convince Stassen Vandenberg, or Warren to toss their support behind him, and ultimately lost to Dewey.26

Dewey went on to face Truman in the general election as a heavy favorite, but for a variety of reasons, mostly related to Truman’s skill and Dewey’s play-it-safe attitude, Dewey somehow managed to lose, despite the fact that the two independent Democrats in the running had eroded Truman’s support. This loss was an embarrassment for Dewey – its important consequence was that the leading public proponent of Republican internationalism had been discredited electorally, and would be too damaged to run in 1952. At long last, it would be Robert Taft’s turn in 1952 – or so it seemed at the time.

Part III: The Rise of Non-Interventionism and the Battle of ‘52

Isolationism: The Great Straw Man of 1952

Before delving back into the history of 1949-1953, its vital to address a core question that politicians, journalists, and historians have debated since that era: Can Taft and his post-war ideological allies be considered “isolationist”, and if not, how can their foreign policy doctrine be classified? Many people associate the word “isolationist” with Robert Taft, and some paint a picture of the 1952 Republican National Convention as a battle between Eisenhower and a man who wanted America to return to 1920. A young Arthur M. Schlesinger wrote an article entitled “The New Isolationism”, in May of 1952, labeling Taft as the chief leader of that movement.27 Even a reputed modern expert on the history of the Republican Party, Dr. David Greenberg, painted Taft as a “Right-Wing isolationist” who was “vanquished” by the internationalist Eisenhower in the epic battle

26 Joyner 75
of 1952. Yet on the other hand, Arthur Vandenberg, an isolationist if there ever was one, had declared that Pearl Harbor had “ended isolationism” during the war. Can the foreign policy doctrine enunciated by Taft in 1952 be accurately described as “isolationist”, or did a distinctly different foreign policy doctrine emerge from the ashes of the war?

While it is convenient to lump all critics of internationalism under one umbrella term, calling Taft an isolationist, particularly after World War II, ultimately oversimplifies and distorts the discussion. It blurs the distinction between the foreign policy doctrine held by a bulk of the Republican Party in 1935, and the views of Taft in 1952, which adapted more to post-war realities than many wanted to recognize. Though never an internationalist, Taft’s post-War rhetoric certainly does not meet the definition of isolationism, and its also arguable unclear that his pre-war doctrine did either. A more accurate and useful term for Taft, who called his doctrine “the policy of the free hand”, would be “non-interventionist.”

The term “non-interventionism” is broad, and encompasses a spectrum of foreign policy perspectives, including isolationism, which can be seen as a rather extreme and dogmatic form of non-interventionism. The term “non-interventionism” will be defined in this document as “a doctrine which, while accepting the importance of America in the global economic community, the necessity of some degree of greater post-war international organization, and America’s status as a power, remained skeptical of binding international commitments, cautious to avoid warfare over anything beside American vital interests, and warned that hegemonic game or economic investments might motivate leaders to engage in frivolous wars.”

In essence, the non-interventionist policy that Taft espoused was a pragmatic reformation of 1930’s-style isolationism, which often embraced protectionism, feared any international interdependence, and in the words of David Greenberg, “rejected America’s leadership role in the world.”

Realizing the limited political viability of isolationism in post-war presidential politics, Taft’s views as enumerated in his 1951 book *A Foreign Policy for All Americans*, salvaged what he saw as the wisdom of isolationism while adapting his foreign policy to a changing world. Taft himself claimed no one held a doctrine of isolationism after the war. "I don't know what they mean by isolationist," Senator Taft would say, "nobody is an isolationist today...I would say that anybody is an idiot who calls anybody else an isolationist." Taft defined his “policy of the free hand” as “an attitude of opposition to binding commitment by the US government that would create new, or expand existing, obligations to foreign nations”, and was meant to allow the current American leadership the freedom to determine in each case if it was necessary to intervene based on US vital interests. To put it in modern terms, Taft did not oppose all wars; he just opposed “dumb wars”, “rash war”, and unnecessary wars.

It would be an overstatement to say isolationism had died entirely after Pearl Harbor. There were still voices in Senate that could be considered isolationist well into the 1950s. But the point remains that isolationism died as a force within the realm of Republican presidential politics; Taft was the only non-interventionist to run after 1944, and his views appear relatively moderate in comparison to the more extreme Senators of that wing. While Taft criticized many aspects of Truman’s post-war foreign policy, he

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29 Greenberg (2011)
30 Schlesinger (1952)
was no “backward looking conservative” and his views were neither “naïve not nostalgic”, as many of his concerns were vindicated by history. He correctly pointed to features of the UN that would keep it from serving as a real force for peace and equality, foreseeing that the UN Security Council and NATO could someday be used by presidents to draw the United States into war without using the proper constitutional and congressional channels. Although Taft would ultimately vote for US membership in the United Nations, he had a different proposition for postwar organization, one that he claimed would be based less on cynicism and power politics and more on the libertarian and egalitarian principles. He forcefully argued for an international court – as had his father – whose decisions would be enforced by an international peace force, to which the US and other countries would contribute troops. While opponents wanted to claim his reservations to the UN were because he was stuck in the 1920’s, many of his concerns were rather based on fairness – in 1951, for example, he would say, “surely nothing can be law if the five largest nations can exempt themselves from its application.”

As members of the Truman administration would later acknowledge, Taft was correct that Truman overstated the Soviet threat to scare Americans into supporting the Marshall Plan and aid to Greece. Taft also correctly predicted that increased defense spending could lead to both a “garrison state” and an erosion of civil liberties during peacetime, and was the first to realize that even “well-meaning internationalism would necessarily degenerate over time into a form of imperialism that would breed resentment against the United States around the globe, eventually endangering U.S. national

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32 Hayes 510-11  
33 Hayes 516  
34 Hayes 516
security.”

His primary preconditions to American involvement in international organizations were “fair boundaries had to be negotiated, providing for full self-determination for previously occupied nations; and fair economic arrangements had to be established in which every nation would have access on equal terms to the raw materials of the world.”

Rather than sounding like a platform written by an isolationist, there terms in their sum appear to have come from a man who cared about the liberty of other nations, understood the importance of international trade in the post-war world economy, and willingly accepted America’s role in post-war international organization. His proposition to contribute American troops to peacekeeping force to enforce international court rulings, and his ultimate vote for joining the UN attest to the fact that the word “isolationist” does not fit him post-war; the term “non-interventionist” recognizes that something has changed. Isolationists is a fitting term for the 1930’s Senators who opposed alliances of any kind, making it illegal to sell arms to Britain or even ride British ships; Taft supported alliances against the Soviets, but he felt he had no right to bind future leaders to war as NATO would. That contrast showed how far the debate had shifted.

Many historians note the contrast between post-war Taft policy and traditional isolationism. Thomas A. Bailey would write that Senator Taft was a Republican with "an isolationist tinge", while Selig Adler would say “Taft was a ‘moderate’ isolationist who could be distinguished from other ’more inflexible’ or ‘extreme’ isolationists.”

Richard Grimmett performed a study of Senate voting records from 1947-1956, in which he

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35 Hayes 510  
36 Hayes 517  
37 Richard Grimmett "Who were the Senate Isolationists?" *Pacific Historical Review*. 42.4 (1973): 480.
determined that Taft voted with in an isolationist voting pattern only 67% of the time during the years he served – meaning that 34 senators during the Truman/Eisenhower years had a more isolationist record than Taft, and another four were tied with him.\textsuperscript{38}

The study also noted that Taft voted for the Greek-Turkish aid bill, something 22 Senators would oppose\textsuperscript{39}, and Grimmett did not list Taft among the 27 “extreme isolationists” of the era.\textsuperscript{40} Even the term used by many other writers to refer to these Senators after the War, “neo-isolationist”, suggests that they acknowledge some differences between the pre- and post-war doctrine. Indeed, it would be hard to imagine a post-war Senate passing a bill as restrictive as the Neutrality Acts of the 1930s, and almost unthinkable to hear a post-war Republican Presidential candidate tell Americans to “prepare themselves for a fall of Britain and France” to the Soviets as Vandenberg said about the Nazis in 1940. Traditional isolationism would never really appear in presidential politics again after Pearl Harbor – Taft’s non-interventionism would be the closest thing to it.

Yet Taft’s political opponents would try very hard to blur the distinction between Taft’s vision in 1952 and the hardheaded isolationism that was discredited during the war. Arthur Schlesinger’s 1952 article, “The New Isolationist”, was a scathing attack on Taft that tarred him with the term “isolationist.” According to Hayes: “The real problem with the term isolationism is not that it misrepresented Taft’s general orientation, but rather that it permitted defenders of various Roosevelt and Truman policies to discredit Taft without having to engage his arguments seriously.”\textsuperscript{41} Schlesinger’s article would

\textsuperscript{38} Grimmett 485  
\textsuperscript{39} Grimmett, 490  
\textsuperscript{40} Grimmett 489  
\textsuperscript{41} Hayes 510
only be one of many articles to make that point during those years. The Eastern Establishment, which Tom Dewey represented and had relied upon in 1948, had reached the same conclusion, and feared the implications of a Taft victory for the Cold War and the future of international trade. Major figures of this wing of the Republican Party, such as Dewey, John Foster Dulles, and Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., would bring this case to the only man that they thought could beat Taft, General Dwight David Eisenhower. Alerting him to their fears and appealing to his sense of duty to the country, they would begin a campaign to draft Eisenhower, and keep the Republican nomination away from the man many felt was the inevitable Republican choice in 1952.

“His Time Has Come”: The Resurgence of Non-Interventionism, 1950-1952

Everything seemed to be falling into place for Taft in the years between Dewey’s loss in 1948 and Eisenhower’s recruitment in early 1952. Though internationalism had dominated Republican presidential politics starting with Willkie’s dark horse victory in 1940, both political and international events began turning the table back toward the non-interventionist policies that Taft advocated. In 1949, after Dewey’s self-repudiating loss, Republicans decided to get rid of all the so called “me-tooisms” of the 1940’s – all those mild emulations of Roosevelt that Dewey and Willkie had put on their platforms to win votes.\(^{42}\) Internationalists and liberals had been discredited electorally – Dewey, a two-time loser, in particular.

As with Willkie in 1940, Taft’s apparent rise was further aided by the foreign events of the time. Truman had gone to war in Korea without a congressional declaration of war, and the conflict appeared to have no end in sight. Taft’s non-interventionism was appearing increasingly wise to many Republicans. He ramped up his non-interventionist

\(^{42}\) Joyner 73
rhetoric, while still citing “our traditional policy of neutrality and non-interference” in his 1951 book, *A Foreign Policy for All Americans*, in which he fully developed his doctrine, writing:

“War should never be undertaken or seriously risked except to protect American liberty. Our traditional policy of neutrality and non-interference with other nations was based on the principle that this policy was the best way to avoid disputes with other nations and to maintain the liberty of this country without war. From the days of George Washington that has been the policy of the United States. It has never been isolationism; but it has always avoided alliances and interference in foreign quarrels as a preventive against possible war, and it has always opposed any commitment by the United States, in advance, to take any military action outside of our territory. It would leave us free to interfere or not interfere according to whether we consider the case of sufficiently vital interest to the liberty of this country.”

Meanwhile, more and more Republican Senators began turning away from internationalism. According to Grimmett’s study:

“isolationism in the Senate reached its height in 1952 when nearly thirty-nine percent of that body voted an isolationist pattern—a fact that doubtless reflected the passions of the partisan campaigns of that Presidential election year. It is also evident that, from 1947 through 1949, isolationism in the Senate was at its lowest ebb.”

With Dewey discredited by his back-to-back losses, and non-interventionism on the rise, the Republican internationalists realized that there was no one in their midst who could keep Taft from winning the 1952 nomination. Fearing the implications that a Taft

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43 Robert A. Taft, *A Foreign Policy for All Americans* (Doubleday: 1952) 52.
44 Grimmett 497
presidency would have on the nation’s foreign policy, Republican interventionists John Foster Dulles and Thomas Dewey successfully courted national hero Dwight Eisenhower to enter the Republican nominating contest. Although reluctant to run, Eisenhower began campaigning vigorously after his major write-in victory in the New Hampshire primary. Eisenhower went on to win all of the primaries in the East, while Taft won all those in the Midwest, and Stassen and Warren won their respective home states of Minnesota and California.\textsuperscript{45}

\textbf{The 1952 Convention: Non-Interventionism’s Last Stand}

The delegates at the convention in 1952 realized that the Republican Party was at a crossroads. The party had been out of office for an unprecedented twenty years, and had blown the last election against an unpopular incumbent; they had yet to govern in the new post-war era. The two front-runners were very different, and not just in terms of foreign policy. Taft was a conservative, while Eisenhower was a moderate. Taft had led the Republicans in Senate through their darkest days, acting as a loyal spokesmen of conservative values, offering a traditional ideology based on a consistent emphasis on liberty and limited government in all policy spheres. Eisenhower was a national hero with no previous association with the Republican Party, a man beloved and trusted by the nation; although his conservative credos were weak, he would certainly be a strong candidate for the general election. The differences between the two could not be clearer.

It was make or break for Taft, who said that, at age 62, this would be his third and final shot at the presidency. Taft came to the convention with strong support from the traditionally isolationist Midwest and the conservative South, while Eisenhower’s base

was the Eastern Establishment he inherited from Dewey. Before the delegate count began, Eisenhower supporters, led by Lodge and Dewey, claimed that Taft’s Southern supporters had rigged their states’ delegate count in Taft’s favor. In a narrow and controversial vote, the convention decided to replace some of the delegates. The first ballot then began with 595 votes for Eisenhower and 500 for Taft. Ike was still 10 delegates short of victory, but as soon as Warren agreed to release his delegates to break the deadlock in Eisenhower’s favor, the game was over. Ike won, and Taft would never win the Republican nomination that he felt he had earned. Though billed as contest between two competing policy visions, the reason why many undecided Republicans supported Ike was less than ideological – Ike offered a ‘sure victory’ in November, and as the party had lost five presidential elections in a row, some were not willing to pass that up.

**General Eisenhower’s Foreign Policy Vision**

Eisenhower shared much in common with the Eastern Establishment in the internationalist vision for the world. His time as Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe gave him a great appreciation of Europe’s value to the US, as well as how fragile the continent was; he himself knew how close the war had been. His time as Chief of Staff of the US Army, NATO commander, and President of Columbia University after the war would provide him with important insight and connections in the government and in New York. The contacts he made while at Columbia proved important when he entered into politics, and would introduce him to Tom Dewey and the other Eastern Establishment figures that encouraged him to run. As a result, the same Dewey acquaintances that Dewey would have put in his cabinet became part of the Eisenhower

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46 David 95
administration, often due to Dewey’s recommendation or introduction. The most significant people in that category were Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, CIA Director Allen Dulles, and Vice President Richard Nixon, all of whom played key roles in the future of Republican foreign policy. His foreign policy vision would be similar to theirs, yet due to his personal style and military experience, it would remain distinct as well.

Like these figures Eisenhower placed an emphasis on handling the Soviet Threat and securing access to resources. Securing international resources was as vital for Eisenhower as it was for the Eastern Establishment. In his words:

“From my viewpoint, foreign policy is, or should be, based primarily upon one consideration. That consideration is the need for the U.S. to obtain certain raw materials to sustain its economy and, when possible, to preserve profitable foreign markets for our surpluses. Out of this need grows the necessity for making certain that those areas of the world in which essential raw materials are produced are not only accessible to us, but their populations and governments are willing to trade with us on a friendly basis.”

In the 1952 General Election, Eisenhower would run on a platform of ‘Korea, Communism, and Corruption’, charging that Truman had failed on the three important issues. The reference to Communism was two-fold – not only did it accuse the Truman administration of not doing enough to curb the spread of global Communism and play of the “Democrats lost China” card, it nudged ahead rumors that Democrats allowed the bureaucracy to be infiltrated by Communists. Yet the Republicans also vowed not to repeat Truman’s mistakes in Korea. There is an important contradiction here: The Republicans were both accusing the Democrats of not doing enough to prevent the fall of

47 Hayes 518
China, but also criticizing Truman for the way in which he committed troops to prevent the fall of Korea. Thus the Republicans created an expectation that you could have a foreign policy that would both do enough to prevent another "loss" like China, while not going as far as committing troops like Korea. Though the role of domestic politics in Eisenhower’s foreign policymaking remains unclear, Dulles’ strategy for fighting the Cold War would fit well into these “Not another China, Not another Korea constraints – with the two pillars of covert action and nuclear deterrence ensuring that Eisenhower’s internationalism would be of a quieter variety.

**Part IV: The Success of Eisenhower’s “Quiet Internationalism”**

**Fulfilling Republican Foreign Policy Priorities**

While it is clear why Eisenhower won in 1952, the question of how internationalism solidified as the principle doctrine in the Republican Party during is more complex. In many ways, Eisenhower’s “quiet internationalism” succeeded in becoming the party’s dominant foreign policy model because it met the key foreign policy priorities of both wings of the Republican Party during the 1950s, and its main premises were not repudiated during that time. What were those key priorities?

For the non-interventionists, they were ending the war in Korea; preventing a similar costly commitment of US troops to a foreign war, reducing fiscal commitments, and publicly ending Truman’s open-ended containment policy. The Republican internationalists, still led by the Eastern Establishment and the Council on Foreign Relations crowd, cared far more about expanding and securing international trade, waging the Cold War and countering the Soviets, preventing another “Fall of China” and stemming the perceived spread of global Communism. Meanwhile, pragmatic Republican
politicians and those focused on domestic policy just hoped their party’s foreign policy
doctrine would not hinder its electoral appeal. Eisenhower’s internationalism would come
to dominate the party in part because it did an acceptable, though far from perfect, job of
meeting these top priorities of the two foreign policy wings while also proving effective
at the ballot box.

The importance of these basic priorities in Republican nominating politics had
been seen in 1952 as well. The Eastern Establishment saw Taft as being a weak Cold
Warrior and did not trust him to protect their allies’ economic interests abroad due to his
non-interventionist ideals; they felt he would not fight the Cold War as it needed to be
fought, that he would not protect Europe, and that his hesitance to intervene would send
the wrong message to the Soviet Union. For some members of the Eastern Establishment,
foreign policy was not just about abstract global issues – it connected to concrete
financial interests. They feared Taft would do little to protect their trade partners, and it
was for these reasons that they set out to draft Eisenhower. Likewise, the non-
interventionists were committed to Taft; they doubted Eisenhower would be as effective
at keeping America from getting dragged into war, or as fiscally conservative with the
defense budget. Many historians believe the reason why Eisenhower ultimately prevailed
at the convention, winning many delegates not strongly aligned with either foreign policy
vision, was because of his electability – Eisenhower’s full image, man but also doctrine,
appeared far more electable than Taft to Republicans desperate to end their decades
trapped outside the executive branch.

Yet the consequences beyond 1952 would depend on Ike’s effectiveness in
delivering on Republican foreign policy priorities. To fatally damage non-
interventionism, Eisenhower would have to show that there was a way to wage the internationalist’s Cold War without another Korea; that there were ways to aid allies without another World War II; and that were are ways to foster international trade and interdependence without another World War I (the Nye Committee, which pointed to American commercial interests in the UK as a cause for US entry into World War I, had been an important factor in 1930s isolationism). By succeeding in doing so, he was able to prevent any major non-interventionist resurgence during his years, and pass internationalism onto his Republican successors.

The New Look: The Eisenhower/Dulles Policy in Action

Eisenhower’s “New Look”, put together by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, was a way of both meeting the internationalist demand that Ike confront the Soviet threat while also keeping America out of a shooting war. Eisenhower shaped internationalism to suit his political needs, which involved reducing America’s bloated military budget and keeping American troops from getting bogged down abroad. The new model for post-war Republican internationalism that John Foster Dulles tailored for Eisenhower would rely on two pillars – strategic nuclear deterrence and unregulated covert action, which he coordinated through his brother, CIA Director Allen Dulles.

Eisenhower expanded America’s nuclear arsenal to reinforce ‘our nuclear deterrence’ – which made the odds of conventional war lower, but the chances of nuclear war higher. Yet more important was Eisenhower’s use of covert action. The Central Intelligence Agency, created with the sole mission of gathering intelligence, became a tool for initiating regime change abroad only months after Eisenhower took office. At the urging of the British, who hoped to protect their oil interests in the region, the CIA
worked with MI6 to execute its first coup against elected Iranian Prime Minister Mossaddeq in August 1953. While the Americans were motivated by fear of a communist takeover, those fears were unfounded – yet the facts had never been openly debated, not even in Eisenhower’s cabinet.

Iran would only be the beginning, with successful coups in Guatemala and the Congo to follow, as the CIA fully developed its capacity to covertly enact regime change abroad. Through these covert acts and nuclear deterrence Eisenhower created a distinctly Republican brand of internationalism – a quiet kind. Now there were two flavors of internationalism – the more public, Democratic-style one seen under Truman/Kennedy/Johnson, which was characterized primarily by the open use of force, supported by rhetoric about freedom and containment, in contrast to the more covert, Republican-style “quiet internationalism” of Eisenhower and Nixon, who used covert action to both undermine communist/socialist political movements and advance American economic interests. The ‘covertization’ of the America’s containment policy protected it from the criticism of Republican non-interventionism, allowing Eisenhower to engage in missions that were never politically or constitutionally viable. The CIA is now ubiquitous with illegal assassinations, covert coups, and other secretive, extra-constitutional excesses of executive authority, testifying to the lasting mark Eisenhower and the Dulles brothers left on the toolbox of interventionism

**Ike the Internationalist: Keeping the Eastern Establishment on Board**

Eisenhower was able to keep internationalist content during his term because he essentially was an internationalist. He accepted key internationalist assumptions about the Cold War, the Soviets, and about the importance of America’s leadership role in the
world. The upper echelon of his administration was filled with internationalists, particularly the Dulles brothers, who largely helped him determine his foreign policy. His wartime reputation as protector of Europe, and the fact that he surrounded himself with these key people, inspired confidence in the minds of the Republican internationalist elite – though not a real member of Eastern Establishment, his close ties to the Dulles brothers and Tom Dewey made him a sort of step-father to the movement.

Ike was willing to wage the Cold War in his own style, upping the ante with expanded nuclear deterrence. Dulles would often use “liberation” rhetoric, claiming that containment was not enough and that America had to push back against global communism; he also, during interviews, would go as far as to list the times that America almost used a nuclear weapon. These words alone put Eisenhower in the internationalist camp – to these internationalist leaders, his people, he was doing things right, even if no one knew exactly what he was doing to counter communism. The coups that Eisenhower’s CIA launched in both Iran and Guatemala had no direct domestic political effect, because they were covert operations kept below the radar. Yet it is also possible that Eisenhower successfully pre-empted internationalist concerns about these communist threats in these two countries. Although most historians now believe that the extent of a communist threat was greatly overstated in Iran, Guatemala, and the Congo – a self-fulfilling prophesy in Guatemala, where legitimate fears of an American coup would lead the President Guzman to request arms from the Soviets, and pure preventable in the Congo, when Lumumba only turned to the Soviets after his pleas for help from the

Americans\textsuperscript{49} – it is very possible that the same concerns about a communist threat that motivated Eisenhower to take action would have eventually made it to the public, or at least to the wider Eastern Establishment elite, had Eisenhower not taken action. As shown by United Fruit lobbying for regime change in Guatemala, fear of the Communist threat there was not limited to the President’s inner circles, although America’s role in the coup was. Had concerns of a “Red Threat” hit the public, Eisenhower may have been seen as weak on communism, and his “silent internationalism” could have lost fans in Eastern Establishment circles or put him in a position where he would be encouraged to commit troops, something his “quiet internationalism” hoped to avoid. In the end, “quiet internationalism” was able to pre-empt what could have been political concerns about Iran, Congo and particularly Guatemala, and preserve the legitimacy of Eisenhower in internationalist eyes.

Ike passed up other opportunities to disappoint internationalists. The death of Stalin in 1953 offered Eisenhower a unique chance to move forward, and the combination of his unquestionable security credential, public exhaustion with Korea and Truman’s containment, and non-interventionist Taft leading Senate created a special window in which Eisenhower could have initiated an early détente. But internationalists, like Dulles, were not ready for that – and Eisenhower too was not ready to go far enough to bridge that gap. It would not be a stretch to say that Stalin’s death had created a political window in the United States, which could have been used to justify great cutbacks to the excesses of the Emergency State. While Eisenhower did make a limited attempt to deal with the Soviets in the diplomatic realm, these never went far enough. The limited responses he showed, such as Open Skies, the Atoms for Peace, and the speech of 1953 was more to

\textsuperscript{49} Ambrose 299
test communist intentions, to please others, and gain a strategic edge over the Soviets.\textsuperscript{50}

Another key to the heart of the internationalist was Europe – a big trading partner of the Eastern Establishment, and a place many felt a cultural connection to, as well as other sentimental feelings post-war. Internationalists felt that Eisenhower, who had fought as hard as anyone to free Western Europe from the yoke of Nazism, was not about to let it fall to Communism. He had strong personal connections with both Churchill and de Gaulle, who both led their respective countries at points during Eisenhower’s presidency. Eisenhower embraced and strengthened NATO, giving it the bipartisan support it may not have received under Taft. His administration’s cooperation with MI6 in the 1953 Mossadeq coup, which helped Britain secure its oil supply, and the quiet financial and military aid he gave to the French as they struggled to hold Vietnam attested to the extent that Eisenhower viewed those countries as strategic partners in the Cold War, not just former allies from World War II. Internationalists had reason to feel that their investments in Europe were secure in Ike’s Europe. Furthermore, international trade expanded under Ike, creating the interdependent global economy the internationalists always dreamed of, further opening the appealing markets of the rebuilt Europe – which was still not rebuilt enough serve as a major import threat to their business in the US.

Outside of Europe, Eisenhower would increase foreign aid, citing the importance of the many “pawns” of the Cold War. His “Eisenhower doctrine” of 1957 announced that any country could request economic assistant and/or help from American military forces if they felt threatened by armed aggression – particularly Communist aggression.

Eisenhower would use this doctrine the next year, sending ships to Lebanon to intimidate the opposition threatening the pro-Western Marionite leadership. His actions in the Congo, Guatemala, and Iran attest to his belief that those battlegrounds were important. In Congo in 1960, Allen Dulles, likely with tacit support from Eisenhower, would even go as far as ordering the assassination of elected Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba – the assassination only never occurred because his domestic enemies got to him first.

For the first six years of his presidency, whether through his actions or simply because of luck, Americans perceived no major losses to Communism, no repeats of “losing China”. But in 1959, that would change, when the government of Cuba, a large island nation practically on America’s border, would fall to the pro-Soviet forces of Fidel Castro. Ironically, the phrase “We lost Cuba” would never become as famous as “We lost China”, even though, unlike China, “we” had once controlled Cuba and liberated it from colonial rule.

But Cuba did not discredit Eisenhower in the minds of internationalists – in fact, this one big loss in many ways showed just how successful Ike’s “quiet Internationalism” had been in dominating the discussion, if not bringing the desired results. Both parties viewed the CIA that Ike and Allen Dulles had built as the key tool to dealing with Castro – very few internationalists advocated a real, Korea-style invasion – in part because, unlike Korea, the Cuban Revolution involved no outside aggression. The CIA would attempt to assassinate Castro several times throughout the Eisenhower and Kennedy years. Eisenhower’s CIA also drew up plans for what would later be known as the “Bay of Pigs” invasion – plans that ultimately would be used not by Eisenhower, but by
Kennedy, his successor.

Perhaps “quiet internationalism” survived “Losing Cuba” because it occurred in 1959 instead of mid-1953, giving the doctrine time to become ingrained and the institution of the CIA time to develop. Yet the fact that the CIA was the first body both Ike and Kennedy turned to, viewing it as the best option, testifies to the extent to which Eisenhower’s “quiet internationalism” had won a bipartisan debate, in part because CIA coups were so addictive. Without quiet internationalism, a president practicing universal containment may have acted differently; on the other side of the spectrum, its highly unlikely that a non-interventionist like Taft would have done anything, and a loss of Cuba could have damaged his doctrine had it occurred on his watch. For Eisenhower, Cuba was the one that got away – yet it simultaneously showed that his doctrine was here to stay. Meanwhile, the 1960 U2 incident, in which a US spy plane was down over Russia, would be a bigger challenge – giving the public a first glimpse behind the quiet exterior of Eisenhower foreign policy. Yet while Eisenhower was caught lying to the American public and to the world, his internationalism would not be discredited – many would just be determined that we had to do it better next time.

**Ike the Non-Interventionist: How “Silent Internationalism” Won Them Over**

Winning over the non-interventionist wing, or at least showing that his policy could be acceptable to that faction of the party, would be trickier. The extent to which Eisenhower tailored his foreign policy to fit this political framework is unclear – in many cases, he may not have had internal Republican politics in mind. Yet his personal style of foreign policy happened to fit with the non-interventionists priorities as well. There were numerous times throughout his two terms in which Eisenhower could have sent troops to
fight abroad or escalated intervention in more extreme ways, yet he declined to, largely because his military experience told him that such project were doomed – particularly in Vietnam, Egypt, Hungary, Laos, and Cuba. He did not let our alliances – with the UK, France, or small countries – drag us into war, in such a way that it showed the limits of non-interventionist assumptions that alliances would lead to war, with Eisenhower exercising his “free hand” in a way Taft would appreciate. This showed that there was a real Republican brand of internationalism, one that wasn’t as messy or reckless as the Democratic Brand, and that we could wage the Cold War without sending troops. It was in this way that a President who did so much abroad for the internationalists could be acceptable to non-interventionists. The death of Robert Taft, the leader of the non-interventionist wing, also might have aided Eisenhower, as non-interventionist no longer had an inspiring voice to turn to, and a potential source of intraparty opposition was gone.

Ending the war in Korea, which was increasingly seen as a quagmire, was not just a priority for the non-interventionists – it was a priority for most Americans. Eisenhower had made Korea a main issue in his general election campaign against Stevenson, and in late November 1952, he made good on his campaign promise to go to Korea and see things for himself after he was elected. When an armistice agreement was finally proposed to divide Korea across the 38th parallel, the UN and the Eisenhower administration supported it, which was not a political problem at home due to Eisenhower’s high level of military credibility. Though the agreements would not formally end the war and would keep American troops in the region indefinitely, this was largely seen in the United States as a necessary cost to ending the military battle without losing American dignity.
Eisenhower managed to keep the non-interventionists at bay by keeping the Cold War cold, at least in the eyes of the American public. It was a Democratic-sponsored war that led to the 1950-1952 resurgence of Republican non-interventionism, and Eisenhower’s restraint in terms of overt action helped prevent a repeat. Eisenhower’s greatest acts of interventionism were not known to general public at the time, as files documenting Ike’s incursions in Iran, Guatemala, and Congo would remain hidden from criticism until after his death.

But there were a number of times during his presidency where Ike held back on committing troops, avoiding what could have been major clashes with Taft allies. Though the French would plead to Eisenhower to send them troops or the Air Force to aid them at Dien Bien Phu, Eisenhower refused to give them the massive military support they wanted. Eisenhower showed that the alliance with France would not draw the US into a war that did not serve its interests, delineating the limits of America’s alliance with Western Europe.

Two years later, this message was reinforced during the Suez Crisis. After the British, French, and Israelis invaded the Sinai Peninsula when Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal, the British, after their cooperation with the CIA in Iran, expected that the US would not criticize the invasion of a pro-Soviet Middle East nation that threatened global trade and European economic interests. Yet Eisenhower came out strongly against the invasion, and American pressure ultimately forced the two European allies and Israel to pull out. This sent a clear message – Eisenhower’s America would not support even its closest allies if they did something that was not in America’s interest, and in fact would even actively oppose and undermine allies efforts to protect their economic interests.
abroad. No one would expect an action like this to come from a man whose support came from the pro-European, pro-trade Eastern Establishment; interestingly, this might have been more characteristic of what a Taft administration would have looked like. Taft’s doctrine said that America should not support or fight for allies if doing so did not aid American interests. Taft also criticized the UN Security Council system because it allowed the great powers – the US, Britain, and France among them – to exist above the realm of international law, wielding their great veto power. Taft supported an international court to prevent aggression and deal with international disputes like the Suez nationalization. Indeed, Eisenhower seemed to be following Taft’s model more than an internationalist one in this case, showing his independence from the Eastern Establishment model. Though Ike would later regret his reaction to the crisis, the behavior was nonetheless revealing of certain instincts he held.

As history showed, America’s problems in Southeast would not come while its European allies were struggling, but rather years later, after both the French and Eisenhower had departed from the stage. Though Eisenhower would send a small number of US military advisors to an independent Saigon, it should be remembered that he did not put the trigger starting real US military engagement in Vietnam – that was President Johnson with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution. When the war went sour and Johnson would complain, “I am only carrying out the policy of Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy”, Dwight’s brother Milton would point out to the then-President “President Johnson, you’re making a terrible mistake. President Eisenhower was bitterly opposed to any participation in the Vietnam War. He was importuned by the Air Force and everyone else, and he declined time and time again.”

51 Ambrose 263
This was typical Eisenhower. He would walk like an internationalist, talk like an internationalist, and quietly intervene when no one was looking, but when others would push for all out military intervention, he would always decline. Yet in the process, he would often create a plan for action, setting things up so it looked like he was about to intervene – although he did not plan to pull the trigger. Johnson claimed that Eisenhower would have fought Vietnam as he did, and Kennedy inherited the plans for what would become the “Bay of Pigs” invasion thinking that Eisenhower would have gone the same route. But the fact that Eisenhower did leave plans and concerns about Vietnam, Laos, and Cuba hanging in the air when he left office attested to his caution when it came to using regular warfare. His doctrine of “silent interventionism” was in this way reminiscent of Taft’s 1940 doctrine of “preparedness”, and Eisenhower’s personal reluctance to actually go ahead and use force. Because Eisenhower felt a need to be prepared for any contingency and know all his options, he would often draw up intervention plans without using them, much to the relief of non-interventionist but to the disappointment of his allies and aides. There is probably no better example of the disconnect between Eisenhower’s actions and his planning, rhetoric, and allies’ hopes than in his reaction to the 1956 Hungarian Uprising.

Hungary, 1956: Ike’s “Internationalism” Goes Silent

On October 23, 1956, the people of Hungarian would revolt against their oppressive, Soviet-back government. A Budapest radio station would broadcast in the midst of the chaos “SOS! They just brought us a rumor that the American troops will be here in one or two hours…we are well and fighting, where are the Americans?”52 Yet the troops would never come. Less than two weeks later, the Soviets would invade to brutally

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52 Ambrose 235
crush the nascent revolution, executing its leaders and killing thousands. The failed revolution would attest to the broken promises and empty rhetoric of the CIA, Dulles, and Eisenhower, exposing the limits – non-interventionist tinges – of Eisenhower’s “Quiet Internationalism”. Nothing before, or after, would do more to show non-interventionists that Eisenhower was not the man they feared him to be, and that a politician could wield rhetoric, make alliances, and build up forces without using them.

Many people – internationalists and Hungarians alike – thought Eisenhower would aid the Hungarians due to the administration’s rhetoric supporting the “liberation” of Eastern Europe. The Republicans had won votes from many Americans of Eastern European descent by promising to liberate their countries when the time came.53 The CIA would encourage the Eastern Europeans further through their broadcasts on Radio Free Europe, the pro-freedom annual White House Christmas greetings to the region, and remarks from John Foster Dulles, who said during the campaign that Eisenhower would “use every means” to achieve liberation – though Ike would tell him to restrain his comment by inserting the word “peaceful” between “every” and “means”54 Yet Ike’s actions would show that his “liberation” rhetoric was only for domestic consumption. He apparently failed to make this clear even to members of his administration, however, as the CIA began a project called “Red Sox/Red Cap” that trained refugees to fight in their home countries. When the Hungarian Uprising began, the CIA would send in these refugees; meanwhile John Foster Dulles would promise economic assistance to any country that broke off from Moscow’s orbit. This, as well as the continued radio broadcasts, would further encourage the rebels, as new Hungarian leader Imre Nagy

53 Ambrose 235
54 Ambrose 236
would declare the country’s withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact on October 31.

Yet Ike himself never even seriously considered intervention, to even his brother’s surprise. “Look for yourself,” he said to Milton, “Hungary is landlocked. We cannot possibly fight there.”55 Eisenhower’s own men, particularly the CIA, were disappointed and angry with him – the President had exposed to the world that liberation was a sham, and had not even warned the CIA first. Yet despite Eisenhower’s inaction in Hungary, the CIA had persisted. Even after the bloodshed ended in Hungary, they continued the Red Sox/Red Cap project, until finally a report reached the President’s desk and he shut it down.

Money, Money, Money: The Budget Battle of 1956 and the Last Isolationists

Yet it would be wrong to portray the relationship between Ike and the non-interventionists as “sunny.” Despite the fact that he waged the Cold War without losing American lives, a number of Taft followers remained in Senate throughout the 1950’s. Furthermore, it should be remembered that preventing war was only part of the conservative demands of 1952 – Taft has always been a proponent of spending cuts, on both the defense budget and in foreign aid. As a Senator in the 1940’s, he had proposed an amendment to decrease funding for the Marshall Plan, although it would ultimately fail. Eisenhower had promised to Taft after his victory to make fiscal conservatism a priority, and made it a more prominent part of his 1952 platform at Taft’s request. Eisenhower was able to shrink the bloated defense budget during his term – in part by relying more on nuclear weapons and covert action rather than conventional arms – but the decrease was relatively small.56

55 Ambrose 238
56 Unger 95
In 1956, however, there was a major battle between Eisenhower and the Senate over the foreign aid budget – with many Senators demanding cuts. Many historians would bill that fight as a sort of “last stand of the Republican isolationists.” Yet this is an oversimplification of a complicated battle in which Eisenhower was facing three distinct opponents, and in retrospect would come to define the similarities and differences of the “New” and “Old” Right.

Grimmett’s study of isolationism in the Senate is very revealing, offering a breakdown of votes by party and by name. 1956 would be the last year in this study, largely because it was the last year many historians see isolationism as a strong force in the legislature. In the study on 1956 Grimmett, looked at 12 specific votes that could be considered isolationist vs. internationalist, most of which were amendments related to the foreign aid battle. Only Senators voting for the majority of the isolationist bills were considered “isolationist-pattern” voters. In 1956, 33 Senators voted in this isolationist voting pattern, but only 15, or 45.4% of them, were actually Republicans – a major contrast from 1951, when 100% of the 27 so-called “isolationist-pattern” Senators were Republicans. This means that a majority, 54.5% or 18, of the people giving Eisenhower trouble with foreign aid were Democrats, with 13 of them being Southern Democrats.

Yet these 15 “isolationist-pattern” Republicans could be divided further. Only around half were members of the isolationist “Old Right”, such as Homer Capehart, William Jenner, and John Bricker. This crowd had given Eisenhower big trouble in 1954 by proposing the Bricker Amendment in response to fears that international agreements could supersede Congress. The amendment was an attempt to restrict the scope of 

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57 Grimmett 496
58 Grimmett 490
executive power to make agreements with foreign countries, but ultimately failed when Eisenhower rallied opposition by calling for party loyalty against the bill – and a 1957 Supreme Court ruling obviated the need for the amendment anyway by dealing with the question directly. The 1956 fight would be the last great showing of this wing of the party, as some veterans of the 1930’s and 1940’s battles had retired or died, while others were converted to the Eisenhower wing because of the power of party loyalty.

But not even all of these fifteen Republicans were Old Guard isolationists. Barry Goldwater was among those voting to cut foreign aid, as were some of his younger future allies like Senator Carl Curtis, and their motives were very different than the older traditionalists. Rather than being concerned about America’s ties abroad being too strong, or fearing that sending money abroad would lead us to fight foreign wars, these new voices opposed the foreign aid bill mainly because of budgetary reasons. They thought it would hurt private foreign investment, and were focused more on keeping federal spending and taxes as low as possible. Barry Goldwater was no dove, and would create his own brand of internationalism. Goldwater, and the “New Right” he represented, accepted internationalist concerns about the Soviet Union and believed in America’s leadership role in the world strongly. Though a protégé of Taft, his emulation would be more focused on fiscal ideology. In the 1960’s, he would be the voice of the conservative wing, an internationalist voice rather than a neo-isolationist one, and it would be his brand of conservatism that would counter the liberal, Eastern Establishment Dewey/Rockefeller wing, in contrast from the moderate branch led by Eisenhower and Nixon. The 1956 battle would be a point before the Taft/Bricker and the Goldwater models fully detached, as the new conservative internationalism was still developing. Yet
the 1956 alliance would also foreshadow Southern support for his 1964 candidacy, in which he broke the “Solid South” and won only the Deep South in addition to his home state. Also tellingly, three of the four remaining great heirs to the Republican non-interventionist doctrine – Bricker, Knowland, and Jenner – would lose or retire from politics after the 1958 election, while Homer Capehart would live quietly until 1963, a year before Goldwater’s nomination. By then, non-interventionism would be the doctrine of the old – Eisenhower and party loyalty had converted the younger Republicans to his side; the 1956 elections after the foreign aid fight were a landslide for Eisenhower, while the party made no gains in Congress; rather than going out with a bang, non-interventionism would fade away. Internationalism seemed more electorally helpful than non-interventionism, a conclusion that would be seen in full force in 1960. By then, many Republicans thought Ike’s internationalism did not go far enough.

The Internationalist 1960’s

Eisenhower’s success in providing a Republican brand of internationalism set a clear, safe precedent for Republican executive candidates. He showed how the Cold War could be fought without troops – and that a quieter containment policy was possible, in contrast to Truman’s messy one. Virtually none of the Republican politicians elected during Eisenhower’s years supported an isolationist or non-interventionist model, and the few Senate holdovers who completed their political education during the Roosevelt/Truman years were getting older and losing influence. Yet the Cuban Revolution, the U2 incident, and the supposed “missile” gap with the Soviet Union led many to think that America needed a leader with a more robust and aggressive foreign policy doctrine than quiet internationalism.
Richard Nixon, Ike’s Vice President though not Ike’s friend, arose as an heir, with a foreign policy platform following Ike’s general model, but was not quite as quiet. Ever the shrewd politician, Nixon remained close with the old non-interventionists, realizing he needed their support more than Ike ever had, building personal connections and making private assurances. They did not run anyone against him, and it’s unclear they had anyone who they could even run. Nixon’s only real opponent in 1960 was an internationalist of a different brand, New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, more an heir to the Willkie/Dewey wing than Eisenhower or Nixon had ever been, largely because he came from the Eastern Elite. Feeling overpowered, the New York Governor met with Nixon to quit the race if Nixon would write a joint platform proposal with him, using some of his ideas, such as a “free world confederation.” Nixon then allowed the non-interventionists to strip the platform of Rockefeller’s high-mindedness at the convention’s policy meeting – though he would then go on to upset the Old Guard by selecting internationalist former UN Representative Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. as his running mate.

The 1960 campaign showed just how bipartisan internationalism had become. Nixon and Kennedy would compete to show just how anti-communist they were, almost as if it were a game; yet unlike the domestic anti-communism of McCarthy and others, the anti-communism of 1960 was clearly intertwined with an internationalist worldview in the eyes of both candidates. Eisenhower’s foreign policy had not been repudiated – rather, politicians seemed to feel that his model just had to be perfected. The candidates were internationalists largely because they felt the public was, and no alternatives were

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59 Joyner 83
60 Joyner 84
every really discussed. The 1960 election would not be one about policy, but would rather be about personality, an issue on which the charismatic Kennedy was fated to win.

The rise of Goldwater in 1964 would show that conservatism was not the same movement it had been from 1918 to 1956, at least in terms of foreign policy. His book, *Why Not Victory?* espoused the importance of winning the Cold War, an idea that would be anathema to non-interventionists. Yet scholar of the era like Joyner would refer to conservatives as “the Taft-Goldwater” wing of the party, in large part because Goldwater followed Taft’s economic and domestic policies – matters than Taft himself said mattered more to him. However, Goldwater had adapted Eisenhower’s “liberation” rhetoric – something Ike had not even meant – and made it a core component of his foreign policy, which scared many Americans away from him, in part thanks to Johnson’s infamous “Daisy” ad, which inferred that a Goldwater victory meant nuclear war. It is an irony of history that the man labeled Taft’s successor would lose by a landslide in part because his foreign policy was viewed as reckless and could lead to World War III. Though not the biggest figure in the Republican foreign policy shift, Goldwater’s role should not be understated, as it was he who brought the conservative wing 180 degrees around from their original position.

1968 featured the return of Richard Nixon, Ike’s Vice President, whose foreign policy platform was similar to Eisenhower’s in many ways, differing more because of its louder tone and personal differences than because of content. Like Eisenhower in 1952, Nixon came in promising to find an end to the messy war started by the Democratic incumbent while refusing any sort of retreat. But what happened in 1968 is less notable than what did not happen – there was no real non-interventionist Republican in the race.
If Republican non-interventionism was going to ever return to the stage after Eisenhower, 1968 would have been the year. Despite the Democratic unpopular war, the Republican field remained internationalist – it was the liberal Democrats who became famous for pushing withdrawal from the war, not conservative Republicans, or prominent Republicans of any kind. This is because during the Eisenhower years, and during the 1960 and 1964 elections, Republicans had wed themselves to the assumptions of the assumption of Cold War internationalism. Even Nelson Rockefeller, the liberal internationalist who ran in 1968, did not openly speak out against the Vietnam War although he did not actively support it.

There was one exception in the 1968 election, one candidate whose fall from grace was a telling sign of the strength of Republican internationalism. Michigan Governor George Romney was polling well during 1967, polling at the top of the presidential pack along with Richard Nixon – in March, Romney was only nine points behind the former Vice President.61 As a former auto executive and state governor, he did not have much of a record on foreign affairs – he needed to articulate a clear policy if he wanted to win. Romney had supported the Vietnam War until his 1965 visit to that country, when he said his doubts began. In August of 1967, Romney would officially come out against the Vietnam War, but in an unfortunate choice of words, he would say he was “brainwashed” by generals into supporting the war. Opponents and war supporters would seize on the comment, and the gap between him and Nixon in the polls would increase by fifteen points by the end of the month.62 His candidacy would collapse, largely because of the comment. Yet it could also be seen as a sign that the

61 Rhodes Cook “Like Father, Like Son? The Romney Run for President” (Center for Politics: September 20, 2007).
62 Cook 2007
Republicans were largely not interested in an anti-war candidate, and the gaffe, which could have been ignored, was simply used to destroy him. The fact that there was no major force in the party to come to his aid, in the establishment or from the public, did not bode well for his core sentiments. It is likely that other Republicans took his collapse as a sign, and no Republican would adapt the anti-war mantle in that year.

**Conclusion: A Party Changed**

The foreign policy doctrines dominating the Republican Party before the convention of 1940 and after the convention of 1960 were vastly different – it is amazing how a party’s foreign policy could change so much in so few years. A number of key figures, and the people who followed them, played leading roles in the shift. Wendell Willkie’s surprise 1940 victory at the convention showed that internationalism could be a force in the Republican Party, particularly during and after World War II. Pearl Harbor led a number of Republicans to defect to the internationalist wing, including Arthur Vandenberg and Thomas Dewey. Dewey would become a primary figure in building Republican internationalism during its years of intraparty dominance during the Roosevelt/Truman Presidencies. Meanwhile, Robert Taft picked up the pieces for the conservative wing after isolationism was repudiated by World War II, championing a reformed and more moderate non-interventionism that almost won him that 1952 nomination, riding the wave of discontent about Korea. The Eastern Elite drafted Eisenhower in 1952 to beat Taft, and, he proceeded to govern using his own brand of “quiet internationalism”, which in many ways was able to bridge the gap between the two warring factions, bipartisanizing internationalism and leading many younger Republicans to accept internationalist assumptions about the Cold War. Ike’s achievements were made
possible in part by John Foster Dulles, the architect of a foreign policy model that aimed to prevent another Korea and another China, succeeding in part by relying on his brother, the CIA Director, to further develop America’s covert action capabilities.

Eisenhower’s years had fundamentally changed the party so much that the three most prominent Republican politicians of the 1960s – Goldwater the conservative, Nixon the moderate, and Rockefeller the liberal – would all be internationalists of different styles, leading their respective wings further in that direction. By 1968, despite an unpopular Democratic war, non-interventionism did not return as a force in Republican presidential politics.

The causes for the shift are myriad, with the above actors playing a vital role in determining the history of their party. Yet other forces were at play as well. International events – a rising war in Europe, Pearl Harbor, the fall of China, trouble in Korea, etc. – would not just directly influence politicians, but would also change the way people thought about America’s role in the world. Many times, noticeably in the early 1940’s, Republican politicians would take their cues from the people – or from the political successes of the opposing party. The role of the media also proved important in foreign policy shifts – from the Yellow Journalism of the 1898 war, to the way that Romney was so easily dismissed in 1968. Various policy reports such as the Nye Committee, the 1954 Doolittle Report, and the Gaither Committee’s missile gap report, would often be used to justify leaders making their positions more extreme, whether the reports were right or not. Yet other factors, such as the mid-century geographic realignment, also may have played a role in the shift, moving the Republican base away from the Midwest over to the Western and Southern Sunbelt states.
The changes of that era continue to have profound effects on today, as different forms of internationalism continue to dominate the political debate. The relative similarities of the foreign policy doctrines of all the presidents since Eisenhower attest to how rare a major shift in foreign policy occurs. As David Unger’s *The Emergency State* has shown, key assumptions of foreign policy have tremendous staying power in the executive office. When the next major Republican shift will come, no one can say, but if the last shift is any indicator, it would require major global changes, the efforts of many individuals who believe strongly in their mission, and a leader like Eisenhower who facilitates the shift by meeting the most important priorities of the doctrine it hopes to supplant.

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