The Systemic and Ideological Sources of Grand Strategic Doctrine: American Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century

by

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Abstract

What explains the puzzling variation in America’s foreign policy posture? This study proposes and tests a theory of American grand strategy that places an emphasis on two key variables: the ideological content of American liberalism and geopolitical conditions abroad. It distinguishes between two varieties of thought within the American liberal tradition—termed negative liberty and positive liberty—and deduces implications for American foreign policy from their content. Differing concepts of liberty cause American statesmen to adopt different interpretations of international threats, different choices in managing strategic trade-offs, and different preferences for military and diplomatic policy tools. Systemic pressures also integrate strategic ends and means, making foreign policy more coherent over time. These propositions are united together with several insights from geopolitical theories to form a Theory of Liberal Foreign Policy (TLFP), which predicts America will pursue distinct grand strategies under different ideological and systemic conditions.

This study uses a variety of primary source documents to measure TLFP’s variables and assess its theoretical power. TLFP is tested through five structured, focused comparisons of American grand strategy towards Europe in the twentieth century: American foreign policy in the period of the Great War (1914-1920); under the interwar Republicans (1921-1932); in the run-up to World War Two (1937-1941); during the origins of the Cold War (1945-1952); and at the strategic transition of America’s Cold War strategy (1953-1963). Each case tests for congruence between TLFP’s independent variables and its predicted strategic outcomes, as well as searching for process-tracing evidence expected by the theory. The general finding is that TLFP does indeed explain the major variation in American grand strategy during the twentieth century, although other factors do exert an impact.

The study makes several contributions. First, it explains an empirical puzzle that has previously resisted a unitary interpretation. In so doing, it suggests that existing realist, liberal, and domestic political theories of American foreign policy are in need of revision. Second, it advances scientific knowledge by synthesizing the best elements of past theorizing into a new theory that generates unique predictions. Third, and novelly, it advances our understanding of liberal ideology by suggesting that variation in liberal approaches to foreign policy is caused by variation in the content of liberalism itself, rather than changes in the international environment.

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Chapter One

Introduction: the Puzzle of American Foreign Policy

In September 1796, President George Washington gave perhaps the most important public speech in the history of American foreign policy. The advice of his “farewell address” would dominate American foreign policy for the next hundred years and haunt American strategic debates in the century that followed. In contemplating the development of contemporary American foreign policy, Washington’s advice is worth quoting at length:

> Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none; or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. Hence, therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves by artificial ties in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities. Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course.... Why forego the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground?

Today, America stands upon foreign ground, not just in Europe, but across the globe.¹

This study offers an explanation of how America quit the advantages of its peculiar situation with regard to Europe. In so doing, it grapples with the most fundamental international commitments of the United States during the twentieth century. Why did America at times engage with European great power politics and at other times prefer to keep its diplomatic distance? Why did it prefer military strategies based on naval, air, and nuclear weapons in some eras, while committing to extensive ground force deployments in other periods? Why did American statesmen sometimes perceive the mere fact of European disorder as a threat, yet on other occasions shrug off political and economic chaos on a grand scale? In sum, what causes the basic posture of American foreign policy to change, and how does this posture lead to the individual commitments America makes?

Beyond their historical importance, these questions raise broader theoretical issues. Realist theories of international relations agree that states will pursue their interests defined in terms of power, but have disagreed on how much power states will seek and the strategies by which they will pursue it. Theories of liberal ideology agree on a basic content to liberal strategic culture, but differ as to the method by which liberal philosophy will be applied in international affairs.

From both perspectives, American foreign policy is an outlier case: geopolitical and ideological variables each take “extreme” values. The United States is perhaps the most geopolitically safe and ideologically liberal great power in world history. American grand strategy is also an anomalous case, poorly accounted for by existing theories and therefore fertile ground for deducing a new one. The case also possesses “intrinsic” interest: for good or for ill, the future of international politics will turn heavily on how American commitments are deployed abroad. A theory that can powerfully explain past American behavior offers the possibility of anticipating future challenges.²

This study proposes a new theory of American grand strategy and applies it to explain the pattern of American policy towards Europe. I argue that, properly understood, the distribution of power abroad and the changing character of American liberalism at home explain the major variation America’s European posture. Specifically, I contend in Chapter Two that there have been two competing interpretations of liberalism in American politics—negative liberty and positive liberty—and that these dueling liberalisms have very different implications for American grand strategy. Novelly, this approach roots changes in liberal foreign policy in the content of liberal ideas themselves, rather than environmental factors of one sort or another. I call the theory expounded in this study a Theory of Liberal Foreign Policy, or TLFP for short.

This chapter sets the stage for delineating TLFP and explains the goals of the project. I proceed in three parts. First, I briefly sketch the major changes in America’s European strategy during the twentieth century, in order to illustrate the compelling nature of the historical puzzle. Second, I outline the requirements for a theory of American grand strategy by illustrating the theoretical indeterminacy of larger research paradigms and the empirical inadequacy of several more specified theories. Finally, I set out my basic research design and explain the scope and limits of the study.

The Puzzle of American Grand Strategy

Accounts of American foreign policy have tended to privilege geopolitical and ideological explanations for American commitments abroad. But the overall pattern of American behavior appears puzzling from both perspectives. Consider the following examples.3

In 1919 and in 1991, a war ended—one hot, the other cold. In both situations, the liberal United States of America was blessed with an enviable power position: more powerful by a considerable margin than other great powers, possessed of a carefully honed fighting machine, and aggressively sought after as an ally. But in each situation, America chose a radically different and surprising path. After World War I, liberal America chose to demobilize its military, eschew European security commitments, and largely turn inward for twenty years to protect its values at home—during one of the least stable and most geopolitically threatening eras in world history. After the Cold War, liberal America kept a sizeable number of forces in Europe, expanded the scope of its security alliance, and launched several wars against unpleasant regimes on behalf of its values abroad—during one of the least geopolitically threatening eras in memory. Under apparently similar structural and ideological conditions, the United States adopted different grand strategies, each of which clashes with our intuitions about the geopolitical and ideological threats and opportunities at hand.

This is not the only puzzle in America’s strategic history. When the United States was at the pinnacle of its strength after the Second World War, a Democratic and Republican president alike went to great lengths to avoid a permanent troop commitment to the European continent. They only reluctantly engaged at all for fear of the Soviet Union swallowing West European industry whole, through conquest or ideological subversion. During the 1960s, American
relative power declined, the appeal of Communism dropped, American burdens rose at home and
on the periphery, and there were threats to the stability of the entire world economic system. But
it was during this era that American statesmen of both parties decided on a permanent European
commitment. Anxious to avoid commitments at the zenith of American might, American
statesmen undertook the costs and risks associated with a stronger commitment in a much less
geopolitically propitious situation. And each of the approaches was adopted by statesmen as
apparently ideologically dissimilar as Truman and Eisenhower, or Nixon and Kennedy.

Finally, the United States twice entered the European civil conflict commonly referred to
as the World Wars. Both times America was lead by an ideologically center-left president
known for his imprint on American attitudes towards foreign affairs; both times America entered
late; both times it was faced with an apparently deteriorating balance of power. Of the two
conflicts, World War II was probably objectively more threatening, since the United States faced
a potentially stable stalemate in 1917 and a nearly collapsed political order after May 1940. But
Wilson’s aid to his European allies was quicker, more massive, and more ambitious than the
comparatively restrained and laggard support of Roosevelt, despite a plausibly similar ideology
and a less threatening situation.

I should note that this interpretation of American foreign policy is not universally shared
and is certainly open to dispute. Nonetheless, I think it is basically correct and that its
implications for international relations theory are underappreciated. It is to these implications
that I now turn.

Theoretical Problems

The cases just highlighted appear puzzling because they clash with our intuitive
expectations for realist and liberal theories of grand strategy. This clash underscores theoretical
indeterminacies of long-standing in both realist and liberal approaches. A new theory is required
to solve the puzzle, while synthesizing and recasting the insights of past work that make it
interesting in the first place.

Such a theory must accomplish three tasks. First, it must be a theory of foreign policy,
not a theory of international politics that describes only permissive conditions for action.
Second, it must resolve the theoretical indeterminacy of realist and liberal theories. In this
regard, it must describe the motor force of American strategy, explaining what makes the United
States expand and retract its commitments abroad. Third, it must remedy the empirical
difficulties of extant theorizing by better explaining the puzzle than its rivals.

In this section, I examine the possibility of explaining the puzzle with existing social
scientific tools. I analyze three broad families of international relations theories: realist theories;
theories of liberal ideology; and theories emphasizing domestic politics. I show that at its
broadest level, each paradigm is under-specified: they all lack sufficient assumptions to make
determinate predictions about American grand strategy. I also contend that more highly-
specified theories drawn from each paradigm are empirically inadequate: they can explain only
some parts of the puzzle. Far from causing the abandonment any of these approaches, such
problems incentivize a search for theoretical refinement.

REALIST THEORIES

Structural realist theories expect that, under conditions of anarchy, balancing coalitions
will tend to form because they promote survival. These assumptions alone are insufficient to
predict foreign policy behavior, since the mechanisms of selection and socialization need not operate uniformly, or at all, on each unit in the system. Whether individual states will balance, the conditions under which they balance, and how much commitment they will make remain open questions. A purely third image theory of American foreign policy must identify additional systemic variables, or additional invariant conditions of the system, to generate the forces necessary to predict strategic behavior. Taken collectively, the offensive and defensive realist schools of thought can claim to have identified such forces. Unfortunately, even so configured, each realist approach has serious problems explaining the puzzle of American grand strategy among the European great powers.

STRUCTURAL REALIST INDETERMINACY. Kenneth Waltz famously drew a distinction between theories of international politics and theories of foreign policy. His own work was a theory of international politics. Because it ostensibly relies only on system level processes like selection and socialization, structural realism can only predict outcomes in world politics, not the choices of individual states. By Waltz’s own admission, “international political theory deals with the pressures of structure on states and not how states will respond to those pressures.” Structural theory has little to tell us about why and when states make particular choices about grand strategy or otherwise. It cannot tell us about the sources of foreign policy. A theory of international politics can only say that the system will tend towards certain recurrent outcomes produced from the combination of all foreign policies.4

Essentially, a structural theory tells us about permissive conditions: it specifies the constraints and opportunities that states face as they compete in the international system and are socialized to its effects. Applied to the United States, a theory of international politics reveals an extraordinarily permissive environment. Throughout the twentieth century, the United States has maintained a massive advantage in the basic measures of economic and industrial might. In economic terms, it has simply been the most powerful state in the system for more than a century, with variation only in the margin of its superiority. At the same time, America also has a very favorable geopolitical position. The United States is isolated from the great powers of Europe and Asia, protected by the giant defensive moats of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and surrounded by countries of trivial economic and military strength. These conditions have not varied much, if at all, in the course of the period under study, yet the United States has taken on highly varied levels of commitments.

In addition to specifying permissive conditions, any theory of foreign policy must provide a motor force—a source of preferences and beliefs that explains state action. In particular, such a theoretical motor must accomplish two tasks: it must power the vehicle of the American state both forward and backward. It must specify a “propulsive force” that explains when and why America chooses to make commitments outside of its secure base in the Western

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4 Kenneth N. Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” in America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power, ed. G. John Ikenberry (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 51. Waltz gives an excellent example of the limits of structural theory in his seminal book: “Germany and Austria-Hungary formed their Dual Alliance in 1879. Since detailed inferences cannot be drawn from the theory, we cannot say just when other states are expected to counter this move. France and Russia waited until 1894. Does this show the theory false by suggesting that states may or may not be brought into balance?” Waltz believes that it does not, unless the intervening period shows behavior “directly out of accord with the theory.” But explaining the policy of France and Russia in the intervening years is exactly the kind of prediction we want a theory of grand strategy to make. For this example, and more on the limits of structural theories, see Kenneth N. Waltz, Theory of International Politics (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), pp. 125, 73-77, respectively.
hemisphere, and it must explain the character of those commitments. At the same time, it must also posit a “retractive force” that explains when and why America chooses to abandon its commitments or avoid new ones, and it must stipulate the character of those limitations.

Structural realist theory therefore leaves two important questions unanswered: under what conditions do individuals states make or avoid commitments and what changes in the international system cause this variation. Structural realism lacks what E.H. Carr called the “springs of action” necessary to explain political behavior: the goals, motivations, and mobilizing forces that account for the choice of one path over another. An explanation of American grand strategy requires a theory of foreign policy: a theory that can explain when and why America chooses or avoids particular commitments. The realist paradigm has developed two strands of theorizing that could plausibly meet these demands: offensive and defensive realism. 5

OFFENSIVE REALISM. Offensive realism proposes that states will expand to the limits of their power. Theorists of realpolitik since Thucydides have alleged that states “by a necessary law of their nature rule wherever they can.” As Gideon Rose puts it, “the relative material power resources countries possess will shape the magnitude and ambition... of their foreign policies: as relative power rises states will seek more influence abroad, and as it falls their actions will be scaled back accordingly.” Such states, in a sort of mindless fashion, reach out for whatever they can grab. 6

John Mearsheimer, whose sophisticated treatment of the power-maximizing proposition is the best developed, crafted a theoretical reason for this behavior: the international system contains deep structural uncertainty. States can never know how much power is “enough,” since sometimes material capabilities are translated inefficiently into military prowess. One can never know what the distribution of power will be in the future, and friends today could easily become enemies tomorrow. “Given the difficulty of determining how much power is enough for today and tomorrow,” Mearsheimer argues, states will “act offensively to amass as much power” as possible. Conversely, when powerful states are rampaging about, it pays to conserve one’s strength. It is always better let another state commit to oppose threatening expansion, rather than exhaust one’s own resources on the front lines of a fight—because who knows what will happen after a war is over. 7

7 John J. Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 35; see also pp. 20-21, 31-40, and esp. 34-36. I use Mearsheimer as the paradigmatic example of offensive realism, because he explicitly roots the conditions of state expansion in the international system. However, an important qualification is in order: because Mearsheimer gives great weight to geography, he is actually a defensive realist as regards the United States, and his predictions for American behavior track defensive realist predictions. I nevertheless treat his theory as what
In sum, deep uncertainty about the future produces a drive to maximize power. A propulsive force exists to expand into power vacuums and to dominate weaker states. A state will also be propelled to make commitments against expanding enemies whose threat is undeniably present: those hegemons who must be stopped now before it is too late. A retractive force exists in the urge to conserve strength and await future opportunities. States will retreat and retrench in the face of resolute opposition in force and will attempt to limit and minimize their commitments to stopping the strong. The key variable driving change is the distribution of power: the presence or absence of power vacuums and very powerful aggressors.

But power-maximizing theories confront important anomalies when faced with the puzzle of American European grand strategy: several periods of low or limited commitment in the face of potential hegemons and power vacuums. Superficially, at least, one might explain the American intervention in the First World War and support for the League of Nations on the basis of a power vacuum or anti-hegemonic rationale. But why then did America turn on its heel in the inter-war period and disengage from political commitments abroad and military armament at home? There was no less of an opportunity to expand after the war. Indeed, there was an even larger power vacuum to be filled: Germany was temporarily shattered and the Western Allies were begging for increased American commitments.

Similarly, the American expansion after the Cold War might seem natural to an offensive realist. America was the sole remaining superpower and had lots of room to throw its weight around. But there has never been a larger power vacuum than the one after World War Two: Europe in 1945 has been aptly described as a “zero-polar” situation, with all the European great powers thoroughly devastated. Yet America moved to fill this vacuum only haltingly and unwillingly, constantly seeking to shift responsibility to others and looking for the exit. It was only after Europe recovered economically, and the Soviet Union developed militarily, that the United States committed to permanently managing European politics.

Finally, American entrance into the two World Wars looks discrepant. Perhaps 1917 was the ideal opportunity to extend American influence on the continent. But in that case, America missed an opportunity in 1939, and then failed to act decisively to defend the remaining great powers after the fall of France. On the other hand, if World War II did not constitute an opportunity to expand offensively or an incentive to contain for defensive purposes, then the Great War is inexplicable. These empirical problems cast serious doubt that on the viability of purely offensive realist explanations for American grand strategy.

DEFENSIVE REALISM. Defensive realists propose that states will seek only enough power to be secure, because other states will surely check too much expansion. But security also surely requires firm commitments to check the aggression of others. So how much commitment is enough? Defensive realists tend to answer with reference to the “offense-defense balance.” Defined narrowly, the balance is a characteristic of the international system: it asserts that geography and technology at any point in time and space determine whether conquest is easier or more difficult. Depending on the character of the balance, competition will be more or less intense, and state strategies more or less committed. When geography and technology are more favorable to the offense, conquest is easier and security is harder to get. This situation generates a propulsive force: states expand more often and commit more quickly to stop expansion. When

geography and technology favor the defense, states are more secure. Such a defensive advantage is a retractive force, leading states to commit themselves less frequently and with more limitations.\(^8\)

Attempts to operationalize and measure the offense-defense balance have not met with great success. But from the point of view of the United States, determining the balance is easy. American geography is a massive defensive advantage in all eras. To threaten the sovereignty or territorial integrity of the United States, an aggressor would have to be able to defeat the American Navy and launch an amphibious invasion of American shores. Alternatively, one can imagine an aggressor building up an army in a proxy state located on the land mass of North or South America and advancing in conquest from there. Or potentially, a series of well coordinated naval and land operations could result in a strangling economic blockade of the United States.

But all of these operations would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to execute. They could only be undertaken in situations where military technology favored the offense. Most importantly, only extremely powerful aggressors—potential hegemons—could possibly make the attempt: states with a truly massive amount of economic and industrial resources, and without rival great powers balancing against them at home. Such states are rare. In short, America should only fear a potential hegemon. The United States should be propelled into commitments in order to prevent one great power from conquering Europe and mobilizing its resources against the Western hemisphere. Otherwise, it should return to its secure home, favoring minimal commitments if any.

Once again, history poses a problem for realist theory. Defensive realism cannot explain American commitments abroad in several periods that lacked a credible potential hegemon. Perhaps an offense-defense perspective can tell us why America returned to isolation after the First World War: a multipolar Europe posed few threats to the homeland. But it cannot explain why America went to war in 1917, Germany was opposed by no less than three European powers, even if it was menacing American merchants with its submarines. Moreover, the military technology of the day was woefully inadequate to assault the Western hemisphere: imagine Gallipoli on a massive scale or the Western Front trench line somewhere on the Yucatán peninsula. America had no credible security fears in 1917. From the point of view of the offense-defense balance, World War I was a war of choice. Even more inexplicable is the Wilsonian post-war strategy—with Germany in tatters, what needs an American commitment? But the propulsion of American power abroad was central to Wilson’s post-war plan.

In the same vein, defensive realism may perform well in explaining American commitments against Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. With Europe in disarray and the British Empire exhausted, these look like states that could quickly assimilate most of the important industry and territory in the developed world. Moreover, they came to power in the age of carrier warfare and blitzkrieg, more favorable technologies for conquest. But how can

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defensive realism explain the transition of American Cold War strategy from lesser to greater commitment? The economic might of Western Europe rivaled the Soviets by the mid 1950s. And second strike nuclear arsenals—a technological outcome which at least makes conquest much more difficult—were available by the mid-1960s at the latest. Yet this was the period when America re-doubled its commitments abroad. All of this is to say nothing of American expansion after the Cold War, which must remain completely inexplicable to defensive realist theories.

SUMMARY. Structural realist theories of international politics cannot explain American grand strategy because they cannot explain when and why America chooses to make or avoid commitments. Structural realism specifies permissive conditions, but does not propose a motor force for when America deploys forward or pulls back. For this purpose we need a theory of foreign policy. Offensive realist theories identify that motor as the deep uncertainty that infuses the international system, which propels states forward into power vacuums and backwards from costly engagements. Defensive realists locate the motor in the offense-defense balance, which spurs commitments to stop potential hegemons but otherwise indicates indifference. Both perspectives cannot explain large portions of American strategic history, reinforcing the puzzle. To construct an adequate explanation of American grand strategy, one must add other variables beyond the international system.

THEORIES OF LIBERAL IDEOLOGY

Theories of liberal ideology posit a liberal strategic culture that normatively values peace, trade, and democracy. This culture also promotes corresponding causal beliefs that the expansion of liberalism through free trade, regime change, and international law will lead to peace. But liberal strategic culture is indeterminate with regard to predicting American foreign policy: it does not specify when America will propel itself forward and when it will ratchet back. However, two important research programs shed light on the conditions under which liberalism will switch from holding itself as an example at home to vindicating its values abroad: these programs might be termed “liberal expansionism” and “ideological distance.” Interestingly, neither program sees variation in liberal behavior as having much to do with the content of liberal ideas. Both programs face major anomalies in addressing the puzzle that call their utility as comprehensive explanations into question.

INDETERMINACY IN LIBERAL STRATEGIC CULTURE. National culture has often been cited as a variable with major impact on American foreign policy. Specifically, the unique course of American development—the enlightenment ideas surrounding its formation, its lack of a feudal past, the absence of revolutionary and reactionary responses to modernization, and its broad based middle class society—are said to have led to a society thoroughly dominated by philosophic liberalism. Loosely defined, liberalism is an ideology committed to human freedom and specifying the manner of bringing it about. This national ideology influences political outcomes by confining the parameters of political debate and setting the terms on which ideological disputes affect political conflict.9

Philosophic liberalism has influenced foreign policy as well as domestic politics. The development of the liberal tradition led to a corresponding set of ideas about normative goals for international relations, the most effective causes of peace and human flourishing, and the origins of war and other deviations from human progress. A basic consensus among international relations theorists exists about the content of liberal ideas in world politics.

First and foremost, liberalism is “anti-realist” in orientation: it views the competing armaments, violent wars, secret diplomacy, and shifting alliances of the international realm as unnatural and evil. Liberalism rejects power politics as an aberration, alleging that the symptoms of realist behavior among states just listed are themselves the causes of continuing tragedy and destruction in world affairs.  

Second, liberalism posits an alternative vision of politics among nations, which privileges peace and international progress as the natural state, while specifying the causes of, and solutions for, the war problem. Scholars agree that international liberalism consists of a number of interlinked propositions, starting with “the apparently uncontroversial thesis that peace is good and war is bad.” Historically, liberals saw “war as neither desirable nor inevitable.... it was perceived as a marker and consequence of social and moral backwardness.” Another liberal idea is that commercial exchange and war are negatively linked. Among liberals “Trade and commerce were presented as both morally elevating and ethically superior to war.... Their contrast and exclusivity meant that to the extent that one was predominant the other declined.”

The major problem of international politics, for liberals, is that bad actors dam up the peace-inducing effects of trade and start wars that serve their own interests but hurt the global public. Atavistic social classes and violent regime types are the source of international conflict; the obvious solution is more democracy and public control over foreign affairs. As arch Manchester-liberal Richard Cobden put it, “There is no remedy for [war] but in the wholesome exercise of the people’s opinion on behalf of their own interests. The middle and industrious class of England can have no interest apart from the preservation of peace. The honors, the fame, the emoluments of war belong not to them; the battle plain is the harvest field of aristocracy, watered with the blood of the people.” Finally, a basic structure of international law will help states compete peacefully and enrich themselves with trade. Tony Smith summarizes the liberal world-view well: in its mature form, liberalism calls for a community of “democratic states bound together through international organizations dedicated to the peaceful handling of conflicts, free trade, and mutual defense.”


Cobden quoted in ibid., p. 27, n.16; Tony Smith, America’s Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 7. There is broad agreement that the liberal triad of trade, democracy, and international law constitutes a distinctive and well developed vision of the causes of international peace. See Michael W. Doyle, “Liberalism and World Politics,” The
Philosophic liberalism thus sees human progress as advancing towards a natural state of peace, trade, and democracy, and views illiberal actors and their power political behavior as the major impediment to its vision. However, scholars also agree that history has seen at least two distinctive ways of applying the content of liberal theories to foreign policy. These differ not in their normative goals, but in a dispute about the best way to achieve them. In America, these differences stem from the very hegemony of liberal ideology. As Hartz quips in another context, “It is only when you take your ethics for granted that all problems emerge as problems of technique.” To wit: some liberals believe that international progress will occur when America serves as an example to inspire the world; other liberals believe America must vindicate liberal values by its own action.13

Liberal “exemplarists” believe that America can “better serve the cause of universal democracy by setting an example rather than by imposing a model.” They tend to see the harmonious development of world politics as slow but inexorable, as the march of human progress inevitably leads international relations towards its natural state. They also believe interference with this development is unwise. As Jonathan Monten summarizes, “Exemplarism also contains a claim about the efficacy of democracy promotion and the limits to U.S. power. Exemplarists have been comparatively skeptical toward the U.S. capacity to produce liberal change in the world. Because democracy is fragile and difficult to propagate, the ability of the U.S. government to directly promote and consolidate democratic institutions is limited and constrained.” What is worse, it may also lead to compromising American liberal institutions at home. The best course is to improve America’s own domestic politics to serve as a beacon for others; to trade with whoever will consent to commercial exchange; and to propagate and obey, but not enforce, international law.14

Liberal “vindicationalists,” by contrast, believe that America must act in foreign policy so as to “vindicate the right.” The liberal millennium will not come about under its own power—vindicationalists tend to believe of foreign affairs that “If the obstacles to man’s advancement are removed, and the flaws in his institutions corrected, progress will be swift and sure; otherwise it will be slow and uncertain.” What is worse, a lack of progress will be dangerous—vindicationalists consider the “exemplarist expectation that other states will emulate the U.S. example... as at best inefficient and at worst utopian.” If the illiberal causes of war are allowed to flourish, they will certainly come to threaten the United States. The best course is to use

America power to advance liberalism abroad: to promote and defend democratic regimes; to expand free trade; and to take responsibility for organizing international politics. Like structural realism, liberal theories of foreign policy have a core set of insights that remain underspecified for predicting foreign policy behavior. Under what conditions will America make commitments to promote its values and when will it restrain itself? When will the liberal motor produce vindicationalist propulsion and when will exemplarists put the ship of state in reverse? And what is it about liberalism that will cause this variation? Also like realism, liberal theorists have two plausible approaches that could answer these questions: “liberal expansionism” and the “ideological distance” approach.

LIBERAL EXPANSIONISM. The first line of argument holds that liberal ideology mandates an extensive and aggressive role in the world—liberalism is an essentially expansionist ideology. Drawing on arguments from the liberal peace literature, “liberal expansionists” hold that liberal states are extremely distrustful and fearful of non-liberal states. Illiberal states use illegitimate coercion and violence against their own people, and are therefore expected to behave with similar aggression in international politics. Indeed, a world with illiberal states will not remain at peace for long, and liberal states will either be threatened by illiberal violence from without, or by illiberal transformation from within.

When faced with such a world, liberals fear America will come under threat from expanding illiberalism, and may have to wreck its economy and society defending itself, destroying the liberal values it sought to defend. Thus, its own liberalism forces America to adopt an aggressive grand strategy. American statesmen will seek to end the threat from illiberalism overseas by transforming international politics into the image of American domestic society. As Layne puts it, the liberalism will export the “imperialism of idealism” by marrying “a heritage of expansionism and a conviction of mission.” Liberals will promote commerce, the rule of law, and democratic forms of government—if necessary, by the sword.

At the same time, when opposed by countervailing power abroad, liberals will be forced to hold back their expansionist urges. What liberalism needs to vindicate its values are opportunities for expansion; in essence, liberal foreign policy is offensive realism aimed at liberal goals. Desch summarizes that “Liberalism, at least since the writings of Kant, manifests consistent expansionist ‘urges’,” but it was the “relative power positions of Britain and the United States that changed their foreign policy.” Layne argues several “systemic preconditions had to be met” before liberal America could pursue a vindicationalist foreign policy in Europe: “the United States needed to enjoy a significant relative power advantage over the other major states in the international system” and “because rising powers usually expand into regions where they won’t encounter strong opposition, the distribution of power... had to tilt decisively in

17 Layne, The Peace of Illusions, p. 32.
America’s favor.” In short, the motor in the liberal vehicle is always propelling American foreign policy forward at full tilt, but a car pushing against a brick wall won’t go anywhere.\(^{18}\)

This perspective faces similar problems to offensive realism: there have been numerous opportunities for liberal expansion in Europe that America passed up. Following the First World War, the United States had enormous opportunities to help manage European politics on behalf of its values, but more or less ignored them. Entry into both World Wars might be conceivably explained in terms of a vindicationalist foreign policy, but fighting in massively costly great power conflicts hardly seem like “golden opportunities” provided by a lack of strong opposition. The timing and manner of entry into these wars seems odd as well, since it is difficult to understand why a uniform liberal assumed very different approaches for when and how to spread its values. Liberal expansionism does well with the unipolar era, but has difficulty with the Cold War transition, since opportunities for commitment were being reduced just as America was entrenching its position.

**IDEOLOGICAL DISTANCE.** Another body of research contends that liberalism is just one of several transnational ideologies, and that the character of liberal foreign policy depends on the international ideological environment in which it operates. “Ideological distance” theories explain the variation in liberal foreign policy by the degree of illiberalism present in world politics. When international affairs are dominated by states with domestic ideologies far-removed from liberal goals, liberals will adopt confrontational strategies based in power politics. When faced with more-like minded states, they will adopt more benign policies. In Mark Haas’ words, “the core claim is that there exists a strong relationship between the ideological distance dividing states’ leaders and their understandings of the level of threat they pose to one another’s central domestic and international interests.”\(^{19}\)

These patterns are caused by human psychology and the desire for domestic power. Distant ideologies abroad will be mistrusted and feared as internationally dangerous “out-groups.” Conversely, state leaders will have a psychological affinity to their ideological conferees abroad. At the same time, ideologues in one state will fear or cheer the potential diffusion effects of ideological battles abroad—an enemy ideology’s victories elsewhere are perceived as domestic defeats and vice versa. Ideological “adherents will derive positive utility from the gains of a state governed by their ideology,” while also seeing such gains as a buttress for their ideology at home. Such perceptions will cause an “increasing desire to convert ideological rivals” abroad. Finally, it will simply be more difficult for ideological opponents to

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reach agreeable settlements because different world views will lead to mutual misinterpretation—ideological distance causes communication break-down and misperception.\textsuperscript{20}

Ideological distance theories are most usefully aimed at explaining the conflictual or cooperative nature of American commitments, rather than the extent of such commitments. But this prediction does suggest a potential motor for change in American grand strategy: ideological changes abroad. When America perceives hostile ideologies overseas, vindicalist pressures will push its commitments outward in order to protect American security and values. When other European powers are perceived as ideologically friendly, cooperative relations with them may allow the retraction of commitments.

Ideological distance theories also confront empirical issues in the history of American grand strategy. Specifically, the United States has been frequently confronted with similar ideological distributions in Europe and adopted very different strategies. While ideological distance theory could potentially interpret American alignment during the two World Wars, it would have a hard time explaining the timing and route to American entry. During the Cold War, it would be difficult to argue that America’s ideological distance from the Soviet Union changed dramatically, yet America strategy shifted in the middle of the superpower conflict. If one seeks to employ party identification as an ideological proxy, as ideological distance theorists often do, America employed similar Cold War and post-Cold War strategies under Democratic and Republican administrations. And in Western Europe, at least, America was confronted with basically democratic countries after the First World War and the Cold War—yet American commitments were entirely different in each period.

**SUMMARY.** Liberal ideology, in the abstract, cannot explain variation in American grand strategy. The ideational content of the liberal approach to foreign affairs is uniform, in that all liberals tend to believe peace is the natural state of world politics; that increasing trade, democracy, and international law will increase peace; and that war and insecurity are caused by illiberal actors and power political practices. But two different approaches exist in applying liberal values to foreign policy, and liberal theories require a source of variation in order to explain the adoption of exemplarist and vindicalist approaches at different times. Liberal expansionists can posit an ideological motor in the international system, with uniformly vindicalist liberalism advancing when international opportunities for expansion present themselves. Ideological distance theorists might point to the changing distribution of European ideologies or partisan changes at home to explain the propulsive and retractive forces driving American commitments. But neither perspective can explain large portions of the American puzzle.

**THEORIES OF DOMESTIC POLITICS**

Several other broad theoretical families have been used to explain American foreign policy, roughly grouped here into second image explanations emphasizing domestic political variables. Bureaucratic politics theories claim that foreign policy will be the outcome of pushing and hauling between self-interested organizations seeking to increase their size, wealth, and autonomy. Institutional theories point towards the fractured nature of the American state—the

division of power between the executive and the legislative branches, and the importance of public opinion—to explain the nature of American commitments. Sectoral economic theories argue that American grand strategy is the product of changing political coalitions representing economic interests, which make or retract strategic commitments based on their economic spillover effects. Bureaucratic and institutional perspectives are indeterminate, as they are largely useful for predicting strategic coherence rather than expansion and retraction. Of the three perspectives, only sectoral economic theories can point to a theoretical motor explaining the expansion and retrenchment of American commitments. Unfortunately, this motor is in need of empirical and theoretical repair.

**INDETERMINACY OF BUREAUCRATIC AND INSTITUTIONAL THEORIES.** Organization theory has long noted the potentially sizeable impact that the apparatus of the modern state can have on foreign policy making. Bureaucracies are large, hierarchically structured, and functionally differentiated organizations. They have incentives to champion policies that privilege the importance of their function, the material interests of their hierarchy of personnel, and their freedom of action in a highly uncertain environment. Such organizations will seek to maximize their size, wealth, and autonomy from external interference. These goals serve the organizations’ material needs and protect their capacity to execute policies on a large scale. The modern state is made up of several such organizations, and bureaucratic theorists argue that organizations will compete to shape policy. The outcome of strategic decisions should reflect the compromises and victories of inter- and intra-organizational struggles.21

Students of American foreign policy have also underscored the peculiar nature of the American state as having an important impact on foreign policy. Power is divided into multiple centers, all of which are open to influence by public opinion. The legislature and the executive compete to shape foreign policy, while both branches keep a careful watch on their masters, the American public. John Owen has suggested, for instance, that liberal public opinion restrains realist elites during times of crisis through the mechanism of American’s open institutional structure; others have argued that Congress plays a particularly important role in limiting and directing the action of executive agents. In any event, institutional theories imply that we should expect the special arrangements of government structure to make a big difference for American commitments abroad.22

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In their extant form, neither bureaucratic nor institutional theories of American foreign policy can explain the puzzle. While it is conceivable that one could develop either perspective into a variable that could explain the expansion and retraction of American commitments over long periods of time, I am not aware of any such attempts. Instead, each paradigm explains best the incoherency and failure of American commitments. Bureaucratic log-rolls or organizational power grabs are unlikely to produce a carefully balanced foreign policy with optimal results. Congress and public opinion are both likely to restrain executive action and make the coordination of commitments difficult. Both perspectives can tell us a great deal about particular foreign policies, but both also lack the motor needed to explain the pattern of American strategy over long periods of time.

SECTORAL ECONOMIC THEORIES. Some theories of American foreign policy find their theoretical motor in groups of material interests present in American society, usually taking the form of different economic sectors. Sectoral models of grand strategy include two core elements. First, they posit a set of domestic economic sectors that have financial interests in security policy abroad. Second, such sectors use political parties to form coalitions that advocate grand strategies consistent with their interests. Coalitional politics means that sectors must often compromise their ideal foreign policy to maintain their coalition, but should still prefer the resulting strategy to that offered by opposing coalitions.23

There are two essential types of sectoral interest. Domestically oriented sectors do most of their business in the home economy. These sectors usually compete with imports, and so favor economic policies that discriminate against foreign trade. More importantly for strategic purposes, they have no interest in securing foreign markets, thus providing a retractive force for American grand strategy: domestic sectors think any resources spent on security policies beyond defending the homeland are wasted. Since these resources are extracted from domestic industry along with everyone else, an active security policy is viewed with disdain. Domestic interests tend to be nationalist and inward focused, preferring strategies of isolation or minimal activity abroad.24


24 Lobell, The Challenge of Hegemony: Grand Strategy, Trade, and Domestic Politics, pp. 24-26 has a good statement of this baseline typology, shared in its core by all the authors in the previous note.
Internationally oriented sectors do much more of their business in foreign markets. They can be exporters of goods or raw materials, direct investors in foreign business, or banking and financial entities with loans overseas. These sectors have a great interest in access to foreign markets, which entails support for free trade, international monetary and financial stability, and political stability in foreign countries. Security policy can have important distributional impact for international interests—if commitments abroad can help secure peace, maintain currency stability, and buttress free trade, then such grand strategies will give them disproportionate benefits. For these reasons, sectors oriented towards overseas markets produce a propulsive force in American grand strategy. They will be outwardly focused and internationalist, preferring active security strategies paid for on the backs of domestic interests.\textsuperscript{25}

Sectoral approaches imply that grand strategy should alternate with parties exchanging power. But during the early Cold War, a Republican and Democratic president both pursued the same strategy of limited commitments to Europe; indeed, if anything, the supposedly inward oriented Republican administration made greater commitments to the continent. During the late Cold War period, three Democratic and three Republican administrations made the same basic kinds of commitments. Likewise, after the Cold War, two Democratic and two Republican administrations have followed the same path. Party change in the executive proves a poor predictor of grand strategy. Moreover, American entry into the World Wars shows that there has been important intra-administration variation in America’s most important strategic decisions. It seems unlikely that coalitional structure or financial incentives changed two or three years into each conflict.

Theoretically, it is debatable whether the posited strategic preferences of outward oriented interests make sense. The logic of outward oriented internationalism is that free trade, international financial openness, and foreign markets must be defended with security commitments. Outward oriented interests are said to prefer institutional strategies because they promote peace and stability, keeping commerce flowing and markets open. For the same reason, international interests are alleged—much more vaguely, it must be noted—to support broad security commitments. The logic here is that resolute commitments can deter aggressors and promote peace.\textsuperscript{26}

But it is seriously debatable whether security institutions can help support peace—or whether they have ever really been tried: even the comparatively robust League of Nations was hardly the collective security organization of liberal theory. In any case, strong institutional solutions to security problems are vastly over-predicted by sectoral theories. Moreover, commitments abroad may promote peace and macro-economic stability, but they may also bring the onset of war: security commitments may threaten and spiral rather than balance and deter. The theoretical expectations for a peace-promoting international interest are indeterminate. As Jonathan Kirshner has shown, the preferences of the financial community—one commonly cited


outward interest—have generally been for isolation and appeasement, rather than deterrence and commitment abroad.27

SUMMARY. Sectoral economic, bureaucratic, and institutional interests cannot explain the pattern of American grand strategy towards Europe. Bureaucratic and institutional paradigms mostly explain resistance to change and incoherence in policy, rather than variation in commitments over time. Moreover, policy clearly does change and possesses greater and lesser degrees of coherence. Of the three, only sectoral economic theories possess a theoretical motor with sufficient variation to power the changes observed in history. But the approach runs into a series of empirical problems because of its reliance on partisan coalitions, and it is not even clear that its predictions for internationally oriented interests are completely coherent.

Research Design and Limitations

I conclude this chapter with a research design informed by the theoretical indeterminacy and empirical limitations of the major perspectives on American foreign policy. My goal is to develop and test a new theory of American grand strategy, taking advantage of the insights of previous work. The paradigmatic origins of the variables are thus viewed primarily in a complementary rather than a competitive light. After describing the basic theoretical enterprise, I lay out a strategy for testing the new theory, as well as some inferential limitations inherent in the project’s scope.

A THEORETICAL AGENDA

The preceding discussion shows that existing theories do not adequately explain variation in American grand strategy towards Europe. These results are hardly surprising. Most theories of American foreign policy are not empirically comprehensive; that is, they are configured to explain only some parts of the puzzle. The solution offered here is a synthetic approach: I use key insights of past ideological and realist work to deduce a new theory of grand strategy, specific to the American context. I call the model a Theory of Liberal Foreign Policy, or TLFP for ease of reference.

The principal innovations of TLFP are to root liberalism’s theoretical motor in the changing character of liberal ideology over time, and to integrate these new liberal propositions with older insights from balance of power theory. This effort is undertaken in Chapter Two. I then test the new theory across five cases of change in American grand strategy from 1914 to 1963, in Chapters Three through Seven: American foreign policy in the period of the Great War (1914-1920); under the interwar Republicans (1921-1932); in the run-up to World War Two (1937-1941); during the origins of the Cold War (1945-1952); and at the strategic transition of America’s Cold War strategy (1953-1963).

I use three methods for evaluating the strength of TLFP. First, I employ congruence testing: I check to see if the observed values of American grand strategy match those predicted by the values on the independent variables. To execute this method, I develop conceptual understandings and measurement schemes for three variables: the international system, liberal ideology, and grand strategy. While designed with the American case in mind, these concepts

have the potential to be of broader comparative use. The independent variables of system structure and liberal ideology are measured at the beginning of each case. Second, I use process-tracing to observe whether the causal logic developed by TLFP matches that found in the policy decision-making at the center of each case. Congruence testing and process-tracing comprise the bulk of the empirical material. Finally, in the conclusion, I engage in comparative analysis, showing how isolating change in the independent variables over time provides a powerful explanation for the major variation in America’s strategic posture. 28

This research strategy is, from a theoretical point of view, synthetic rather than competitive. A competitive approach would deduce a series of empirical statements from alternate theoretical paradigms and compare them to observed reality. Ideally, these statements would contradict each other as applied to the cases under study, since this would allow the observer to infer which paradigm was more powerful when alternatives were placed head to head. As suggested above, this kind of approach is likely simply to uncover an empirical and theoretical morass. Realist theories would be strong in some cases, ideological theories strong in others, and none would be able to account for major variation over the whole pattern of American grand strategy. Instead, I use realist and liberal theorizing as a foundation from which to deduce and integrate a new theory, whose aim is to explain the whole breadth of the puzzling American case.

This approach does not let TLFP off the hook by giving it the field to itself. Rather, I raise the bar, pitting TLFP against the performance of the most powerful competing perspectives in each case. I chose these alternatives on an ad-hoc basis: in some cases economic, institutional, or bureaucratic theories will be particularly strong; in other cases more pure variants of realism are examined. The goal is to force TLFP to confront the best existing explanations on their own turf, in order to determine how much it really adds to our understanding of American foreign policy.

TLFP is designed to explain a specific empirical domain, which will place limits on how far the theory can travel outside the context of American grand strategy towards Europe. Nonetheless, the unique aspects of the American case allow us to make some general statements about the paradigms that underlie TLFP. First, from the perspective of ideological theories, the United States is an easy case. Historians and political scientists alike agree that America represents the preeminent example of a liberal country. The success of ideological variables here will tell us little about their general power. But because liberalism takes on such an extreme value, the process driving liberal foreign policy should be especially clear. Observing this process provides a baseline for further research on the impact of ideological variables in less favorable contexts and for establishing the conditions under which such variables will be powerful.

Second, from the perspective of geopolitical theories, the United States is a difficult case. Isolated from great power politics and protected by natural defensive advantages, the pressures of the international system will be felt less powerfully in American than in most other countries of the first rank. If geopolitical forces are found to be important in the American case, this strengthens the over-all power of the basic structural realist approach.

LIMITATIONS

28 A good discussion of these methods can be found in Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).
There are three principal areas in which this study is limited and may have nothing to say at all: the foreign policy of other states; American strategy in regions outside Europe; and American policy in most areas of international economics. These limitations are necessary because American grand strategy towards the great powers is a conceptually distinct domain. As a theory designed to operate in this domain, the argument of this study may travel only intermittently, and with adjustments, to other areas.

AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM. Without taking a position on the many barrels of ink that have been spilled on the topic of American exceptionalism, it is difficult to deny that America occupies a unique strategic space. It is perhaps the most geopolitically isolated great power in world history: there has never been another great power in the Western hemisphere, let alone on the borders of the United States. The Atlantic and Pacific Oceans are barriers the likes of which have never been crossed in force. During the twentieth century, this geopolitical isolation has been abetted by massive power: America has been the most dominant state in the system throughout the period. Economically, the world has been unipolar since the turn of the twentieth century. And, whether one accepts the power of liberal ideas or not, America’s ideological heritage is certainly peculiar—it missed out on monarchy, aristocracy, fascism, communism, and a host of minor political causes and movements, all of which were common among European and Asian great powers. Simply put, America has always had the freedom to do as it pleased, the capability to plausibly implement its schemes, and a unique set of ideologies permeating its decisions.

A theory designed to explain the behavior of such an odd country may not do very well in other contexts. This possibility is unsurprising, since the reverse is also true: the reason American grand strategy is so puzzling is because theories designed for other contexts do not travel very well to this outlier case. At most, one might expect the explanation offered here to travel to other geopolitically isolated great powers that have experience with liberal ideas—Great Britain, perhaps. But even there, the differences in the amount of isolation, surplus power, and cultural consistency of ideologies ought to have pronounced effects on its explanatory power.

GREAT POWER POLITICS IN EUROPE. State behavior towards great powers can be very different than behavior towards other types of states. Great power politics is an intensely competitive realm: vital interests are at stake, the threat of violence is near at hand, and a guarantee of help is nowhere to be found. States are locked in struggle and fear for survival. Whether or not specific realist theories can accurately predict strategic behavior, great powers live in a broadly realist world. States are both less cooperative and more cautious in this realm than they may be in others. Great power politics provides a kind of discipline for statesmen, and focuses them on the main chance: these arenas have priority over others and only the most important factors tend to drive decisions.

Moreover, the region in which great power relations take place matters a great deal. Europe is different from Asia: it has a different cultural and political history, a different economic landscape, and importantly, a different actual landscape. European industrial might is densely concentrated in a small area easily accessible by military might. Asian economic power has historically been concentrated on an island: Japan. In the contemporary era, the flat plains of northern Europe stand in stark contrast to the large mountains and seas of Asia.

TLFP is thus less likely to explain behavior unconcerned with great powers, or taking place outside of Europe. The relationships and policies America pursues on the periphery are entirely different from those America has had with Europe. Many things may matter in the
developing world or the Western hemisphere that do not intrude on American strategy towards Europe. The context for European politics is also very different from that of Asian politics. It is possible that the theory constructed for American foreign policy in Europe might have some relevance to Asian great power politics or to great power competition in the periphery. But once again, these are areas where the theory would need to be reconfigured to accommodate the wealth of other variables that may influence other contexts.

SECURITY, NOT ECONOMICS. Last, economic intercourse is fundamentally different from security and diplomatic relations. To be sure, economic might is the foundation of military power and the ultimate cause of security. Important economic questions do at times intrude on the world of alliances and military power, and at such times TLFP ought to be able to explain economic decisions. But at bottom, a sizeable portion of economic relationships are positive sum games: mutual gains are possible, cooperation is easier, and violence far removed from the exchange. The factors that influence trade policy, commercial regulation, financial harmonization, and other classic topics of international political economy will likely be very different from those at work in the domain of classical grand strategy.

It is therefore very unlikely that the theory of this book will be relevant to most economic interactions. The lone exception should be those issues that intersect with major security concerns. I do not aim to argue that international political economy does not matter to grand strategy. Indeed, several times in the twentieth century, international monetary and financial issues have had roles of central importance in American strategy, and in such cases I believe the theory here can be illuminating. But I do believe that most of international economic exchange represents a distinct domain, and do not expect a theory of political military grand strategy to be of much use there.

Conclusion

The history of American strategic commitments to Europe in the twentieth century presents a puzzle. Under constant conditions of geopolitical isolation and massive power, America has undertaken a highly varied set of international commitments: it went from isolation to war and back to isolation in a short period of time, briefly adopting an intensely internationalist strategy of collective security. It entered the Second World War with different timing and goals than in the first conflict. America then waged a Cold War against the Soviet Union, but adopted two different grand strategies. First, a limited strategy of temporary commitments in the early Cold War when the Soviet Union was strongest, and then a more committed strategy of permanent power management after the balance had equalized and Europe had grown strong. After its adversary fell apart in 1991, it expanded despite the total absence of a security threat. These commitments cannot be squared with changes in the balance of power or in threatening international conditions.

Realist and liberal theories alike fail to capture the major variation in American grand strategy. Structural realism is under-specified when applied to foreign policy behavior; offensive and defensive realism disagree as to the effects of the international system and both fail to explain important parts of the puzzle. Liberal ideological theories have identified the core content of the liberal worldview, but admit there are at least two ways it has been applied. Liberal expansionist and ideological distance approaches might be applied to explain this variation, but both face empirical difficulties in the attempt. Economic, bureaucratic, and institutional theories either lack a theoretical motor for explaining variation or face empirical
difficulties. The object of this study is therefore to create and test a new model for American grand strategy towards Europe that can explain the puzzle: a Theory of Liberal Foreign Policy (TLFP). TLFP breaks new ground among liberal theories by pointing to the ideological content of liberalism as a key factor causing strategic shifts. I construct this theory in the next chapter.
Chapter Two

A Theory of Liberal Foreign Policy

This chapter proposes a new theory of American grand strategy. I argue that two variables are of primary importance for predicting American grand strategy: the character of American liberalism at home and the nature of international environment abroad.

When liberalism was understood as an ideology that championed freedom from constraint, American foreign policy was driven by a strong inward impulse. To intervene abroad was to sacrifice liberty at home by increasing the power of a constraining central state. But when liberalism has been understood as mandating certain baseline opportunities and resources for all, American statesmen have had major incentives to intervene abroad. State activity has been seen as a method of advancing freedom across the domestic and international arenas. When combined with the influence of the international system— which under some conditions produces a strong "pull" towards overseas commitment as well as placing restraints on too much adventurism—this theory explains the major variation in America’s grand strategy towards the European great powers during the twentieth century. It also sheds considerable light on American foreign policy generally, and indeed on the broader question of how ideas interact with the structure of the international system to produce state behavior.

This chapter outlines the basis for my argument in several steps. I begin by discussing the concept of grand strategy and how changes in the basic American foreign policy posture can be measured. Next, I consider the liberal philosophical tradition and argue that rival interpretations of liberal norms constitute an important source of ideological variation in American politics. In the following section, I deduce foreign policy preferences that flow from two competing concepts of liberty and consider objections to these arguments. This analysis culminates in a Theory of Liberal Foreign Policy (TLFP): I combine my arguments about liberal preferences with insights from balance of power theories to predict American strategic behavior towards the European great powers. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how to measure these variables, generating a scheme for tracking liberal ideas and geopolitical threats in order to produce theoretical expectations for American behavior at different points in time.

Conceptualizing and Measuring Grand Strategy

In order to understand the causes of American commitments, we must first understand what kinds of values are at stake in making them and how such commitments might be compared to one another. The study of grand strategy is a ready-made tool for these purposes, as it encapsulates a broad range of important behaviors at the highest level of foreign policy. Though grand strategy is a subset of foreign policy more generally, I use the two terms interchangeably.

In this section, I conceptualize grand strategy, describe how it can vary, and suggest how that variation can be measured. I aim to produce a concept that can capture the puzzling variation in American commitments abroad and, by fitting within the extant literature on grand strategy, be of broader comparative use.

CONCEPTUALIZING GRAND STRATEGY
Grand strategy is a geopolitical concept to be understood in terms of managing power under anarchy. Below, I define the term, give it substantive content, and describe how it can vary.

DEFINITION AND CONTENT. I define grand strategy as a state’s plan for managing the balance of power. It is not an explicit document or plan per se, but is rather the implicit “theory” behind a state’s foreign policy choices. Grand strategy operates at the highest level of foreign policy, but it is not any particular policy itself. It is the logic underlying a general pattern of interlocking policy ends and means; this logic specifies how a state’s polices are going to “cause” the international environment to produce whatever ends it has in view.1

I adopt this definition because, in the broadest sense, states live in a “realist” world. They live in anarchic environment without a universal sovereign that can enforce law and produce order. In such a world, other poles of power may obstruct a state’s goals or may need to be induced to cooperate with them. Because there is no guarantee that other powerful actors will permit a state to achieve its objectives, it will need policies for managing the constellation of other power centers in a way that maximizes its ability to get what it wants. The presence of other powerful actors will constrain certain state policies and incentivize others, but states will still need to make choices about how to best manage the system. In short, grand strategies are needed to solve the universal problem of pursuing goals in an environment where other states may stand in the way.2

A grand strategic logic answers two questions about how to manage the balance of power: (1) “what configurations of power are acceptable or necessary,” and (2) “by what mechanism will these configurations be obtained?” By answering these questions a state’s grand strategy outlines a general foreign policy posture, producing a recognizable pattern in its behaviors.

A configuration of power indicates the number of other great powers, their relative power position, and their perceived alignment. Grand strategies contain a vision for a state’s preferred power constellation. That is, state policies imply how many other great powers there “ought” to be, and whether particular poles need to be increased or reduced in relative power. Strategic decisions will also often contain implications about the orientation of other poles—whether the cooperation or non-interference by particular actors is desirable or necessary, and whether other poles constitute threats to state objectives.

Grand strategies also indicate mechanisms by which the preferred structure of power will come about. These mechanisms specify how different policy means and ends are connected:

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2 This is the basic structural realist view. See Kenneth N. Waltz, Theory of International Politics (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979); John J. Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (New York: Norton, 2001).
how a state’s policies will adjust or manage the number, size, and alignment of other poles in a way that produces an acceptable power constellation conducive to a state’s ultimate goals. Each strategic mechanism implies a level of policy activism and the number and kind of commitments that will be needed to produce a benign balance of power.\textsuperscript{3}

In answering these questions about the balance of power, grand strategies make a fundamental trade-off between cost and control. Costs are the expense of blood and treasure necessary to execute a grand strategy. Control denotes the range of policy options open to a state as well as its ability to affect the orientation of other states. It does not imply an ability to dictate the policy of other states, only to gain influence or leverage over their behavior; I therefore use the terms “influence” and “leverage” interchangeably with “control.” More costly strategies tend to provide more influence over international outcomes, and vice versa—states generally can reduce their costs only at the price of less control over the international environment. So, for example, if statesmen wish to have a surfeit of military options abroad, they must pay for a large and extensive military to provide them. If they wish to avoid the costs of foreign alliances, they must also forgo opportunities to shape the policy of allies.\textsuperscript{4}

TYPOLOGY OF VARIATION. Below, I arrange a typology of grand strategies along a continuum measuring the degree of power management. Each strategy is denoted by its vision of the balance of power and its mechanism of operation, and each represents a different mix of cost and control. I lay out four ideal-typical grand strategies on this scale: non-entanglement, buckpassing, balancing, and preponderance. Because these strategies rest on a one-dimensional continuum, the exact place where the level of power management changes type will always be somewhat arbitrary. Still, I note general markers where one grand strategy ends and another begins based on their preferences for ordering the balance of power. In the American context, strategic preferences can be thought about in terms of the desired polarity of the European system and the relationship of the American pole to European politics.\textsuperscript{5}

\begin{quote}
A Grand Strategic Typology: The Power Management Continuum
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{3} Grand strategy is a description of foreign policy at its most abstract level. Thus, similar mechanisms will not necessarily produce commitments that are identical in type, number, or intensity. States with the same grand strategy, as classified here, may nonetheless have considerably differences in some of their policies.

\textsuperscript{4} The trade-off between cost and control is not a fundamental law of grand strategy, but rather depends to some extent on the international environment. In some circumstances, a small amount of international commitment can provide a large amount of leverage over the orientation of other poles. A state fighting a war for its survival, for instance, may accept whatever help it can get, even at the expense of making fundamental changes in policy. At other times, states can sink a tremendous amount of blood and treasure into hopeless attempts at influencing immutable aspects of the international power structure. But on the whole the trade-off exists, and it represents a clash of values for which grand strategies try to find an appropriate mix.

\textsuperscript{5} The basic four-part one-dimensional typology of grand strategy has support in the grand strategy literature: Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, “Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy,” \textit{International Security} 21, no. 3 (Winter 1996): 5-53; Layne, \textit{The Peace of Illusions}, pp. 159-161 both use a similar scheme. Though sub-dividing his typology into seven parts, the same idea is evident in Robert J. Art, \textit{A Grand Strategy for America} (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003).
At the lowest level of power management is the strategy of *non-entanglement*. Non-entanglement requires very little or no management of the balance of power—it sees few configurations of power as unacceptable and therefore entails little need to manage the policy of other states. A state pursuing non-entanglement has one major preference about the structure of power: that its own alignment be distant from that of other states. Non-entanglement strategies pursue this preference through the mechanisms of non-interference with other states and the deterrence of threats to narrowly defined vital interests. In general, non-entanglement incurs minimal costs and produces little control: in recognizing few threats, it neither invests in diplomatic and military tools nor reaps their influence. When a state discovers outcomes abroad that it is not willing to tolerate without a major commitment to forestall, it has ceased pursuing non-entanglement. In the American context, this vision of the balance of power implies a position of indifference to the number, size, and orientation of the European great powers, producing a unilateral and low commitment posture detached in any serious way from European politics.\(^6\)

At the other end of the continuum is a strategy of very intense power management, which I call *preponderance*. A strategy of preponderance views many possible power configurations as dangerous and unacceptable: it envisions a position of dominance over other centers of power, as the sole pole of major importance. Policy is chosen such that the potential for independent opposition to a state’s goals (whatever they may be) by other actors is minimized. Preponderance thus requires a great deal of influence over the relative size, policy, and alignment of other states. It achieves this influence through mechanisms of military dominance and political preeminence. While a state can never fully control other centers of power short of occupying and administering their territory, a strategy of preponderance pursues a position as hegemonic manager of the balance of power as the next best alternative. Preponderance tends to be expensive but also provides commensurate control over others: it is a strategy that recognizes many threats and invests mightily to meet them. When a state is unwilling to try and prevent major independent action contrary to its goals by another pole of power, it has stopped aiming at preponderance. In the American context, the strategy is often associated with an interventionist

liberal internationalism. American statesmen pursuing preponderance tend to envision American commitments as helping to “solve” the problems of power politics through institutions that approximate a single pole European of power: collective security organizations or alliances which purport to enforce the scope of legitimate international action, and in which American power plays a very prominent role. 7

In between these two extremes is an area of modest to more intense management of the configuration of power abroad. Formally stated, strategies in this area seek to manage the balance of power such that some power configurations do not occur, but are willing to let others come to pass. But there are greater and lesser requirements for preventing undesirable power configurations, and different mechanisms for managing them. I therefore divide the broad middle area of the strategic continuum into two categories: buckpassing and balancing.

Buckpassing is a strategy featuring non-trivial activity to manage the balance of power, but only on behalf of a narrow set of requirements. Usually, its object is preventing the dominance of a single other great power, but conceivably buckpassing preferences could extend to forestalling other undesirable configurations as well. Buckpassing rests on a mechanism of free riding: it seeks a limited amount of influence over other states and aims to coast by on their policies. It therefore emphasizes cutting costs over gaining international control, though it will give at least some priority to the latter. Unlike the alternative of balancing, a buckpassing strategy is premised on the belief that the balance of power can be managed largely, but not entirely, through the efforts of others. The mere existence of some international commitments does not a balancer make. When one state builds up the power of another so that the second party can absorb a blow, or comes late to a fight to get the spoils of victory, it is buckpassing: managing the balance of power with a light footprint, low costs, and for more limited outcomes. When a state has ceased either to make any commitments, or stopped relying on others as a primary resort for its ends, it has ceased to buckpass. In the American context, this strategy focuses on maintaining European multipolarity, with a distant but not entirely indifferent American pole as part of the system. 8

Balancing is a strategy of greater commitment and more active power management. It is premised on managing the balance of power to prevent a broader range of configurations: balancers usually fear more outcomes than just a single unacceptable power distribution. Common balancing aims are the containment of a particular great power, the deterrence of

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7 Preponderance is best described in two strategies from Posen and Ross, "Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy." Posen and Ross show how the liberal “cooperative security” strategy and the more explicit “primacy” strategy bear strong resemblance to each other in terms of actual commitments, and are both based on mechanisms of American military and political predominance. Earlier collective security strategies were even more obviously aimed at producing a kind of international government intended to act as the sole pole of power and final arbiter of security. Such strategies can produce terminological confusion, because the liberal logic that drives them is so at odds with the realist logic of the power management continuum. Nevertheless, they can still be effectively analyzed in terms of a preferred unipolar structure of power and that pole’s corresponding military and political supremacy. As argued below, it is important to distinguish between the type of grand strategy and its success.

8 Buckpassing is ably described in Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, pp. 157-162. It is often advocated today under names like “off-shore balancing” see Layne, The Peace of Illusions, pp. 159-192. Buckpassing does not have to be a status-quo strategy. Revisionist strategies such as Mearsheimer’s “blood-letting” and “bait-and-bleed”, or Schweller’s “bandwagoning for profit,” share the same limited requirements for control and a free-riding mechanism, conceptually placing them in the buckpassing category. See Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, Ch. 5; Randall L. Schweller, Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler’s Strategy of World Conquest (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 75-83.
military aggression, or the management of politics to avoid general war, though a number of
theories of power management might be envisioned. A balancing strategy aims to achieve this
influence by a mechanism of forward commitment: the balancer directly and substantially
entangles itself abroad to gain a handle on particular threats. Balancing thus emphasizes
influencing the shape of the international system over cutting costs, though it is not without
concern for the latter. When a state is no longer content to trade-off greater costs for more
international influence, or when it pursues political preeminence by expansion, it has ceased to
balance. In the American context, balancing is associated with maintaining a bipolar distribution
of power in Europe, with the direct involvement of the United States as one of the two poles.9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vision for Balance of Power</th>
<th>Non-entanglement</th>
<th>Buckpassing</th>
<th>Balancing</th>
<th>Preponderance</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indifferent, except for the state's own strategic detachment from it.</td>
<td>Prevent hegemony; most other configurations acceptable.</td>
<td>Prevent some configurations beyond hegemony.</td>
<td>Prevent other poles from taking independent action contrary to the state’s goals.</td>
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MEASURING GRAND STRATEGY

How can these grand strategies be measured empirically? There are two kinds of relevant
evidence. First, measurements of grand strategy can be inferred from the pattern of policies
implemented by a state. The question is, “What kind of preferences about the balance of power
and mechanisms for its management would generate this range of policies?” Much of the
literature surveyed in Chapter One implicitly proceeds in just this fashion, providing a narrative
of strategic decisions and showing their logical structure. Second, statesmen often talk about
their strategies in private and about how the international position they seek justifies their
preferred policies. Such comments are credible evidence for coding their grand strategy. In

9 The term “balancing” is often used very loosely in IR theory to indicate a number of possible policies. I adopt
Mearsheimer’s distinction between a balancer who “assumes direct responsibility for preventing” undesirable
outcomes and a buck-passer who “attempts to get another state to bear the burden” of managing the balance of
commitment are often referred to as “selective engagement;” see Art, *A Grand Strategy for America.*
addition, it is important not to confuse the issues of grand strategic success and ends-means integration with the coding of grand strategy itself.

MEASUREMENT TECHNIQUES. In inferring grand strategy from state behavior, I examine three broad elements of any state’s foreign policy posture. Threat perceptions and response are decisions about “who is against you” in world politics, and whether these enemies demand a policy response. They are judgments about what other centers of power threaten state goals and the adoption of a diplomatic posture towards these poles. Diplomatic policies concern “who is with you” in the international environment, and the manner in which such friends will be managed. These are judgments about which centers of power need to be induced to cooperate or facilitate a state’s goals, and the adoption of diplomatic initiatives to bring about such cooperation. Military policy encompasses the size of a state’s military power, the type of forces it buys, and their manner of employment. Military decisions are the most fundamental arbiters of the costs of grand strategy and the control it can provide. By charting changes in these areas of foreign policy, changes in strategic logic can be revealed.10

Such inferences about policy depend in no small part on judgments about what decision-makers intended their policies to achieve; objective facts about state policies do not simply speak for themselves. Consider the grand strategy of the Soviet Union in 1939, for example. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact implied Soviet balancing commitments to manage the European power structure. Russia absorbed Polish territory that gave it a more defensible border against potential German aggression in the future, while buying time for the construction of massive forward-deployed armies for defense. As the same time, Stalin’s policy contained major free-riding elements, both in terms of “bandwagoning” on German territorial conquest, and in sending the Wehrmacht west where France and Britain had to bear the costs of balancing Hitler. Determining the best classification of this strategy requires knowing something about how Stalin understood his own policy, and how he thought it fit with other actions of the Soviet state.11

SUCCESS, INTEGRATION, AND STRATEGIC MEASUREMENT. In empirically assessing the character of a state’s grand strategy, it is important to keep two considerations in mind. First, just because a strategy is unsuccessful or has means disintegrated from its ends does not make its categorization impossible. Hitler’s bid for European dominance is one of the most spectacular strategic failures in world history. Yet it is perfectly reasonable to describe Nazi Germany’s grand strategy in terms of preponderance or hegemony. The failure of a grand strategy to achieve its goals does not thereby change its position on the power management continuum. Ambitious institutional strategies may fail, even as they still pursue a unipolar system and produce extensive diplomatic and military commitments. Similarly, buckpassing strategies are often attractive choices for states that seek to influence international politics at lower costs. If a

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10 For works on the importance of threat perception, diplomatic posture, and military doctrine as crucial elements of grand strategy, see, respectively, the first chapter of Mark L. Haas, The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Stephen M. Walt, The Origins of Alliances (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine. Importantly, economic policy is also an important element of grand strategy. In trying to generalize about the subject, I came to the conclusion that it probably required a separate book to treat with any rigor. I therefore note the importance of economic commitments, but simply in terms of their size and number.

11 On this example, see the take in Schweller, Deadly Imbalances, p. 66. I take no position on the nature of Soviet strategy. Schweller believes this difficulty shows that strategies as conventionally defined are not mutually exclusive. Actually, it mostly shows that bandwagoning and buckpassing are variants of the same strategic logic. There is no reason Soviet strategy can’t be objectively classified, it merely requires knowing something about the aims of Soviet policy-makers.
buckpasser is later drawn into a greater set of commitments and to new mechanisms for implementing them, that fact does not change the measurement of its earlier strategy. The characterization of a state’s strategy at any given time depends on inferences about its desired configuration of power and the mechanisms by which policy aims to achieve it—not on its degree of success or level of strategic integration.

Second, statesmen frequently avoid making trade-offs. Policy-makers would obviously prefer to have as much influence as possible, and for pennies on the dollar. As will be discussed in more detail below, they often function as motivated reasoners, actively seeking out causal stories—some plausible, others preposterous—for how low-cost policies will provide the leverage essential for achieving high-priority goals. This basic psychological tendency can lead to grand strategies that are incoherent, unsuccessful, and even internally contradictory.\(^{12}\)

In the end, though, the international environment and the broad cognitive rationality of decision-makers both lead towards the more consistent strategies represented by the ideal types just described. The international environment provides constraints and incentives toward behavior that protects the survival of states and can socialize political leaders into more effective strategies. Basic rationality gives statesmen an incentive to pursue high-priority goals over lower ones. To the extent that the recognition of international realities moves state strategy towards greater consistency, or causes it to change type, the balance of power deserves credit as the independent variable doing the work. As will be discussed below, the international system tends over time to make grand strategies more integrated, in the sense of increased means-ends consistency.\(^{13}\)

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### Liberalism in American Politics

The rest of this chapter constructs a theory to explain variation in American grand strategy as defined above. A principal independent variable in this theory is liberalism, a tradition of philosophical ideas dating to the seventeenth century. The liberal tradition, which places heavy priority on the freedom of individuals, has been the hegemonic political discourse in America since the founding era.

I begin this section by discussing the character of ideational structures, which are composed of normative and causal beliefs and are subject to psychological pressures. Next, I briefly review some of the literature on American political culture discussing the dominance of liberal norms. The remainder of the section then argues that there are two distinct interpretations of the central liberal norm of freedom: negative liberty and positive liberty. I sketch the philosophical differences between negative liberalism and positive liberalism, and consider their implications for domestic political order. They constitute a source of variation within the liberal tradition that I will later argue has important ramifications for American grand strategy.

### IDEATIONAL STRUCTURES

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\(^{12}\) Put another way, it is still possible to usefully classify a state’s posture in international politics, even if the ideas that underlie that policy are flawed.

\(^{13}\) On political-military integration in grand strategy, and the way the balance of power can socialize and constrain strategy towards more integration, see Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, pp. 24-29, 74-79. Motivated reasoning is discussed below.
In order to understand how ideology influences policy, it is vitally important to understand what ideologies are and how individuals adapt them in the face of real-world discrepancies. To this end, I review here the basic elements of ideational belief structures. I then discuss how psychological mechanisms impact belief structures and conclude by giving some examples of how ideologies have impacted major elements of foreign policy.

The upshot is that ideological structures are difficult to change because the cognitive impulse for simplicity, consistency, and motivated bias militates in favor of retaining previously held beliefs. Two circumstances will produce change in ideological beliefs. First, unambiguous information and high-stakes choices will push individuals towards analytic rationality. Second, when causal beliefs conflict with highly valued norms and the policies that embody them, individuals will tend to adjust their causal theories, rather than abandoning their norms or radically changing their policies. These two tendencies are critical for the later discussion of how different norms produce different foreign policy preferences and for how decision-makers approach value trade-offs among grand strategies.

ELEMENTS OF IDEOLOGY. Ideational structures, of which political liberalism is an example, consist of two different types of beliefs that motivate political action. Normative beliefs specify what kinds of outcomes are valued, what types of behavior are appropriate and inappropriate, or define the nature of important concepts. Causal beliefs reflect expectations about how the world works; about what kind of policy "causes" will secure normative "effects." The most common mechanism by which these ideational structures affect policy is when they serve as cognitive road maps, wherein causal beliefs direct decision-makers along those policy routes towards the destination of their desired normative goals.14

To use a repugnant example, Hitler's Nazi ideology identified racial purity and anticommunism as the appropriate values for political pursuit. Hitler also held a related set of causal beliefs: world politics was characterized by social Darwinist struggle between races and ideologies; personal and political miscegenation would weaken the power of a given national race; and the ideological and racial distance between Soviet Russia and other states would make it unlikely for an anti-German balancing coalition to form. The combination of these ideas produced obvious policy conclusions—prepare for and wage the inevitable anti-Soviet war by navigating between East and West, while engaging in racial extermination to prevent the weakening of the German race.15

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON IDEOLOGY. In the abstract, there is no logical reason why ideologies must necessarily propound such closely related normative and causal views. After all, the "ought/is" distinction reminds us that questions of cause and effect differ from those of right and wrong. But practically, any ideology worth its salt will produce an ideational structure with at least some links between its values and an effective manner of obtaining them. An ideology

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15 On Hitler's ideology see Haas, The Ideological Origins of Great Power Politics, 1789-1989, pp. 107-111. I take no position on whether Hitler's ideology was the primary cause of Germany's aggressive foreign policy. But if Nazism drove German grand strategy, the above account sketches a probable mechanism by which it had its effects.
that suggested its vision of the good was unobtainable would not find many adherents. Furthermore, psychological theories of decision-making give us powerful reasons for expecting that individuals will try to avoid conflicts between their different beliefs, revise them only under pressure, and will respond to pressure by adjusting causal views in order to correspond with the pursuit of normative goals, rather than by changing policy responses or normative goals to match correct causal beliefs.

Intuitive approaches to cognition suggest that individuals will seek to reduce the strain of complex calculations and to maintain cognitive consistency. Even under the optimal assumption of rational decision-making, the environment contains a massive overload of ambiguous information that human beings simply cannot process. Information overload will thus cause even the best reasoners to rely on heuristics, analogies, and other mental short cuts that tend to reinforce pre-existing views. Intuitive reasoning greatly exacerbates this problem, as it posits a cognitive need for simplicity and consistency that leads only "to options consistent with the decision-maker's belief system, previous practices, or present policies." Furthermore, "tendencies towards consistency and simplicity inhibit the recognition of value conflicts." Because individuals believe that their values are consistent, they can overlook the possibility that that chosen policies will lead to value clashes.16

Motivational approaches to cognition stress that errors in cognition are often self-interested, "in the sense of being useful to the actors, of facilitating valued actions, positions, or attitudes." As Jack Snyder puts it, when under the influence of motivated bias, decision-making "will become a process of rationalization rather than rationality." Recent psychological research demonstrates these claims in a particularly relevant way: laboratory experiments show that individuals will often evaluate causal propositions in a way that biases assessments towards seeing higher probabilities for highly valued outcomes. Female experiment participants, for instance, are far less likely to believe the proposition that coffee can have harmful effects on women than are male participants when presented with the same evidence, even when the posited effects are very mild. As Princeton psychologist Ziva Kunda puts it, individuals often "generate theories about the causes of positive and negative outcomes in a self-serving manner" as well "applying more stringent criteria to evidence with less favorable implications." In many situations, "the cognitive process is harnessed in the service of motivational ends."17


To quote Snyder again, “people see the ‘necessary’ as possible,” over-rating their ability to cause desired end states rather than abandoning key goals. More generally, theories of motivated cognition posit that the stress of decision-making will lead individuals to deny the necessity for value trade-offs or belief updating. Instead, motivated reasoners will be “increasingly persuaded that a single policy will permit all values to be satisfied.” In sum, motivated reasoners will resist seeing conflicts between their beliefs and values, and when forced to acknowledge them, will often modify their causal beliefs to match their valued norms.18

To be sure, there is copious evidence that individuals can engage in broadly rational, analytical decision-making: they have the capacity to organize their attitudes, values, and beliefs into hierarchical structures; to monitor their environment for new information that would update their causal beliefs; and to make choices that maximize their preferences. Analytical rationality is especially likely to hold under situations where the stakes are high and information is unambiguous. So, the evidence for basic human rationality ought to give us confidence that value preferences informed by normative beliefs will exert influence over policy choice, and that decision-makers can indeed make value trade-offs when forced to do so. However, there is also considerable support for the notion that large elements of non-rational perception in the human make-up will produce delays in matching policy ends and means. Furthermore, such evidence also predicts that normative concerns will dominate causal beliefs under conditions of ambiguity.19

EXAMPLES OFIDEOLOGICAL PRESERVATION. The literature on military doctrine shows how slow-changing cognitive structures can affect foreign policy. It is well known that militaries construct institutional ideologies, consisting of norms about the nature of war and proper military organization, as well as causal prescriptions about the doctrines most effective for fighting wars. Many of these beliefs stem from organizational interests in wealth, prestige, and autonomy, and are adopted instrumentally for those purposes, whether consciously or unconsciously. But the normative and causal beliefs of militaries can also derive from a “purpose” or “organizational essence.” Such views can be thought of as more purely ideological, in the sense that these beliefs are held because they are seen to be right, true, and beautiful in themselves, rather than merely useful.20

Two brief examples illustrate the tenacity with which valued norms can be defended, even at the expense of strategic coherency. Before the Great War, the French Army held causal beliefs indicating that an offensive doctrine was required to win future wars and that only long-service conscripts could successfully mount an offensive. These beliefs were adopted in large part because the values, norms, and rhythms of traditional military institutions were threatened by short-term conscripts who could not be adequately socialized to military life. Despite increasing evidence that offensives would be suicidal under modern conditions, the French Army only increased its attachments to the efficacy of the offensive, offering rapidly changing causal

18 Snyder, The Ideology of the Offensive, p. 18; Farnham, Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis, p. 257.
19 Farnham, Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis, pp. 245-248. On analytical models of reasoning, which even at their most optimistic, stress limited analysis and bounded rationality, see Stein and Tanter, Rational Decision-Making, pp. 27-32; Herbert A. Simon, Administrative Behavior (New York: Free Press, 1997), Chs. 3-5.
arguments that were ever more absurd. The result was the disastrous Plan XVII, which neatly facilitated German strategy in the opening battles of the Great War. 21

Similarly, before the Second World War, both the British Royal Air Force (RAF) and civilians massively over-estimated the effectiveness of German and British strategic bombing in bringing about decisive results. While the RAF had obvious material incentives for pushing a strategic bombing offensive, politicians of all stripes also accepted that “the bomber will always get through.” Hawks and doves alike found the argument useful for protecting key domestic values and justifying their preferred strategy. Doves saw the efficacy of German bombers as a key argument for appeasing Hitler, building the RAF, and avoiding the much hated ground commitments of the First World War. Hawks saw strategic bombing as a way to mobilize the lethargic public to oppose Hitler now, before it was too late, as well as seeing the growing Luftwaffe as confirmation of German aggressiveness. It was only as the pressures of the international system became obvious that politicians began to look for information to really test strategic bombing propositions and found them wanting. 22

I would highlight three take-away points from this discussion of ideational structures. First, ideologies are composed of norms and causal beliefs, and affect strategy by suggesting policies that can secure valued ends. Second, human psychology will be resistant to changing these beliefs, often working to obscure ways in which values clash or causal beliefs are faulty. Third, as information becomes less ambiguous and the stakes of action rise, beliefs sets will become more consistent, coherent, and rational. But bias will remain in favor of core normative values: individuals are more likely to adjust their beliefs about causal forces than they are to abandon valued norms or policies that embody them. It is to normative distinctions within liberalism that I now turn.

AMERICA'S LIBERAL CULTURE

American political culture is thoroughly dominated by philosophical liberalism. This should first be understood as a claim about what American culture is not. Unlike European societies, America never had a feudal past to tear down. It therefore avoided the radical Marxist tradition as well as the reactionary modernism of the fascist right, both of which arose out of grappling with an older social order and an emergent new one. Bereft of both aristocrats and revolutionaries, endowed with cheap land and scarce labor, and founded when Enlightenment intellectual currents were at their high-water mark, America developed a broad-based society and with it the liberal ideology of the bourgeoisie. The absence of an alternative set of ideas makes liberal thought a powerful legitimating device in American politics. It also ensures that political debate is carried out on relatively narrow ground. 23

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21 Snyder, The Ideology of the Offensive, Chs. 2-3.
22 Jervis, “Deterrence and Perception,” pp. 14-17; See also Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine, pp. 144-146.
This debate encompasses a range of values that still leaves plenty of room for disagreement. American citizens and leaders have long held to a basic consensus of political values: constitutionalism and the rule of law; democracy; egalitarianism; individualism; and most importantly, the primacy of liberty. These values can sometimes contradict each other, and the working out of such tensions constitutes the stuff of liberal political discourse. For instance, scholars of the early American republic have pointed to several different ways in which statesmen grappled with conflicting liberal values. David Erickson identifies a transition between a relatively public-spirited republican conception of liberalism and a more pluralist and individualist notion. J. David Greenstone distinguishes between a bourgeois humanist liberalism and a reform-oriented perfectionist variant. The important commonalities that most analysts recognize are that liberalism constitutes a powerful driving force in American politics, and that disputes occur within its limits.24

Generally, these disputes contest differing interpretations of the central liberal ideal: liberty. Given the elevated place liberty has had in American political rhetoric, differing conceptions of its meaning can have powerful political effects and policy consequences. I argue that two powerful visions of freedom emerge from trends in the American political debate. To steal the language of Isaiah Berlin, there have been two concepts of liberty ever present in American discourse: negative liberty and positive liberty.25

Negative liberty is freedom from constraint. To be free is to be unbound from the coercion of others, particularly the apparatus of the state. Positive liberty is the full development of one’s capabilities and their exercise in pursuit of valued ends. To have positive liberty is to be master of oneself—a fully autonomous human being with both the internal abilities and external support to effectively act on projects and plans. The difference can be seen in a musical example: two men who sit down at a piano may be equally free from external constraint, but only the one who knows how to play the instrument is free to create music. Presumably the second man’s musical liberty is conditioned by, among other things, his access to pianos, the time for practice, his musical abilities, and his capacity for self-discipline. Thus, positive liberty is the more demanding of the two interpretations and also the more substantively generous understanding of freedom.

In general terms both concepts are identifiable in American political discourse from the beginnings of American history. But a clear pattern of ideational dominance is observed over time. Until the early twentieth century, the negative conception of liberty was the dominant interpretation of liberalism among American elites. For the first half of the twentieth century, the idea of liberty was more contested, with differing conceptions exerting a profound influence

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25 Berlin introduced negative and positive liberty in his famous essay: Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166-217. While I think these terms are apt for the changes in liberalism I describe, the reader should be aware that Berlin’s usage expands beyond the liberal tradition and reflects a normative stance on which I pass no judgment. The vast philosophic debate on Berlin’s terms and their meaning is not treated here.
on American politics, depending on the occupant of the White House. By the mid 1960s, the situation had reversed itself: contemporary American elites have settled on the positive vision of freedom. Though the rhetoric of negative liberty is sometimes still heard publically, it is a decidedly minority position among political actors. As I will argue below, understanding this contestation in American politics is crucial to understanding variations in American grand strategy over the last century.

**NEGATIVE LIBERTY**

Though in eclipse today, the concept of negative liberty has had a profound impact on American politics. Here I lay out the concept’s essential elements and describe its vision of government.

**PHILOSOPHIC ESSENTIALS.** Negative liberty is what Charles Taylor calls an “opportunity-concept.” Freedom, on this view, is a matter of the opportunities open to an individual. It consists in a lack of human obstacles, or the non-restriction of options: “It is a sufficient condition of being free that nothing stand in the way.” Negative liberty is freedom “from;” as Thomas Hobbes puts it, “by liberty is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of external impediments, which impediments may oft take away part of man’s power to do as he would.” One is free only to the extent that one faces no obstacles to action. Furthermore, obstacles inhibit liberty only to the extent that they are external and of human origin: we do not say that I lack the freedom to play professional basketball; we say that I am short and slow. As Hobbes argues, “when the impediment of motion is in the constitution of the thing itselfe; we use not to say, it wants the Liberty, but the Power to move; as when a stone lyeth still, or a man is fastned to his bed by sickness.” Freedom is the opportunity to work one’s will unimpeded by external human actions or institutions, and where such human impediments exist, freedom is diminished.27

An appreciation of negative liberty, and a preservation of some kind of zone of non-interference, has been one of the primary projects of the liberal tradition. Hobbes himself was no friend to this project, associating it with the violence of anarchy and often justifying the suppression of liberty under an absolute state as necessary to maintaining order. But liberals who followed after Hobbes shared his view of the essential concept. Benjamin Constant, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and John Locke, to name some of the major thinkers in the tradition of English liberalism, could agree with Hobbes that “liberties, they depend on the silence of the law. Where the sovereign hath proscribed no rule, there the subject has the liberty to do or forbear, according to his own discretion. And therefore such liberty is in some places more, and in some less, in some times more, and some less.” Unlike Hobbes, these thinkers sought to

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26 I discourage attempts to map the following discussion onto contemporary political parties and politics. On my reading, American politics is presently dominated by two political parties dedicated to variations on positive liberty. Negative liberals of the type found in the early part of the twentieth century are rarely seen today, and usually only in think tanks and opinion journalism.

increase the zone of non-interference and ensure at least a bare minimum area over which the 
sovereign could provide no rules. They argued that the law inhibits freedom, and advocated its 
silence to increase liberty’s extent. 28

This trend towards a sphere of non-interference has oriented negative liberty in a broad 
opposition to power. Power is the source of coercion and thus the root cause of freedom’s loss. 
As Berlin puts it, “coercion is, in so far as it frustrates human desires, bad as such, although it 
may have to be applied to prevent other, greater evils; while non-interference, which is the 
opposite of coercion, is good as such, though it is not the only good. This is the negative 
conception of liberty in its classic form.” 29

VISION OF GOVERNMENT. Consequently, negative liberty has been associated with a 
distinctive vision of government: anti-statist, rights-protecting, limited to core functions, and 
valuing democracy as a useful instrument for obtaining other valued ends. These views have 
been especially strong in the United States.

In America, experience and philosophy together molded a strong cultural distaste that has 
been called the “anti-power ethic.” Early Americans distrusted power of all kinds, considering it 
inherently opposed to liberty. But they particularly distrusted the power of the state, which was 
the most dangerous source of despotism and of arbitrary depredations of individual rights. By 
setting up an opposition between liberty and power in general, and the specific form of power 
wielded by governments, freedom came to be defined as the absence on state intrusion. To a 
negative liberal the expansion of state power simply is the diminishment of liberty, if it occurs 
outside of a very limited sphere of legitimate government authority; conversely, the limitation of 
state power represents the advance of liberty. With its focus on freedom from constraint, anti-
statism in American politics is the core of the negative conception of liberty. 30

The most familiar example of negative liberal political thought is the social contract 
argument of John Locke. Positing a state of nature where humans interacted without 
government, Locke argued that the coercive apparatus of government can only be justified by 
improvements over the natural state—principally through securing broadly defined property 
rights. Tasked with the job of securing basic order and justice, the Lockean state otherwise 
leaves well enough alone. The sphere of non-interference is wide and deep, and negative liberty 
is maximized within a context of a baseline set of freedoms for all. American history is replete 
with this view of liberty, as it animates the opening passages of the Declaration of Independence 
and on some accounts has provided the lodestar for American political culture ever since. It sits 
at the heart of the American distaste for government and resistance to power and authority. 31

This does not mean the early Americans, or any other advocates of negative freedom, 
believed that no government action is legitimate, or that coercion could not be justified under any

28 Quote in Hobbes, *Leviathan*, XXI, 18. A useful overview of the development of liberal thinkers is Gray, 
*Liberalism*, pp. 9-35.
30 Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony*, pp. 33-39; Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the 
31 John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 
1988). I use Locke as an example of what I mean by negative liberty, though he does not use the term; this 
paragraph is obviously a rather superficial summary of his thought. Useful discussions of American political 
development from a negative liberal, or classical liberal, viewpoint are Robert Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical 
circumstances. Most negative liberty advocates have felt that basic justice compelled at least a bare minimum of freedom for everyone. Otherwise, as the old saying goes, “freedom for the pike is death to the minnows.” As Hobbes feared, in such a situation liberty becomes nothing more than the right of the strongest, with its attendant unending fear and uncertainty. Therefore, government can legitimately regulate an individual’s freedom in order to prevent collisions with the freedom of other individuals. People may have to be coerced into respecting the basic liberties of others. The basic rationale of the state’s role in “collision prevention”—often called the “night-watchmen state”—is a basic part of all but the most extreme visions of negative liberty. This kind of state creates and enforces property rights, provides genuine collective goods, and occasionally regulates the externalities of private interactions. Beyond these fairly traditional roles of liberal government, negative liberty sees very little role for central authority.\(^{32}\)

Politically, negative liberals have had an uneasy relationship with democracy, tending to value it for instrumental reasons. Negative liberty is the concept that answers the question: how much am I ruled, and what areas are left open as opportunities for my own choice? As such, it does not imply very much about the ideal form of government or the role of political participation. As Berlin notes, “just as a democracy may, in fact, deprive the individual citizen of a great many liberties... so it is conceivable that a liberal-minded despot would allow his subjects a great measure of personal freedom.... There is no necessary connection between individual liberty and democratic rule.” Of course, no liberal of any stripe would be anxious to trust a despot on the issue of freedom—liberty would then exist only at the sufferance of his interests. Thus, in America, the rhetoric of democracy has been used by advocates of negative liberty mostly as a bulwark against special interests hijacking the state for coercive purposes. Republican forms of government are valued because they prevent coercion on the behalf of self-interested factions.\(^{33}\)

**POSITIVE LIBERTY**

Positive liberty is the dominant conception of freedom in contemporary American politics, and its rise to prominence helped shape modern America. Here I describe its primary elements and the vision of government often associated with them.

**PHILOSOPHICAL ESSENTIALS.** Positive liberty is the “freedom to” do something or other; it consists in the actual actions of free agents. That is, an agent is free just to the extent that he can exercise valued faculties or capabilities—positive liberty is for this reason often called an “exercise concept.” A lack of freedom is more than coercion or obstacles: it is the failure to realize valuable goals. The capacity to exercise valued ends can be denied by internal impediments, by social norms or institutions, or simply by inadequate provision of resources. All of these things can place an agent in what amounts to a state of slavery, either to society or

\(^{32}\) Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” p. 174, quote on p. 171. Negative liberals do not necessarily believe in the minimal state. History’s most famous negative liberals have often supported limited state intervention of properly legitimated types (like those mentioned in the text), as noted in Gray, Liberalism, pp. 73-81.

circumstance. A person who cannot chose to achieve his ends because he lacks the material or social capacity to act is not at liberty, even if no external force restrains him. Positive liberty is therefore a kind of autonomy or self-realization: freedom requires a control over the shape of one’s life and is judged by an implicit standard about the ends to which that control is properly exerted. As the British liberal T.H. Green put it, the essence of liberty is “a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying, and that, too, something that we do or enjoy in common with others.”

In sum, positive liberty addresses a different set of questions than negative liberty. In Berlin’s words, it is the concept that answers the question of “who rules me?” in contrast to negative liberty’s query, “how much am I ruled?” Am I essentially self-governing, or ruled by others? But there are at least two relevant senses of self-government: as participation in collective rule or as an autonomous individual.

Some variants of positive liberty stress a collective interpretation of human freedom, commonly known as republicanism. On this view, real liberty is collective self-direction, the self-government of a political community. For an individual to be free, he must be an active participant in a polity characterized by common citizenship and “the possession by all... of the fully qualified members of a society of a share of the public power.” In order to use that power well, free individuals must possess certain virtues of citizenship, including the self-restraint of personal interests, independence that breeds public spiritedness, and energy for political engagement. Society, in turn, must produce these virtues by partaking in some measure of democracy and encouraging political participation. The virtuous and free individual must be a part of a virtuous and free community, and vice-versa. The collective version of positive liberty is the source of the normative priority for democracy and political participation often seen in American liberal discourse, and indeed, this emphasis is essential—if freedom is collective self-direction, then a widespread ability to participate in politics is necessary for its exercise.

A more individualist variant of positive liberty has been popular in America as well. Such a view argues that individuals who lack sufficient wealth, abilities, and other resources cannot meaningfully exercise important liberties. In order to have real liberty, human faculties must be developed, social restraints undone, and the resources for effective action supplied. Some individualist versions of positive liberty spell out very carefully the human goods that are worth exercising freely. For example, if an individual has the potential to, say, be a prominent musician, he is not free if that capacity remains undeveloped and not acted on. Others assert simply that certain material preconditions should be granted that allow the exercise of many desirable goods: for example, to be free everyone has to have enough wealth, education, and training to act on a broad range of desires. Both views affirm the proposition that resources, internal deficiencies, and social structures can meaningfully inhibit freedom.

36 Quote from Ibid., p. 208. An excellent summary of republican freedom and the republican virtue tradition can be found in Jeff A. Weintraub, “Virtue, Community, and the Sociology of Liberty: The Notion of Republican Virtue and its Impact on Modern Western Social Thought” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, Sociology, 1979). This paragraph draws on pp. 3-10.
Indeed, despite some differences, all advocates of positive liberty share in common the idea that freedom involves the active exercise of some kind of human good, whether individual or collective, specified or unspecified. And in this they differ radically from the concept of negative liberty, which holds that “it is important to discriminate between liberty and the conditions of its exercise. If a man is too poor or too ignorant or too feeble to make use of his legal rights, the liberty that these rights confer upon him is nothing to him, but it is not thereby annihilated…. Liberty is one thing, the conditions for it are another.” Positive liberals believe otherwise.38

VISION OF GOVERNMENT. The positive liberal vision of government is quite different from the negative liberal view. It tends to be more state-centric and rights vindicating, possesses fewer limits, and values democracy as an intrinsic good.

Positive liberty has a starkly different orientation to power than negative liberty. Rather than being seen as a source of constraints and therefore an enemy to liberty, power is conceptually knitted to liberty in a common cloth. Indeed, it will often be the case that citizens will not have the ability to achieve their goals, whether because of internal obstacles or want of resources and capabilities. Positive freedom will require power for its exercise, usually the power of the state. The state will be needed to redistribute resources so that more people may have the pre-conditions for effective liberty; state power will be needed to shape the capacities of individuals to exercise the most important higher goals, whatever those may be. Berlin sums up the difference in orientation between advocates negative and positive liberty nicely: “the former want to curb authority as such. The latter want it concentrated in their own hands.”39

The most famous exposition of the positive liberal vision is John Rawls’ idea of the veil of ignorance. Rawls asks us to imagine ourselves designing a just society, but without reference to where we will end up in it. Would we design a society where important freedoms are accessible only to some people, not knowing if we will be one of the lucky ones? The veil of ignorance forces the reader to take a positive view of freedom: to secure our liberty in a just society, we will need the power to develop our capacities and the resources to act on them. The state will be designed not just to protect our natural Lockean rights, but also to vindicate our rights to free action through the judicious application of power.40

Positive liberty therefore supports an expansive welfare and regulatory state—an inversion of the traditional American anti-statism. This kind of state must be involved in much more than just “collision prevention.” After all, how does the state prevent collisions between free individuals, when real freedom is the exercise of human capacities in the pursuit of common excellent ends? If individuals are colliding at all, it must be because some of them are not really free in a positive sense—they are pursuing the wrong ends, or society is misdirecting otherwise free individuals into each other. State power must be used instead to direct everyone on the correct path and shape society towards the exercise of its proper ends. Thus, according to some of positive liberty’s advocates, “every limitation of power is an abridgement of liberty.”


40 I use Rawls only as an example of “positive liberty” and can scarcely do justice here to his thought. Rawls himself considers the philosophical debate about concepts of liberty as secondary to his tasks. See Rawls, A Theory of Justice, pp. 176-180.
coercive apparatus of “state assistance, rightly directed, may extend the bounds of liberty,” and the “collective action of the community may and ought to be employed positively... to make the freedom of the individual a reality and not a pretence.”

Positive liberals value democracy as an end in itself. The collective interpretation of freedom and the broad focus on the state in all variants of positive liberty lead to an emphasis on the community that is represented by government institutions. Self-government, as either an individual or part of a community, requires active participation in political life. Though in modern politics only a few individuals can actually take part in government, the democratic basis of representation is a form of participation and self-rule. Moreover, active participation in public questions, whether through activism or other engagement in politics, is a highly valued end. Because positive liberty is focused on autonomy and the state, participating in the state’s business is deemed an important part of self-rule.

In sum, there are two very different ways one can look at liberty: as an opportunity concept that allows a sphere of non-interference and free choice, or as an exercise concept that achieves mastery of important human ends. Each concept of liberty implies different views about the nature of power, the major obstacles to freedom, the role of the state, and freedom’s connection to democracy. Furthermore, the extent to which one adheres to either view can have large implications for a number of other beliefs. The next relevant question for this study is: what implications does each concept of liberty have for foreign policy?

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<th>Table 2.2: Conceptual Markers of Liberalism</th>
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<td><strong>Type of Concept</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunity concept: freedom from constraint, non-restriction of options</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Obstacles to Liberty</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Attitude towards the State</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Role of Government</strong></td>
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41 Quotes are from British theorists and politicians Leslie Smith, Herbert Samuel, and Herbert Asquith, respectively. Quoted in Arblaster, *The Rise and Decline of Western Liberalism*, pp. 287-288.

**Type of Government Tasks**

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<th>Night watchman state; minimal state</th>
<th>Welfare and regulatory state</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude towards Democracy</strong></td>
<td>Instrumentally valued as a check on coercion</td>
<td>Intrinsically valued as a critical part of liberty</td>
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*Liberal Preferences for Grand Strategy*

The variation between negative and positive concepts of liberty has implications beyond domestic politics. Negative and positive liberty produce different preferences for American grand strategy. This normative difference explains the dichotomy in liberal approaches to foreign policy that has been observed in the international relations literature. Negative liberty seeks to minimize American commitments abroad lest they threaten liberty at home, serving as a force pushing American foreign policy towards less power management on the grand strategic continuum. Positive liberty acts as a force pushing towards greater power management, seeking to vindicate American liberal values through an active foreign policy.

I argue that while nothing compels individuals to hold the views I have outlined, there are nonetheless good reasons to believe that my logic should be the predominant interpretations of liberal imperatives among statesmen. The intuitional and motivated biases discussed earlier cause adherents to different liberal norms to adopt variant interpretations of more broadly held liberal beliefs about foreign policy.

This section first outlines the general foreign policy beliefs broadly held within the liberal tradition. I next lay out the relationship between each concept of liberty and grand strategy, establishing a logic that connects negative and positive liberty to different foreign policy preferences. I then consider some objections to this logic. For ease of description, I refer to my propositions about liberalism and their geopolitical counterparts as a Theory of Liberal Foreign Policy (TLFP).

**THE LIBERAL TRADITION AND FOREIGN POLICY**

Though predominantly concerned with domestic politics, the liberal tradition has long had a distinctive approach to international relations. Liberals tend to believe that there is no reason international politics should fundamentally differ from domestic political life. The liberal tradition identifies three domestically valued norms as important international goals and natural conditions: peace, free trade, and liberal political institutions. However, there are two potential ways to interpret liberalism’s implications for foreign policy. Here I outline the general liberal approach and its competing sub-variants, before showing how alternate concepts of liberty tend to match themselves with alternate approaches to foreign policy.

**GENERAL LIBERAL FOREIGN POLICY BELIEFS.** First, a peaceful order tends to foster liberty in international politics just as it does in domestic politics. As John Owen summarizes, “The self-government that respects the self-government of others rules out a coercive or violent life.” Peace is seen as both normal and normative; war is thought an aberration and an abomination; and it is expected that law and institutional restraint favor international peace and freedom as surely as they protect those values domestically. Second, in the liberal view, international relations between states should be based primarily on free economic exchange and peaceful commercial competition. Liberal theorists from Thomas Paine to Richard Cobden to
Joseph Schumpeter have all seen domestic political liberty as intimately tied with free-trade abroad. In the words of Schumpeter, free polities are “democratized, individualized, and rationalized” by the forces of the market, and disciplined by the “economic rationalism” of capitalism. The basic insight that it is more profitable to trade than fight extends naturally across borders. Third, democracy is politically desirable at home, obviously tied to individual freedom and international exchange, and thus historically inevitable abroad.43

And yet the world is often at war, commercially restricted, and autocratically governed. Given the discrepancy between the natural state of the world and observed reality, liberals have developed a set of causal stories explaining the origins of the difference. Put simply, power politics is to blame. Liberalism’s international orientation is profoundly anti-realist; it sees the armies, alliances, and atavism of world politics as the cause of illiberalism rather than the effect of the international system itself. The way to fix international problems is simply to increase global liberalism: expanding peace-building international institutions, free trade, and political democracy will create a self-sustaining virtuous circle. As Robert Osgood neatly summarizes, the liberal view is that “War is immoral, the people are moral; therefore give the people more power, and war will vanish. War is wicked, it must be caused by wicked men; therefore, convert the misguided, and peace will reign.”44

Thus, if “the people” are allowed self-government through liberal regimes and given the freedom to trade, conflict will plummet and human liberty will flourish. Liberal regimes will externalize norms of non-violence; they will understand the superiority of international free trade over conquest. If the “wicked men,” whose autocratic regimes and mercantilist practices drive international conflict, are removed and their regimes reformed, the causes of war will vanish. These evils exist only because they serve the interest of atavistic individuals and classes, and would fall into the dustbin of history if the obvious superiority of democracy and free trade were not suppressed. Finally, if a kind of international law and order were constructed, states would have the same foundation for cooperation that individuals do in domestic life. These causal beliefs form the classic liberal vision for how world politics can make progress: through an expanding democratic peace, increasing economic interdependence, and more potent international institutions.45


COMPETING INTERPRETATIONS OF LIBERALISM'S IMPLICATIONS. As argued in Chapter One, there are potentially two ways in which these central liberal norms and causal beliefs could produce grand strategy. Colin Dueck explains the tension: “liberal tradition sees the entire enterprise of grand strategy as somewhat suspect. Secret diplomacy, tiny elites, Machiavellian ethic, powerful executives, standing armies, security precautions, intelligence services and covert operations—all of these are common features of national security politics, and all of them seem suspicious or even sinister from a liberal perspective. The liberal tendency is to want to keep a very tight lid on such practices. At the same time, such practices are sometimes necessary in order to protect a liberal society from external dangers.”

As a result of managing this tension, a pair of liberal approaches to grand strategy has developed. They give different answers to two questions raised by the more general liberal beliefs about foreign policy. First, can American strategy effectively spread the liberal causes of peace, thus securing a less violent world where liberty can flourish for all? Or do liberal processes in world politics develop best on their own, and does interference amount to a sordid involvement in power politics? Second, does war-causing illiberalism threaten American security and values? That is, will encroaching illiberalism force America into the very involvement in power politics that it seeks to avoid? Or is America secure in its hemispheric keep, strategically untouched by temporary hiccups on the road to liberal progress?

To briefly reiterate, the “vindicationalist” tradition believes America should act to protect and promote liberal values abroad for the benefit of American and world citizens. By acting to ensure free trade, expand political democracy, and construct international institutions, American and global liberty will prosper in an environment of peace. This approach may require temporarily engaging in power politics, but holds the promise of resolving international ills once and for all.

An alternative “exemplarist” tradition maintains that liberal rights “are most properly secured by each people establishing or altering its own government.” America should offer to trade with anyone, maintain its own institutions as a beacon to the world, and obey but not enforce customary international law. The exemplarist strand of liberalism concedes that America may occasionally need to arm and defend itself against threats from an illiberal world but believes the long-run development of international society towards liberalism will reduce the incidence of encroaching power politics. At any rate, global liberalism is unlikely to be coaxed along by American action. Despite these differences, both approaches hold the same liberal norms and causal beliefs about peace; they disagree only on how to protect American security and translate liberalism into grand strategy. I now show how these differences can stem from different interpretations of freedom, reinforced by the psychological mechanisms discussed earlier.

46 Dueck, Reluctant Crusaders, p. 25.
FOREIGN POLICY’S THREAT TO NEGATIVE LIBERTY

Negative liberal anti-statism is fundamentally at odds with an active foreign policy. Rather than abandon their central liberty norm, negative liberals interpret the liberal approach to grand strategy in such a way as to make it consistent with anti-statist and anti-realist attitudes. After first describing negative liberals’ bias in favor of less active grand strategies, I deduce some implications for how negative liberal grand strategies are formed.

NORMATIVE DISSONANCE. Negative liberals tend towards exemplarism in foreign policy. The central norm of negative liberty underscores for its adherents a fundamental trade-off between commitments abroad and liberty from state coercion at home.

Because successful foreign policy is strongly associated with a large and intrusive central state, negative liberals have a motivated bias against vindicationalist beliefs about how effectively America can promote liberalism internationally. Negative liberals will still believe that free trade and democracy cause peace; that illiberalism causes war; and that international law will help bring international progress. But they are much more likely to be skeptical of the results of foreign intervention and to accept the idea that liberal processes work best when expanding naturally under their own power.

For the same reasons, they also have motivated incentives to see only a narrow range of threats. Negative liberals generally regard America as materially quite secure—negative liberals are much impressed by the sturdy ramparts of the Western hemisphere. They also believe America can remain ideologically secure from illiberalism abroad as the inevitable march of history takes place. In both cases, to believe otherwise would require them to acknowledge a value trade-off between their core anti-statist values and the requirements of international peace and security. In addition to the difficulty of overcoming motivated bias, acknowledging this kind of trade-off would place severe strain on intuitive psychological processes that value simplicity and cognitive consistency—that is, the common human tendencies to overlook value trade-offs and to believe all favored normative ends can be achieved together.

An active foreign policy violates negative liberal norms in two ways. First, foreign commitments require a set of restrictions on valuable domestic liberties—important negative rights will be violated in the process of executing grand strategy. Second, a successful foreign policy demands a concerted effort toward state-building. Centralization of power is an anathema to adherents of negative liberty and can easily lead to a future assault on all manner of freedoms. In short, negative liberty acts as a force pushing American grand strategy on a vector towards less activity on the power management continuum. Negative liberals favor a grand strategy approaching ideal-typical non-entanglement and will seek to minimize foreign commitments to the degree consistent with their narrow vision of American security.

Overseas commitments impose at least three types of immediate restrictions on negative liberal norms. First, foreign commitments require the extraction of resources from society at large, with greater commitments producing greater costs. The taxation required for defense spending and the conduct of foreign policy deprives citizens of the fruits of their labors. It lowers their purchasing power and limits their sphere of choice and opportunity. Indeed, taxation beyond a certain level is often viewed as illegitimate by negative liberals.

Second, foreign commitments demand a strong military to back them up. They require the mustering of men and their potential death in battle. The forced labor of military service—especially via heavily coercive measures like the draft—violates core negative rights. The
infliction of injury or death represents the ultimate deprivation of liberty. Simply put, forcing people to put life at risk and to labor for the state infringes upon the zone of non-infringement and represents a major loss of freedom.

Third, a strategy that risks major war will often require centralized management of the economy. A war economy needs to have its resources channeled towards the production of violence. Factories must be told what to make; raw materials must be rationed and apportioned to maximize productivity; investment must be made on a war schedule and in war sectors; prices must be controlled. If defense spending is high, state interference on a large scale may be necessary even during times of peace. Such centralized management severely restricts the free enterprise and imposes restrictions on businesses and individuals in areas often central to their lives.

Moreover, the foreign commitments that restrict liberty at home also launch dangerous state expanding episodes whose effects persist long after wars end. Funding foreign adventures requires constructing intrusive revenue-generating machines, and an extractive capacity built for war can easily be turned to other purposes. Managing an economy necessitates creating a bevy of administrative and regulatory structures. Bureaucracies are noxious and coercive in themselves and also beget more bureaucracy in the future.

The military bureaucracies required by active strategies are particularly obnoxious. Historically, negative liberals have feared the military—and especially ground forces—as a potential tool for domestic suppression and a threat to democracy. But even in societies with strong traditions of civilian control, the creation of military bureaucracies is still worrisome to negative liberals. Once a bureaucratic entity is built, it becomes a going concern as a political interest group, and so makes itself a constant drain on public finances. As the keepers of national security, military bureaucracies are particularly effective at calling on the resources of the treasury. Furthermore, a larger national security state tends to concentrate political power and capacity in the executive branch, undermining the equilibrium sought by the separation of powers. From the perspective of negative liberty, militaries beget future militarism.

In sum, negative liberals have an interconnected, mutually reinforcing set of beliefs that leads them to minimize international commitments. They doubt that power abroad can menace America’s secure hemispheric fortress. Negative liberals will cheer liberalism abroad from the sidelines, but if the world does not want to trade with American merchants, adopt American institutions, or behave like civilized adherents to international law, they will tend to believe American action could not have helped them anyway. Illiberal states only hurt themselves, and in the end, the tide of history is against them. In the interim, American merchants can trade with more enlightened states or with each other, American democracy can serve as a beacon for the world to emulate, and American security will not depend on international legal authority. American citizens will therefore be able to enjoy the fruits of liberty without crushing it at home. Negative liberty thus exerts a retractive force on American grand strategy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGY. Negative liberal norms exert their retractive force through their impact on the different elements of grand strategy. Where negative liberal norms dominate the policy process—that is, where they shape threat perception, strategic preferences on the cost/control trade-off, and preferences for diplomatic and military policy tools—a less active grand strategy will result.

First, negative liberals will have a higher threshold for perceiving international threats. To prompt action, a foreign power will have to appear very dangerous, possessing large economic capacity and real or potential military might—the kind of state that could possibly
make trouble in America's secure rear area of the Western hemisphere. This constraint represents a high bar for international problems to clear, allowing negative liberals to maintain the pleasing belief that they need not dirty their hands in global power politics suffer the consequent violation of American negative rights. Ideological illiberalism abroad will be seen as an unfortunate but unthreatening and historically doomed development.

This low threat perception helps generate a central strategic preference for negative liberals: they will tend to try and minimize costs by forgoing control in grand strategy, pushing American strategy leftward on the power management continuum.

This cost-conscious strategic inclination manifests itself in diplomatic and military policy. Exponents of negative liberty view alliances, international organizations, and other diplomatic cooperation with great skepticism. Political connections overseas generate commitments, with all of the attendant defects for the promotion of freedom at home. At best, they can be necessary and temporary expedients for solving common problems and sharing burdens. At worst, they are transmission belts for war, serving to embroil America in causes not her own at excessive and unnecessary cost. Such cooperation as negative liberty advocates seek will be limited and largely ad hoc. For these reasons, Americans have often scorned international organizations and alliances; their preference is for the gradual development of international law that America does not have to enforce.

However, once in an alliance, negative liberals advocate giving allies real influence in decision-making and treating them even-handedly. They do so because alliances are viewed principally as a burden-sharing mechanism whose primary role is to reduce American costs. American diplomats operating under the ideas of negative liberty will be principally concerned with keeping allies from defecting on such commitments. Operationally, this means they are willing to cede some amount of policy control to allies, and forgo international influence on behalf of their preferences, in order to ensure cooperation. Allies will bear more of the load but will also have more opportunity to set the terms of alliance behavior.

Negative liberals tend to dislike military power in all its forms, but they have a special distaste for standing armies and other ground forces. Ground forces are more manpower-intensive than other kinds of military power, which means they tread more heavily upon the rights of those who must serve in them. Furthermore, they kill and maim personnel in greater numbers and with greater frequency than other forms of military power, which is the greatest deprivation of liberty possible. Ground forces tend to require longer and less flexible commitments, and are a recipe for constant entanglement and quagmires. Thus, adherents of negative liberty prefer “standoff” military forces like air and naval power. In the nuclear era, comparatively cheap atomic weapons are strongly favored.

In sum, norms of negative liberty produce preferences for fewer strategic commitments abroad. In part because of the psychological mechanisms discussed above, negative liberals perceive few material threats and believe America to be safe from the ideological expansion of illiberalism. Those who favor negative liberty tend to have minimal foreign policy goals and favor grand strategies with minimal extractive commitments. They also have preferences for foreign policy tools that reduce rather than bolster state activity. If alliances are dangerous, why have any? If one must have them, use them as a burden-sharing opportunity in order to protect liberty back home. If armies are dangerous and expensive, have navies, air forces, and nuclear weapons instead. These policies bolster the central norm of anti-statism: fewer commitments, fewer resources devoted to them, and less intervention into the lives of individuals.
Logic of Negative Liberty

FOREIGN POLICY’S PROMISE FOR POSITIVE LIBERTY

Positive liberals have no hang-ups about an active foreign policy, but they also lack negative liberals’ convenient skepticism about threats. A more active foreign policy to meet expanded threats is in tension with the anti-realpolitik attitude held by all liberals. Rather than revise this norm, though, positive liberals interpret the liberal approach to foreign policy so as to make it consistent with creating a more liberal world. This interpretation is made with ease, as state action to spread liberty at home appears analogous to similar action abroad. Here I show how tension between different aspects of the general liberal world view produces motivated bias among positive liberals towards more active grand strategies, and sketch some implications for how this shapes positive liberal foreign policy.

NORMATIVE DISSONANCE. Positive liberals will tend towards a crusading approach to grand strategy. They have none of the psychological incentives of negative liberals to discount material and ideological threats. Indeed, given that they draw on the general liberal belief that illiberalism causes war, encroaching illiberalism in the international system will appear quite threatening. But if illiberalism is threatening to American security and values, then America risks becoming permanently mired in power politics. Positive liberals therefore have a motivated bias towards believing that that American foreign policy can vindicate liberalism abroad: grand
strategy can increase economic interdependence, spread political democracy, and construct effective international institutions.

Positive liberals also see foreign policy as a natural extension of their domestic norms. Positive liberals reason that state intervention is crucial for spreading the liberty to take effective action at home; why couldn’t it also vindicate American rights abroad and secure liberal values more generally? To do otherwise would, in essence, be to sacrifice those values. Adherents of positive liberty are thus inclined to promote and defend liberal values through active grand strategies with more intense international commitments. Positive liberal ideas act as a force pushing American policy on a vector towards more activity on the grand strategic continuum.

Two types of considerations support these preferences. First, positive liberty acts as a permissive force for American activity abroad. Positive liberals do not think state expansion is necessarily problematic and believe that it can in fact be an essential element of promoting liberty at home. Less troubled by negative liberal concerns about resource extraction, positive liberals are open to a larger set of commitments for a wider range of reasons. They will see a greater number of material threats as dangerous. And the general liberal belief in the war-causing properties of illiberalism will not be restrained; they will view illiberalism abroad as a hostile force arrayed against American security and values. Positive liberals are thus not hung up on the costs of foreign policy per se but are more interested in what can be bought for those costs.

Second, positive liberty provides a propulsive force for American grand strategy—it supplies an active overseas agenda for the promotion of liberty. Of great importance is that positive liberals see the right to free exchange as a positive right that must be vindicated by the government. An economically closed world is one where American merchants will be intolerably oppressed in their attempts to advance their interests. Positive liberals will see the promotion of international openness as a state duty, allowing both Americans and others to freely act in the pursuit of their goals.

More generally, positive liberals see an analogy between foreign and domestic affairs, expecting that state-building commitments in both realms can be used to gain control over important policy domains. And just as state control over policy at home helps to spread freedom, so too can influence abroad promote liberal values. In domestic affairs, positive liberals are prone to concentrating state power in order to spread domestic liberty. By redistributing wealth, creating government programs designed to achieve valued ends, or developing citizen capacities, state intervention can provide the pre-conditions for the effective use of freedom. Internationally, these pre-conditions can be provided by commitments that defend or promote basic liberal values: democratic regimes and open trading systems. Positive liberals see these traits as the necessary building blocks for a free society, much like the provision of resources is a building block for a free life at home. In short, positive liberals will support more commitments abroad in order to promote and defend global liberty and American rights.48

**IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGY.** These views lead positive liberty to serve as a propulsive force towards more active grand strategies in foreign affairs. Positive liberal preferences manifest themselves in the different elements of grand strategy. When positive liberty dominates

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48 Positive liberals favor free-markets abroad in general, though they disagree with negative liberals, and among themselves, about what constitutes a “free” market. However, the ability to take advantage of the international division of labor through free trade has been a bedrock liberal principle since the eighteenth century. It is this standard liberal preference that positive liberals focus on promoting in their foreign policy.
the policy-making process, it impacts threat perception, goals abroad, views of the cost/control trade-off, and choices for diplomatic and military policy tools.

Positive liberty’s permissive nature will lead statesmen to a broader perception of international threats. They will not adopt narrow definitions of national security by default but will rather pursue security expansively, often extending their view of threats beyond hegemonic concentrations of power. For example, ideological and economic arrangements in other regimes can also create security worries. Closure and illiberalism are, in the broad liberal view, major causes of war. Positive liberals have none of the incentives of negative liberals to dismiss such security threats. They will therefore anticipate that an increasingly closed world with a growing number of illiberal states would require American hyper-vigilance and a serious participation in the evils of power politics. Positive liberals’ motivated bias about the efficacy with which American can build a more liberal world will also lead them to believe these threats can be ameliorated by spreading liberalism.

At the same time, positive liberty’s propulsive properties will create incentives for statesmen to promote liberal values abroad. Positive liberals will use their international commitments to defend American trading rights, democratic institutions, and international openness where they exist, and promote them where they do not. Such a view does not demand the universal promotion of liberal values, nor does it require democracy and free markets to be at the center of every foreign policy decision. In an anarchic world, statesmen are concerned first with ensuring basic security and with everything else second. Indeed, liberal statesmen will even tread on democracy and free trade abroad if they think it necessary for national defense. But we should nonetheless expect advocates of positive liberty to highly value liberal ends and to seek them where they can.

Greater threat perceptions and larger goals generate a central strategic preference: positive liberals will favor grand strategies that provide more leverage over foreign affairs. Such commitments will come, in the main, at a correspondingly higher cost.

These strategic leanings towards more control over international politics will manifest themselves in diplomatic and military policy. Believers in positive liberty are inclined towards participation in alliances and international organizations. Unlike their negative counterparts, positive liberals do not view diplomatic cooperation as primarily having a burden-sharing function. Instead, it is a mechanism for gaining influence over the policy of others. Given that believers in positive liberty will champion strategies that actively manage the balance of power abroad, it stands to reason that the policies of other states will sometimes need to be modified to suit American plans. By committing itself abroad, America can create economic, military, and political dependencies among its allies that give it tremendous bargaining power, but which also come at a cost. In order to better dictate alliance terms, positive liberals will often choose to bear more alliance burdens.

Advocates of positive liberty believe that when it comes to military power, the more the merrier. All military options are viewed as valuable tools of the state, and it would be a mistake not to complete one’s toolbox as far as is possible, even at high cost. But the preference of positive liberty for international influence will often lead to a focus on ground forces—land power is the surest way to set the details of complex policies on the ground and to pursue difficult objectives. (It is very hard to build market democracy solely from the air or sea, to say nothing of building it with nuclear weapons!) The range of flexibility and influence that ground forces provide is a major asset for strategies requiring large amounts of power management. Ground forces are also relatively difficult to remove with speed once stationed abroad, thereby
helping cement the bonds of alliance. Positive liberty will therefore look with favor upon ground forces, though they will not reject other types of military power.

In sum, norms of positive liberty generate strategies with a greater number of commitments, and which maximize control over policy. Adherents to a positive conception of liberty will see more material threats, fear encroaching illiberalism, and will support robust policies abroad to defend against such dangers. As importantly, they will seek to expand liberty overseas by spreading the pre-conditions and baseline capacities for exercising freedom: they will promote liberal democracy and open trading systems. American trading rights will also come in for a vigorous defense. Positive liberty will see alliances and international organizations as helpful tools to these ends, in part because of their potential to direct allied policy. Finally, advocates of positive liberty will especially favor ground forces, which are seen as a flexible tool for influencing a broad range of problems. Preferences for these tools reinforce the central tendency of positive liberty: to spread liberty by increasing policy-maker influence over the configuration of power abroad.

Logic of Positive Liberty

**Threat Perception:**
- broad set of material and ideological threats

**Liberty Preference:**
- promote democracy and free trade abroad

**Strategic Preference:**
- higher control, higher cost

**Alliance Preferences:**
- more alliances and organizations, control of alliance policy

**Military Preferences:**
- flexible military forces, ground forces

**OBJECTIONS TO THE LOGICS OF LIBERALISM**

It is worth addressing potential objections to the logic just presented. The essence of these objections is that philosophic beliefs about concepts of liberty at home do not logically compel the foreign policy preferences I have specified. Positive liberals need not be filled with evangelical fervor in international affairs; negative liberals need not be bound with an isolationist
straight jacket. Indeed, reflection finds counter-examples to TLFP’s logic near at hand: dovish positive liberals like George McGovern and hawkish negative liberals like Barry Goldwater. Why, then, should the reader accept TLFP’s theoretical elaboration as more compelling than other possibilities? Here I examine the possibility of different combinations of strategic beliefs.

ANALYTIC ASSESSMENT AND REALIST BELIEFS. An analytic assessment of foreign policy beliefs or a realist approach to national security are the most obvious routes towards a different set of strategic preferences than those generated by TLFP. If arguments about American capacity to promote liberal values abroad were assessed on the merits after thorough analysis, then different liberal norms might not create central strategic tendencies. If such policies were seen to be successful, even negative liberals would pay the state-building costs to reap the benefits of global liberty; if they looked untenable, even positive liberals would draw back. Similarly, if a realist understanding of national security were adopted by decision-makers, different concepts of liberty might not matter much either. Positive and negative liberals could pursue their differing goals at home, with both groups understanding that American security was the highest value to be pursued in foreign policy. Ideological at home but cynical abroad, American statesmen would adjust strategy to meet the international environment, pursuing liberalism overseas only on the margins.

For better or worse, however, statesmen are not inculcated with scientific norms of belief assessment. Like most people, they absorb their beliefs from their environment as they mature, and evaluate the welter of ambiguous information from the world with heuristics, mental shortcuts, stereotypes, and truncated searches for policy—and this under the best of conditions. In most cases, we can expect statesmen to rely on far less “rational” methods of belief formation and to be prone towards intuitive and motivated bias. These biases will inhibit them from recognizing value clashes or from radically revising previous belief systems. Motivated biases, in particular, will tend to adjust belief systems so that valued norms are paired with causal beliefs about how they can be achieved, rather than reducing norm salience or adjusting policies that embody normative values.

Furthermore, in American culture, some form of liberalism will be the widely shared pre-existing belief system, and this tradition is pervasively anti-realist. It recognizes no fundamental reason why domestic norms should not apply internationally, and attributes their absence to illiberalism and power politics. Grafting realist beliefs about international politics onto such system is exactly the radical type of change that is difficult to induce in cognitive structures. This is not to say that American leaders do not care about national security, or that they cannot act in “realist” ways. Indeed, the next section outlines some ways in which the international system creates the high stakes and unambiguous information necessary to influence even liberal beliefs. But it is to say that typical American statesman operates with a liberal belief structure that changes only slowly and is likely to have major impact on his default strategic preferences.

TLFP predicts the central tendencies outlined above because motivated bias cuts differently when competing primary norms try to reconcile themselves with liberalism’s international values and anti-realpolitik orientation. Negative liberty preserves its anti-statist norm by setting a high standard for threats and by assuming that American help will only impede the march of liberal values abroad. This allows negative liberals to maintain their commitment to global liberalism; to see illiberalism abroad as unthreatening; and to avoid perception of a

49 It does seems likely, though, that those who have made a deep study of international politics and the scientific method will affirm far more sophisticated value combinations than those outlined here.
need to engage in power politics for security—all without building an oppressive state. Positive liberty has no threat inhibitions, and therefore takes threats from both geopolitics and global illiberalism more seriously. But if these threats cannot be met, then America is permanently stuck defending itself in an immoral power political world. Positive liberals are thus motivated to believe that liberal values can be effectively spread abroad, expanding liberty and reducing threats, in a manner directly analogous to how the state should act at home.

Table 2.3: Motivated Bias and the Reconciliation of Liberal Beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Basic Liberal View of World Politics</th>
<th>Negative Liberty Variant</th>
<th>Positive Liberty Variant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Liberal Values</strong></td>
<td>Peace, free trade, and democracy are normative and natural.</td>
<td>Liberal values advance best on their own power through U.S. example.</td>
<td>Liberal values must be vindicated for both American and global welfare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response to Power Politics</strong></td>
<td>War, economic closure, and security threats are caused by illiberalism and power politics.</td>
<td>American is generally secure and need not involve itself in power politics.</td>
<td>America should solve the problem of power politics by spreading liberal values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Means of Protecting Central Domestic Liberal Norm</strong></td>
<td>No consensus.</td>
<td>Lack of threats and U.S. inability to spread liberalism means no need for a powerful state.</td>
<td>Promoting American values abroad will aid security and global freedom, in a manner analogous to state action at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source of Motivated Bias</strong></td>
<td>Differs according to variant of liberalism.</td>
<td>Plays down threats and effectiveness of value promotion abroad.</td>
<td>Sees more threats and plays up effectiveness of value promotion abroad to permanently abolish power politics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**POSITIVE LIBERTY AND GUNS VS. BUTTER.** A counter-argument to TLFP’s proposed evangelical logic of positive liberty might focus on the economic tradeoffs associated with foreign policy commitments. Specifically, there are limits to the resources the state can extract from the economy, and resources spent spreading liberty overseas are not spent vindicating positive rights at home. While in the abstract positive liberals may value the rights of all individuals equally, in practice politicians will favor the interests of their national constituents. So we ought to expect statesmen to favor some version of “positive liberty in one country:” they will prefer to spend scarce resources spreading domestic liberty, and avoid expensive commitments designed to promote foreign liberty. This argument has some merit in the abstract: when faced with an undeniable trade-off between foreign and domestic priorities, American statesmen of all stripes will choose the politically expedient path of favoring Americans. But there are several reasons this truth does
not go very far. Because positive liberals perceive more threats abroad, often of an ideological nature, foreign commitments are perceived to be delivering goods to domestic constituents in the form of greater security.

Moreover, the same economic theories that underpin state intervention in the domestic economy help to deny the necessity of trade-offs between commitments at home and abroad: Keynesian and other growth-oriented economic doctrines claim that in some circumstances government spending can be economically efficient, including defense spending. In practice, the United States is an enormously wealthy country in the period under study. Actual political trade-offs between guns and butter have been little perceived and rarely made by positive liberals, usually only in economic depression or wartime. For instance, a desire to trade guns for butter might have gotten America out of Vietnam, but it could not stop her from getting in.50

In the end, nothing compels any individual to hold any two beliefs simultaneously: any single positive liberal may be stridently isolationist, and particular negative liberals can be uncompromising hawks. But there are sound theoretical reasons for expecting that the more ideologically consistent preferences I have described will be dominant. Of course, the final proof of the logic of the theory must be its historical accuracy, an empirical question explored in great detail in the subsequent chapters.

Geopolitics, Liberalism, and Predictions for American Grand Strategy

Differing concepts of liberty are not enough to predict American grand strategy by themselves. The international system often exerts a profound influence on grand strategy—liberalism can help statesmen to interpret the world but cannot let them create it anew. In order to accurately predict American strategic behavior, liberal desires must be evaluated in conjunction with objective constraints and incentives imposed by the structure of world politics.

In this section, I complete TLFP by combining liberal preferences with some insights drawn from realist theory. Showing how the structure of the international system mediates the influence of ideas, I make predictions for the central outcome of interest: American grand strategy. In order to expand the ability to test the theory, I also make predictions for a number of causal processes that we ought to observe if the theory is correct.

Geopolitics and Foreign Policy

The conventional realist account of grand strategy stresses the deep impact of systemic pressures on foreign policy. Living in an anarchic world without any higher authority to protect them, states fear other concentrations of power. In order to survive, states are forced to take measures to protect themselves and to seize opportunities to augment their own capabilities. Realists often interpret these pressures as dominant. There is little room for ideological aims in such a world.51

However, America’s geopolitical position is relatively immune from these forces. By virtue of its unique geography, America lives in a defense-dominant world. Holding an

51 The paradigmatic realist works of modern “structural” realism are Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*; Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. For an application to grand strategy along the lines in the text, see Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*. 
unassailable power position among the states of the Western hemisphere, America is also protected from extra-regional great powers by two gigantic moats conventionally referred to as the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. As Harvey Sapolsky puts it, “To the north and south are weak, friendly neighbors; to the east and west are fish.” Weak neighbors and the “stopping power of water” mean that the fears for survival, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and power position that have historically plagued great powers are radically diminished for the United States in most circumstances.52

American statesmen therefore feel the pressures of the geopolitical environment much less keenly than their European counterparts. Great powers who share borders with other great powers often feel the need to expand for security reasons, heeding the maxim that the “best defense is a good offense.” But for America, the best defense is almost always a good defense—and given the difficulty of crossing the water barrier, not necessarily even much of one at that. The American strategic dilemma is much more fortuitous and is summed up well by Francis Bacon: “he that commands the sea is at great liberty and can take as much or as little of the war as he will.” Indeed, American wars are almost always wars of choice.53

In fact, there is only one kind of threat that acts as a propulsive force compelling American commitments abroad: the rise of a state that could conceivably cross the water barrier and make trouble in the Western hemisphere. John Mearsheimer refers to such states as “potential hegemons,” so named for the possibility that they might conquer all of the great powers in their region. Potential hegemons are distinguished by their lopsided advantages in aggregate power: demographic, economic, and industrial resources sufficient to produce a military machine that could conquer an entire region of the globe. With all the resources of such territory in tow, and no regional rivals nipping at its heels, a powerful state might find a way to gain a foothold in the Western hemisphere: either by outright assault, subversion of weaker powers, or a constricting economic blockade.54

This nightmare scenario provides a strong systemic incentive for American statesmen to make commitments abroad to contain potential hegemons. It is more prudent to stop a potential hegemon before it has conquered its own neighborhood, while there are still great power allies to help. The threat of a potential hegemon increases with two factors: the appearance of a state with lopsided aggregate economic advantages and the rapid increase of its military might. Such


threats are sufficiently unambiguous that they cannot be rationalized away by appeals to negative liberty.55

The international system also provides two kinds of objective constraints on American grand strategy. First, strategies towards the right end of the power management continuum are inherently more difficult to execute. The more directly and intensely a state seeks to manage the constellation of international power, the more resistance it is likely to face, and the more resources it will be likely have to expend. This systemic resistance can place a check on the grand ambitions of positive liberty. As positive liberals make more commitments to manage the balance of power, other actors will sometimes push back. Control is easy to pay for but harder to actually obtain. Preponderance strategies, in particular, may simply be unobtainable, no matter how hard statesmen push for them—they will require either a tremendous amount of power, international acquiescence, or both.

A second type of systemic constraint is pressure towards greater strategic “integration.” As discussed above, psychological deviations from rationality will frequently allow leaders to avoid making value-trade off s. But as the international environment becomes more dangerous, or more generally, as the realities of the international situation become more unambiguous, decision-makers will be forced to make tough choices that link their policy ends and means. For instance, though grand strategy generally involves a trade-off between cost and control, statesmen will be inclined to believe their preferred goals can be achieved at low costs. But as systemic pressure pushes back on American policy, they will be forced to either ratchet up their commitment or ratchet back their ambitions. That is, the international system will tend to push states towards more consistent, coherent, ideal types of grand strategy, though they will seek to avoid difficult choices for as long as feasible.

The international environment thus acts as a force pushing American grand strategy on twin vectors inward from either extreme and towards the broad center of the power management continuum. Potential hegemons give the United States strong incentives to engage in some kind of commitment before they conquer Europe and must be faced alone. The resistance of other powers to being dominated pushes against American attempts to exert predominant influence. However, these forces do not fully determine American grand strategy: the presence of potential hegemons does not tell diplomats whether to balance or to buckpass, and the difficulties of preponderance does not mean it will not be attempted or that it cannot be successful. The system also ultimately serves as a rationalizing and integrating force in American grand strategy, providing unambiguous information that forces statesmen to face hard choices between cost and control.

PREDICTIONS FOR AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY

I argue that the dominant conception of liberty among American foreign policy elites determines strategic choice within the parameters outlined for it by the international system.

55 This account of systemic influence is a mélange of different realist theories, but is probably most compatible with a very narrow interpretation of the offense-defense balance. My view is that systemic threats are produced mostly by aggregate power, but that geography heavily modifies the importance of power advantages; to a lesser extent this can be true of technological change. See, Robert Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” World Politics 30, no. 2 (January 1978): 167-214; Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine, pp. 64-67. I also draw on the debate around the stopping power of water, which despite its association with John Mearsheimer, is probably best thought of as a defensive realist analysis. See Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, pp. 114-128.
Negative liberty tends to produce preferences for lower costs at home and therefore fewer commitments overseas, while positive liberty is biased towards creating more international commitments for the purposes of securing more policy control, though at higher costs. Those preferences, combined with the anti-hegemonic impulse dictated by the international system, yield predictions about American grand strategy under four different conditions.

When negative liberty is dominant at home and geopolitical forces abroad look unthreatening, we ought to observe an American grand strategy very similar to ideal-typical non-entanglement: American statesmen will have few goals abroad, have little need of international influence, and will rely on mechanisms of deterrence and non-interference to defend a detached position from the constellation of power. The absence of any potential regional hegemon means that systemic pressures will be felt very weakly thanks to America’s secure geography. The preferences dictated by negative liberty ought to have free reign, with few resulting commitments abroad. Those commitments that are made will likely be symbolic or modest, and this international detachment will produce no need for resource mobilization at home. The resulting strategy should be cheap, and state coercion should be minimal, at least for foreign policy’s sake.

When the international system looks more threatening—when a potential hegemon looks like it could emerge abroad—and negative liberty is dominant, the resulting grand strategy will be buckpassing. American statesmen will seek to prevent a single unacceptable outcome on the balance of power: its dominance by the potential hegemon. Statesmen will require some kind of commitment in order to do so, but will try to rely on free-riding mechanisms. The rise in the threat level generates a real need for mobilizing resources to underwrite commitments. But the negative liberal preference for low costs will ensure that these commitments abroad are judicious and relatively inexpensive, at least until statesmen are certain that heavy commitment is essential. American statesmen will work very hard to build up other centers of power to contend with the potential hegemon: as Mearsheimer notes, it often “makes sense for a buck-passer to allow or even facilitate the growth in power of the intended buck-catcher. That burden-bearer would then have a better chance of containing the aggressor state, which would increase the buck-passer’s prospects of remaining on the sidelines.” In short, America will aim at getting others to bear the burden of containing the potential hegemon, managing the balance of power by free riding on the costs of others.56

When the threat abroad is high but positive liberty is dominant at home, America should pursue a strategy of balancing. Multiple concerns about the international order will cause statesmen to see a need for more control over the international environment and to depend on the mechanism of forward commitments abroad to obtain it. Deep concern over the geopolitical environment will not be counteracted by an anti-statist drag on policy, and so America should pursue a more expansive understanding of security that incurs less risk. Moreover, positive liberty will also evince concern for its other objectives abroad, seeking to defend and expand democracy and open trading systems where possible, and may see threats from encroaching illiberal institutions. Still, extra-security goals will be pursued only on the margin: the core anti-hegemonic interest will be the main focus. This strategy will require more commitments, and will be more costly, but leaders will also be able to mobilize more resources in the absence of the anti-statist impulse.

56 Ibid., p. 159.
Finally, when threat is low and positive liberty dominant, extra-security aims will be unleashed in an attempt at preponderance. Statesmen will have large liberal goals abroad and will require extensive control to meet them. The perception of many threats to liberalism and of opportunities to spread American values will cause statesmen to seek a dominant position as manager of the balance of power. They will therefore turn to mechanisms of political expansion and military supremacy to facilitate their strategy. There will be no looming threat causing decision makers to keep their powder dry, while a positive conception of liberty will suggest all manner of good America might do for liberty abroad. America will attempt to maintain pre-eminence and control in security affairs, and use this position to promote free trade and democracy. We should observe an increase in costly commitments, bought in an attempt to control policies aimed at the spread of liberty in other regions.

However, other centers of power may well resist these attempts. If so, then achieving and maintaining a preponderant position will require an enormous advantage in relative power, possibly one so large that it encourages other states not even to think of resisting. Alternatively, states might decide not to resist American preponderance for other reasons, perhaps seeing it as an advantage. Thus, whether positive liberals achieve success for a preponderant strategy or whether they are pressured by the system back into something more akin to balancing depends upon the size of the American relative power advantage and the degree of international quiescence.57

These predictions for strategic outcomes assume ceteris paribus conditions. Negative liberty, positive liberty, and the international system operate as different directional vectors that push American grand strategy along the power management continuum. In the long run, these predictions just laid out are where American strategy should end up under the different values for the independent variables. But all else is not always equal. In the short run, decision-makers will cognitively strive to avoid value trade-offs between cost and control, and will often require systemic pressure to integrate their political ends and means. Furthermore, though TLFP posits that liberalism and the international system are the most powerful causes of American grand strategy, it is surely true that other factors can matter. In certain eras, or for temporary periods, other variables may exert influence on American foreign policy, pushing it one way or the other on the power management continuum. The empirical world, alas, is always somewhat messier than theoretical models suggest. Fortunately, TLFP makes several other predictions beyond grand strategic outcomes that can aid in assessing its power.

Table 2.4: TLFP Predictions for Grand Strategic Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Negative Liberty</th>
<th>Positive Liberty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Potential Hegemon</td>
<td>Non-entanglement</td>
<td>Balancing/Preponderance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Hegemon</td>
<td>Buckpassing</td>
<td>Balancing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CAUSAL PROCESS PREDICTIONS

I argued in Chapter One that no extant theory of American foreign policy could explain the variation in America’s grand strategy towards the European great powers during the twentieth century. If TLFP can explain the major American strategic choices of the last century, it represents a major improvement in our understanding of American grand strategy. However, grand strategy is a subject that can only be measured over long periods of time, which means there are few observations on which to run empirical tests. Even if TLFP appears to explain the small number of twentieth century strategic outcomes, it makes sense to search out grounds for even stronger causal inference.

Fortunately, TLFP posits a very specific causal process: that the content of liberal belief systems will impact American strategic decision-making across a variety of observable areas relevant to strategy making. This process implies several additional observations beyond grand strategic outcomes: we ought to be able to observe a distinctive set of rationales driving strategic behavior in presidential administrations with different concepts of liberty. The more we observe these rationales in the policy process, rather than some other set of reasons, the more TLFP is confirmed. Indeed, the logic of process tracing is quite strong: if we observe liberal rationales operating in the manner anticipated, it would be very unlikely that some other factor was actually at work. To borrow one analogy, evidence of causal process mechanisms is like evidence at a crime scene: if there are signs of a struggle, forced entry, and blood traces on a blunt instrument nearby, it would be a hugely surprising if the cause of death were not murder.58

The causal processes posited by TLFP are the links between liberal rationales and the elements of American foreign policy: threat perceptions, interpretations of cost and control, and preferences for different foreign policy tools. Ultimately, this process culminates in a pattern of policy decisions that comprise the central dependent variable under study: American grand strategy. Thus, the process observations are not the choice of policies. Individual policy outcomes may be impacted by many variables, and their pattern is already being used to measure the principal grand strategy prediction. Rather, the process observations are the presence of liberal rationales, their impact on threat perceptions and cost/control preferences, and the consequent support or “push” for certain kinds of policy tools. These should be observable regardless of the outcome of any given policy decision.

When negative liberty is dominant, four distinctive liberal concerns should be observed in the policy process: (1) anti-tax rationales and a general impetus towards minimizing economic extraction, (2) arguments against bureaucracy and further state-building, (3) desires to defend the free enterprise system and avoid economic management, to include macroeconomic concerns about the effects of foreign policy commitments, and (4) desires to avoid conscription and casualties. These concerns should be voiced as rationales for particular policies, and voiced during and before decisions.

In turn, we should observe negative liberals willing to trade lowered costs, in the above concerns, for less control in foreign policy. In general, we should observe concerns about the

58 On the logic of process-tracing see Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), Ch. 10; Andrew Bennett, “Stirring the Frequentist Pot with a Dash of Bayes,” Political Analysis 14, no. 3 (2006): 339-344; James Mahoney, “After KKV: The New Methodology of Qualitative Research,” World Politics 62, no. 1 (January 2010). The last two articles make use of the crime scene metaphor and explain the “folk Bayesian” logic of inference that underlies it.
costs of foreign policy. More specifically, we should see evidence that they desire to minimize defense budgets, reduce or limit the number and size of military bureaucracies, and favor force employment plans that prioritize non-ground force elements. In the diplomatic arena, negative liberals should favor cooperation limited in time and scope, and focus on burden sharing to meet common problems. Pre-commitments and opportunity costs should be minimized, and we should see a willingness to yield control to allies. In interpreting threats, negative liberals should focus on large concentrations of power and their threat to American geographic security. They should act on fewer threats for more limited sets of reasons than their positive liberal counterparts.

When positive liberty is dominant, three liberal concerns ought to be present in policy decision-making: (1) support for American trading rights, (2) support for democracy overseas and (3) support for open trading systems abroad, as a more general matter. These ends ought to be stated as objects of concern and potential reasons for favoring one course of action over another. In turn, positive liberals should be observed seeking more control over international outcomes and the policy of others. Generally, we should observe worries that America might lack the requisite influence to achieve its goals. Specifically, positive liberals should favor a larger amount and wider array of military capabilities, as well as force employment doctrines that maximize the number and intensity of tasks the military can carry out—likely to include a focus on ground forces. In diplomatic policy, they should favor more cooperation of greater scope and depth. Pre-commitments should be embraced for the potential leverage they give over partners. When interpreting threats, positive liberals should see more problem areas, for a more diverse set of rationales, than their negative liberal counterparts.

Geopolitical forces will also be evident in the causal process of grand strategy making. The aggregation of large amounts of relative power abroad should attract the concern of policymakers of all stripes, and we should observe these concerns expressed. A rise in geopolitical threat will generally elicit a shift towards greater costs and great attempts at control in grand strategy. Ambitious strategies may incite resistance that causes leaders to ratchet back the control they seek. We should also observe the relative success or failure of American policies leading statesmen to make hard choices that better integrate strategic ends and means.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rationales driving policy</th>
<th>Negative Liberty</th>
<th>Positive Liberty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anti-state building concerns.</td>
<td>Support for democracy and open-trading systems.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost/Control preferences</th>
<th>Avoid high costs</th>
<th>Seek greater control.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threat perception</th>
<th>Respond only to large, material threats.</th>
<th>Respond to material and ideological threats of varying types.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diplomatic policy preferences</th>
<th>Skeptical of alliances; attempt to use them for burden sharing.</th>
<th>Alliances and institutions valued; attempt to use them for leverage and influence.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Military policy preferences</th>
<th>Less military spending and an emphasis on standoff military</th>
<th>Greater military spending including an emphasis on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Measuring the Independent Variables

Since TLFP produces different expectations for American grand strategy depending on the value its variables take, a consistent and accurate measurement of each relevant variable is essential to a persuasive argument. In this section I present standards for measuring the independent variables of liberal ideas and geopolitical threat, with the goal of providing a transparent rubric whose judgments the reader can independently evaluate.

MEASURING CONCEPTS OF LIBERTY

Ideas are not directly observable and are subject to diverse representation by human beings. Any standard for measuring ideas must therefore answer three questions. First, whose ideas matter? In order to know if concepts of liberty were present in theoretically meaningful ways, the locus of those ideas must be specified. Second, what kind of evidence is required to measure someone’s ideas? Given the inability to observe concepts of liberty directly, justification for the reliability of indirect observations must be made, and standards of evidence set. Third, what substantive indicators denote the presence of particular ideas? Each concept of liberty ought to generate a consistent standard of theoretically relevant markers. Moreover, because human beings are not always bound by consistency across different beliefs, some framework for weighing the preponderance of an individual’s beliefs is important. I address each issue in turn.

UNIT OF ANALYSIS. My unit of analysis for grand strategy is the foreign policy of a presidential administration during one four-year term in office. I determine the concept of liberty dominant in an administration by measuring the individual views of the president and his top foreign policy advisors, usually cabinet members (but not limited to them). In most administrations, the president’s views will dominate the policy-making process, making his ideological views the most important. Furthermore, the president’s ability to chose his own staff lets him reproduce his own viewpoint in other high-level decision making positions. However, in some administrations, the president gives his lieutenants a free hand in driving strategy. In such administrations, the liberty concept present among other top foreign policy-makers will tend to be more important. To determine which administrations had a strong president, I record the historiographical consensus and code accordingly. In administrations without a strong president, I also code the Secretary of State and average their two concepts of liberty.

RELIABILITY OF EVIDENCE. To measure ideas, I rely on the written and speech evidence of individuals on the subject of freedom or related questions germane to concepts of liberty. This brings the measurement of ideas back as close to their source as one can get: rather than rely on a proxy indicator, I look for the language the individuals themselves used and the ways they expressed their own views.

The procedure faces a major objection: the contention that ideas are either epiphenomenal or instrumental—that is, the notion that ideas are either the irrelevant by-product of other forces and have no role in causation, or are strategically chosen with a view towards achieving goals preferred for other reasons. Both claims amount to the classic charge of omitted variable bias: the ideas observed and the policies implemented are both caused by a third factor not addressed
in the analysis. In the measurement context, the worry is usually that any observed ideas, even consistent and repeated ideas, are just not representative of real beliefs.\(^{59}\)

These are legitimate concerns. One can imagine, for example, American statesmen justifying their foreign policies in terms of freedom, when in fact the policies were driven by concerns about the international environment, the economic interests of their constituents, or other less savory factors. In order to avoid this kind of measurement error, I restrict my rhetorical assessment to the period before individuals held foreign policy-making power. It is unlikely that the same forces causing policy decisions and rhetorical masks in the present also caused the same ideological expressions in the past. Indeed, the public justification for foreign policies adopted in office simply plays no role in coding the presence or absence of a particular concept of liberty.\(^{60}\)

Ideas could also serve instrumental motives unrelated to their content. Many of the individuals being coded were participants in practical politics, where the language of liberalism can often be used to cloak diverse private and political interests. For this reason I distinguish between three types of discourse in measuring ideas: private discourse, public discourse that is likely non-instrumental, and public discourse more likely to be instrumental.

The foundation of my measurement is private discourse. Sentiments expressed outside of the public eye and ear to other individuals are unlikely to be purely instrumental. In most cases there is no motive at all for such deception. Moreover, the payoff for misrepresenting oneself repeatedly in private is much lower than for deceiving the public, and the costs much higher. As Andrew Moravcsik puts it, "Misrepresentation and speculation in hard primary sources—for example, staging a series of phony meetings,... generating false assessments,... keeping a phony diary,... coordinating independent interview responses" is quite costly. In general, I expect that ideas expressed privately, repeatedly, and consistently represent genuine views.\(^{61}\)

Beyond private discourse, some kinds of public statements are not all that suspicious. When the context of the public statements does not suggest an obvious ulterior motive, such as election to public office or remuneration from some private interest, we can assume the beliefs expressed are genuine. Public speeches by private figures are good examples of this kind of rhetoric, if those figures are out of government and not angling for their own advancement. Such evidence is even more persuasive when it has analogues in private rhetoric. Finally, some kinds of public speeches, such as electioneering rhetoric, are prima facie suspicious, but can be used with careful crossexaminations against other facts and evidence. If such statements are repeated and consistent, mesh well with known facts about the individual, and are not contradicted by private discourse, they can serve as a more limited indicator.\(^{62}\)


\(^{62}\) This method is conservative: some research argues that public speech evidence generally dovetails with private beliefs. See Jonathan Renshon, "When Public Statements Reveal Private Beliefs: Assessing Operational Codes at a
SUBSTANTIVE INDICATORS. Finally, the key to a measurement’s persuasiveness will be the substantive fidelity it has to the concepts of liberty I lay out above. Exactly what kinds of statements count as evidence for each type of liberalism?

A consistent measurement of ideology requires a structured, focused comparison: asking the same theoretically informed questions of every individual who is coded, thereby allowing them to be assessed relative to each other and scored on a single scale. I formulate three categories of questions that implicate liberal norms: These are (1) explicit philosophical statements; (2) attitudes towards the centralization of political power; and (3) views about the legitimate degree of interference with the market economy and the fiscal role of the state. These categories are deductively and inductively chosen: they have been established as major issues of political debate in the literature on American political development and the history of liberal ideas, and they are implied by the concepts of liberty themselves.63

The most obvious type of expression is an explicit philosophical statement of an individual’s politics and his vision of freedom. Statements of negative liberty will center on the individual. Classic anti-statist rhetoric features the central state as a tyrannical villain coercing the individual and violating his rights. Such statements will include the fear of regimentation and worries about “collectivism,” and will place the state in opposition to traditional liberties. When negative liberals praise democracy it will be as a way of keeping special interests from hijacking the state and coercing individuals for their own ends.64

Statements about positive liberty will have many more references to the group or the nation. This is not to say they will not employ the language of individualism—references to the lack of effective freedoms of individuals, and state remedies for these conditions, should abound. But advocates of positive liberty will also speak in the nationalist or group-based language: one of the principal notions of positive liberty is that the exercise of real freedom can take place only collectively. References to democracy will be in the vein of exercising these great collective goals, promising a fulfillment of active participation rather than protecting against special interests.65

A second category of ideas relates to the centralization of power. Negative liberty inherently distrusts all power, particularly the concentrated power of the state. Of great concern will be the expansion of the federal government and its usurpation of state and local responsibilities. Negative liberals will frequently defend the separation of powers laid out in the constitution as essential to the American order. The executive branch of government should be especially feared, and concern about the erosion of congressional and judicial authority is a common trope among those who champion a negative concept of liberty. Moreover, the

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Distance,” *Political Psychology* 30, no. 4 (2009): 649-661. Nonetheless, I minimize the use of such evidence and check it against other sources.

63 On “structured, focused comparison,” see George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, Ch. 3-6. The coding exercise I outline can also be thought of as a kind of process-tracing: the “independent variable causal process observations” of James Mahoney, which verify the existence of speculated causes. See Mahoney, “After KKV.”


handmaiden of executive power, a complicated and alien bureaucracy led by oppressive and petty officials, will be another frequent target of anti-statist liberals.66

Positive liberty is much more inclined to support the power of the state and to direct it against the power held by social actors and supported by social norms. Advocates of positive freedom ought to stress the importance of efficiency and the need for effectively directing collective resources—key aids in helping people exercise their freedom. This concern will lead them to greater rhetorical support for the executive branch, less interest in the separation of powers, more tolerance of bureaucracy, and a denigration of federalism.67

A third kind of discourse will focus on the relationship of the state and the economy. Negative liberty views economic activity as one of the primary arenas of personal freedom. Classical anti-tax rhetoric is a common theme in this category, as is opposition to regulating business. Indeed, any government interference in the market smacks of a controlled economy and the threats to individual liberty therein. Some government control for the purpose of providing public goods, reducing externalities, and enforcing property rights will be acceptable, but economic functions beyond these will produce great skepticism. Moreover, advocates of negative liberty see a limited fiscal role for the state. They will put primary emphasis on the importance of a balanced budget. The increase in public debt and fears of inflation associated with an unbalanced budget are both seen as eventual debits against individual liberty, as they are delayed costs paid out of the fruits of labor. Generally, concerns about fiscal conservatism will lead to rhetoric critical of government spending. But when the government must take on new obligations, the concept of negative liberty indicates it should increase revenue extraction.68

Negative liberals will also have a particular view of business corporations and organized labor. Negative liberals will by no means give a free pass to corporations, often suspecting them of trying to rig the political system in their favor. But they will, in general, be sympathetic towards business as the vital force in market society, and will emphasize the benefits that allowing corporate freedom has brought. They may be more or less tolerant of labor unions in general, but will tend towards greater suspicion of them than their counterparts in management. The violence, disorder, and illiberal politics that have often accompanied strikes and labor unrest will be regarded as potentially harmful to the basic liberal order provided by the night-watchman state. It will certainly not be government’s job to facilitate their organization and success.69


67 For historical accounts of these rhetorical trends and political ideas in American discourse, which focus on their emergence in the Progressive and New Deal eras, see Young, Reconsidering American Liberalism, pp. 137-180; Ekirch, The Decline of American Liberalism, pp. 171-194. For a more radical perspective on the meaning of these trends, see Hanson, The Democratic Imagination in America, pp. 223-292.


69 See, for example, the perspectives charted in Higgs, Crisis and Leviathan, Ch. 5; Foner, The Story of American Freedom, Ch. 6.
Positive liberty views economic security as a pre-requisite to exercising freedom. Positive liberal statements will stress basic re-distribution as an element of effective liberty. One will also observe anti-power rhetoric directed at concentrations of economic power and wealth. Regulating these interests, and even planning entire sectors of the economy, will be essential for allowing Americans to individually and collectively exercise their freedom. Positive liberty will thus naturally take a much more expansive view of the state’s fiscal responsibilities. Expansionary fiscal strategies will be embraced as part of a program to ensure economic security and therefore the exercise of real freedom. The ideas of John Maynard Keynes, which emphasize the utility of the government running a deficit in order to expand employment, will be attractive. But so, too, will economic planning and ideas of “growthsmanship” that stress even more active roles for the federal government.\(^70\)

Positive liberals will be look much less favorably on business and much more favorably on labor. Positive liberals will often perceive corporations as having accumulated an excessive amount of power by virtue of their size and profitability, and will see this power as limiting the effective freedom of the working man. After all, how can an individual possibly be free when management holds all the cards and can set onerous terms of employment? Labor unions will frequently be seen as an important counter-weight to corporate power, whose support by government will further the cause of effective freedom.\(^71\)

Having looked for individual expressions across these types of rhetoric, how are discreet measurement judgments to be assigned? Each concept of liberty is best thought of as an ideal type, and the different categories simply as structured ways of comparing individual adherence to the set of typical views. Consider as an example the set of all liberal democracies. One might stipulate that there are several characteristics of the ideal-typical liberal democracy—say, competitive elections, protections of civil liberties, and market economies. Developing indicators across these categories, the placement of a particular country within the set could then be ascertained: Canada might rank highly on all three indicators, India reasonably on them, Singapore high on some but low on others, and Albania low on all of them. One could then develop a code for how far within the set of ideal typical democracies a particular country is.\(^72\)

The indicators for liberal beliefs have been selected with these goals in mind. Each category not only is deduced readily from the philosophic ideas, but also is documented in the


historical literature as a major feature of political debate and of liberal intellectual concern. I weigh the preponderance of an individual’s statements across each category to decide whether an individual is more a negative or positive liberal. I then weigh the categories together and decide the measurement of an individual’s sentiments. I use five rough codings: NL and PL medium, (views more within each set than outside of it); NL and PL high (views fully within the set on all categories); and mixed (equally within the set of NL and PL views).

Concepts of liberty are ideal types. Empirically, individual beliefs are not cut and dry: they are fluid, malleable, mixed with other conceptual notions, and can be incoherent within the same person. Indeed, as the non-rational cognitive models cited earlier all show, human beings will ignore value-trade offs and potential inconsistencies for as long as possible before adjusting their beliefs. So when measuring belief systems, we ought to expect to find tensions, inconsistencies, occasional contradictions, and elements of both conceptual sets. Nonetheless, the preponderance of an individual’s expressions on different issues with relevance to liberal thought is a still useful proxy for the central norms that shape his understanding.73

These kinds of standards are not meant to provide a false sense of precision, but rather to acknowledge the inherent ambiguity in trying to measure ideas in the real world. The scheme allows me to be honest about the complexity of the data and to probe for ideological consistency, without accepting the notion that ideal-typical concepts are useless. It further sets clear standards for making macro-comparisons across administrations separated by decades of intervening time. My judgments are also entirely transparent—anyone who wants to contest my aggregation or assessment of the data will have an easy time doing so, as the empirical chapters will demonstrate. Sadly, ideas cannot be measured with the consistency of roll call votes. But the method of structured focused comparison can nonetheless provide us with baseline expectations.

MEASURING GEOPOLITICAL THREAT

By contrast, measuring systemic pressures is somewhat easier. I establish the presence or absence of a potential hegemon in two ways. First, I examine several measures of latent economic power. The purpose of these measures is to generate a rough gauge of the size and technological sophistication of European economies. In a war of any length, the largest and most sophisticated economies are likely to generate the most military power, and therefore to pose the greatest threat. The presence of a clearly dominant economy would indicate a potential hegemon.

Second, I survey extant military power during the period under study. I look at estimates of the size and quality of readily mobilizeable military forces, which are the principal determinants of military power in the near term. The importance of such a measurement lies in the possibility of a short war: even if no state possesses a large advantage in latent power, a state

73 Skeptical readers might indulge in a thought experiment, presuming there exists a basic set of political values with which they identify. Suppose a historian had access to a lifetime’s worth of one’s expressions on various political issues—emails, letters, published writings, transcripts of bar conversations, etc. Plausibly, a historian would find some contradictions, inconsistencies, and tensions in the set of these expressions. A historian would certainly find a great deal of these in my own record. Skeptical readers should consider whether such an exercise would illustrate that they have no political ideology, or that the entire concept is totally meaningless. I think the exercise shows, rather, that one’s basic views might nonetheless be expected to come through. The question of whether those views had an impact on policy is, of course, a separate issue.
with a clear military advantage might well conquer the system before the superior wealth of 
other states could be mobilized against it. In short, a major lead in either economic power or 
military might offers the potential for winning a hegemonic war, so I survey both categories of 
power. 

I make use of three measurements in assessing economic potential, in order to generate a 
robust assessment of potential hegemony over a range of indicators. I use the Correlates of War 
(COW) index for levels of national wealth, which equally weights aggregate energy consumption 
and steel production. Energy consumption is a gross measure of the relative size of national 
industry that could potentially be mobilized for war. Steel production, which depends on the 
mastery of a series of complex technologies and industrial processes, captures the broad level of 
technology resident in national economies. In addition, I use economist Paul Bairoch’s index for 
relative industrial potential, which is a weighted measure of output from a variety of sectors, 
including several high technology sectors. Finally, I use Angus Maddison’s well-regarded series 
for historical Gross Domestic Products (GDP). This series is calculated based on purchasing 
parity concepts, measured in millions of 1990 International Geary-Khamis dollars.

The COW index captures economic potential at the broadest level, distinguishing 
between economies of equal size that are not equally suited for modern warfare. So, for 
instance, a highly populated agricultural economy might generate as much economic value as a 
smaller industrial economy, yet the former would have no chance of surviving a military 
engagement with the latter. The COW index can be somewhat misleading, however, because 
steel production can often be imported from other countries during peacetime. Trading states 
may channel their energy production into other areas until such time as they need large quantities 
of steel. For economies known to be on the same level of development, the Bairoch index and 
the Maddison GDP series are better measures for comparing latent economic size.

In measuring the short-term military balance, I rely on a quantitative indicator: manpower 
in European armies. This indicator is useful in a general sense, because a potentially hegemonic 
military power will certainly have a large army. However, it needs to be taken with a grain of 
salt as well; in modern war, armies can expand rapidly in size. I also note assessments from the 
historical literature on the comparative effectiveness of armies. These are useful because they 
allow me to take a cut at the quality of different military forces, which is important when 
assessing how likely a powerful state is to win a short war.

Conclusion

This chapter has proposed a Theory of Liberal Foreign Policy (TLFP) in order to explain 
variation in American grand strategy towards Europe in the twentieth century. In doing so, it has 
made several arguments.

First, grand strategy should be thought of as a state’s plan for managing the balance of 
power. It is constituted by a state’s vision of acceptable and unacceptable power configurations 

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74 On measuring the balance of power, in both latent economic terms and in military might, the best treatment is 

75 The COW data set is associated with J. David Singer, “Reconstructing the Correlates of War Dataset on Material 
elaborated in Paul Bairoch, “International Industrialization Levels from 1750 to 1980,” *Journal of European 
Economic History* 11, no. 2 (1982): 269-333. The Maddison series is found at Angus Maddison, “World population, 
abroad and a mechanism for how different policy means will produce an acceptable power configuration. Four ideal-typical grand strategies can be identified running along a continuum from lesser to greater degree of power management: non-entanglement, buckpassing, balancing, and preponderance. Grand strategic choices usually, but not universally, involve a trade-off between lower costs and more control over the international environment.

Second, variation among these grand strategies can be primarily explained by two variables: the character of American liberalism at home and the geopolitical threat from abroad. Negative liberty acts as a leftward vector on the continuum, pushing American strategy towards less management of the balance of power in order to preserve liberty at home from excessive state building. Positive liberty acts as a rightward vector on the continuum, pushing American grand strategy towards greater management, so that liberalism can be vindicated abroad.

The international system acts as twin vectors pushing American policy inward from the extremes towards the middle sections of the continuum. When a potential hegemon arises in Europe, America will have strong incentives to make some kind of commitment to contain it. But ambitious commitments to preponderance will meet resistance from other actors under any circumstances, and will make such a strategy difficult, though not impossible, to implement. Geopolitical feedback will also lead to more coherent strategies with greater ends-means integration, as resistance from the international system will cause policy-makers to make tough choices between lower costs and greater influence.

Third, TLFP predicts a particular causal process of policy formation that, if observed, ought to give great confidence in its efficacy and help show its influence even when other variables are also at work. Negative and positive liberals ought to have different liberal rationales for their policies, identify threats differently, and adopt different preferences for alliances and military forces. In general, we ought to see negative liberals working to reduce American costs and positive liberals reaching out for greater international leverage.

Finally, TLFP’s variables can be consistently and coherently measured. Data on the ideological beliefs of the president and other key decision-makers can be gathered from the historical record in a consistent way that ensures the beliefs expressed were not epiphenomenal or instrumental. Individuals themselves will likely not be fully consistent in their thought, but a structured, focused comparison of their views across a range of indicators relevant to liberalism allows broad differences to be seen. Economic and military data can provide a retrospective picture of international power trends. Together, these indicators generate TLFP’s expectations for American strategic behavior in each case.

All that said, ideological variables are complex. In the final analysis, it is impossible to observe ideology directly. Human beings can be inconsistent, incoherent, and slippery in their normative expressions. And varying liberal inclinations, while providing a direction and an impetus for behavior, do not literally constrain action. Any given decision might be influenced by a wealth of contingent factors, and the impact of liberal thought can be overcome in particular outcomes. None of the above arguments should be taken to imply that all individuals fit neatly into ideological boxes, or that negative and positive liberty will always and everywhere drive decisions towards the preferences I have outlined. Social science theories are probabilistic statements because the world is a big place where many factors matter. As far as this theory goes, Hamlet was right: there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in philosophy.

Nonetheless, the purpose of social science is to simplify social reality in order to explain it, and the theory I have proposed simplifies boldly. With the addition of geopolitical threat to
variation in liberal ideology, TLFP requires only two variables in order to explain American grand strategy. Moreover, both ideology and American grand strategy are aggregate variables: ideological codings are built from the measurement of several categories of expression and often from multiple individuals, just as grand strategy is compiled across a series of foreign policy decisions. Over these large patterns of expression and behavior, idiosyncratic variation will wash out, and identifiable trends should emerge. If TLFP can predict these trends, it will have increased our knowledge of the social world. I now examine whether TLFP can do what it promises, by testing it on American grand strategy towards Europe in the twentieth century.
Chapter Three

Progressives and Preponderance: American Grand Strategy under Wilson

The history of American grand strategy towards the great powers begins with an intensely puzzling series of behaviors—American foreign policy during the period of the Great War. Consider: for more than three years the United States disavowed any interest in the outcome of the war in Europe, even attempting to maintain a superficially neutral posture for six weeks after the advent of unrestricted submarine warfare against its shipping. Yet all the while, American policy favored the Allied blockade of American commerce at its own expense, while provoking German hostility with a series of juridically contrived and economically trivial objections to submarine warfare.

Following the escalation of hostilities made inevitable by this favoritism, the Americans chose neither to back down, nor to defend discrete interests in trade or geopolitical security with limited naval and financial measures. Instead, the United States built an enormous and independent army for the first time since the Civil War, deployed it abroad in an all-out struggle against Germany, and did so while proclaiming a virtual crusade in favor of liberal values. Having achieved victory, America imposed a harsh peace settlement that is widely criticized, on the left, for being illiberal, and by realists, for failing to adequately guarantee its own execution. Finally, after an intense domestic struggle, the United States rejected its own treaty, disassembled its military forces, and retreated into non-entanglement during the inter-war years.

In short, American grand strategy shifted from buckpassing, to war, to non-entanglement in a manner that defies an easy account. President Wilson might have been describing his own foreign policy when he declared at the Paris peace conference "Logic! Logic! I don't give a damn for logic!" How can these sudden changes in the American security strategy be explained?

I argue that the Theory of Liberal Foreign Policy (TLFP) outlined in Chapter Two provides a powerful lens for understanding Wilsonian grand strategy. Europe contained no potential hegemon, giving America few geopolitical incentives for action. It was Wilson’s positive liberalism that provided the impetus for American policy. He envisioned a settlement to the war emphasizing American values: a post-war League of Nations that would guarantee international security while protecting and spreading liberal democracy abroad. This vision was a unipolar power configuration: European power would be combined in a single preponderant pole, led by a disinterested and beneficent America.

However, the failure of American foreign policy to realize the fullness of this vision shows the power of the international system as an integrating force. American strategy during the Great War is the story of Wilson’s discovery that his grand liberal ambitions would require deep American management of the balance of power and a correspondingly large set of political and military commitments. American buckpassing from 1914-1917 stemmed from Wilson’s belief that the League of Nations could only be formed after an American mediated “peace without victory.” When it finally became clear that a non-belligerent America lacked the influence to facilitate the liberal settlement, Wilson reversed course and adopted a strategy of balancing, building a powerful land army and attempting to dictate the future of European

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politics by intervening in the war on the ground. The international system also shaped Wilson’s peace diplomacy, where he agreed to potentially costly forward alliance and military commitments in order to create the League.

The logic of positive liberty can be observed in Wilson’s increasing search for influence over the international power configuration on behalf of liberal aims. Wilson was motivated by liberal goals from the very beginning of the war; he sought an institutional solution that would protect and expand liberal values in Europe. The liberal critics of his peace conference diplomacy overstate their case—at the peace conference, Wilson did in fact prioritize his liberal aims and made several potentially costly commitments in order to build the League of Nations. Wilson’s realist critics are also importantly mistaken—regardless of the efficacy of the League, the keeping of these commitments would have embroiled the United States in European politics during the inter-war period. When confronted with a choice between further American commitments and giving up his liberal vision, Wilson always chose to incur more costs in pursuit of his ideological goals. It was only a series of idiosyncratic and highly contingent events that led to the post-war reversal of American strategy: the outcome of the mid-term elections of 1918; the institutional structure of American government; the fact that Wilson suffered a devastating stroke; and the result of the Republican nominating convention of 1920.

In sum, Wilson’s positive liberalism led him inexorably, and often against his will, to the only strategies capable of securing his ambitious liberal goals: balancing and preponderance. It is fair to say that America never achieved a preponderant posture in Europe, though it was positioned as a balancer before the Treaty fight. Whether America could have ever achieved a preponderant position in early twentieth century Europe is a question left open by history. But Wilson’s liberal goals surely led him to the more intense end of the strategic continuum.

This chapter aims to demonstrate the utility of TLFP for understanding changes in American grand strategy during the First World War. I begin by measuring the independent variables, showing that Wilson held strongly positive liberal views and that there was no potential hegemon in Europe. The following two sections chart American grand strategy during the neutrality period (1914-1917) and after belligerency (1917-1920). I conclude the chapter by examining a set of alternate explanations for the foreign policy of both Wilson.

**Coding the Independent Variables**

I begin the analysis by examining the values of TLFP’s two independent variables during the First World War, in accordance with the procedure developed in Chapter Two. First, I code the Wilson administration’s concept of liberty. I do so by examining Wilson’s extensive record of publications before he entered politics, as well as records of his private statements and personal views on matters of political philosophy. I chart Wilson’s concept of liberty across the three categories of liberal expression outlined earlier: explicit philosophical statements, attitudes towards political centralization, and disposition towards fiscal and economic regulation. After weighing the preponderance of evidence in each category, I code Wilson as “Positive Liberal: High” in comparison with other leaders—that is, I place him nearly fully “within the set” of ideal typical positive liberal views.  

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2 Omitted here for space reasons are the views of other important figures in the Wilson administration’s foreign policy. Wilson dominated the making of American foreign policy during the period, composing much of American diplomatic correspondence on his own typewriter. The only figure to have a major influence on his decision-making
Second, I measure the balance of power in Europe from 1914-1917. I aim to determine whether there was a potential hegemon on the European continent during the period, as captured by the two indicators discussed in Chapter Two: latent economic power and military forces in being. I show that while Imperial Germany maintained a lead in both latent and military power, she could not be considered a potential hegemon as long as Britain had access to the continent, since Britain was a close rival in economic strength. I conclude with a summary of the variables and the expectations they generate for American grand strategy during the period of the Great War.

WILSON’S CONCEPT OF LIBERTY

Woodrow Wilson is perhaps the quintessential example of a positive liberal, and his presidency marked the beginning of positive liberty’s long march to intellectual hegemony in American government. We can observe his views in the unique record he left behind: as the only academic to ever hold the presidency, Wilson authored a number of works on politics, history, and administration. In matters of political philosophy, centralization of power, and economic intervention, Wilson’s writings reveal his vision of freedom as an exercise concept.

PHILOSOPHY. Woodrow Wilson’s political thought was an extended attack on the philosophy of the American founding. Wilson rejected the Founders’ natural rights theory of liberty as an empty abstraction divorced from the changing needs and values obvious in historical progress. He sought to modernize American institutions and political concepts to meet the needs of the contemporary historical epoch. Wilson therefore adopted understandings of freedom, democracy, and the role of government that are textbook examples of the positive concept of liberty.3

For Wilson, “political liberty is the right of those who are governed to adjust government to their own needs and interests.” Different times would call for different boundaries between the government and the individual, and a “liberty fixed in unalterable law would be no liberty at all.” Indeed, one of the main arguments of Wilson’s Constitutional Government is that the American Constitution’s view of liberty is “practical” and “adjustable”: there is “no abstract setting forth of liberties” to remain inviolate against the state, but rather “a formulation of limits and of methods” to government coercion. Wilson understood that the Framers felt differently—“No doubt a great deal of nonsense has been talked about the inalienable rights of the individual, and a great deal more that was mere vague sentiment and pleasing speculation has been put forward as fundamental principle.” But for Wilson “the whole spirit and manner” of the Bill of

was his friend and confidant Colonel Edward M. House, who mirrored Wilson’s political views. On Wilson’s foreign policy pre-eminence see, for example, Ibid., p. 20; Arthur S. Link, Wilson, I: The Road to the White House (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 13-15.

Rights “is exhibited in their business-like phrases.” How could its “quiet language” be read as a fundamental charter of non-interference when it denied “to the government only unreasonable powers arbitrarily exercised?” American liberty was not freedom from reasonable powers exercised for good purpose.  

Wilson’s liberty was teleological: freedom had a purpose, even if one could not specify the same purpose for every day and age. He used the remarkable analogy of a boat, which when well adjusted to the wind “runs free” but when poorly guided “is in irons.” Political liberty was likewise, argued Wilson: “There is nothing free in the sense of being unrestrained in a world of innumerable forces, and each force moves best when best adjusted to the forces about it.” An individual could not be free from state interference anymore than a boat could move freely without interference at the tiller and trimming the sails.

“Progress,” Wilson argued in lectures on the development of modern politics, “lies in the growth of man’s ability to make more out of himself and to make more out nature.” Politically, these growing abilities led to the simultaneous development of individuals and societies to their proper ends: “The goal of political development is identical with the goal of individual development. Both singly and collectively man’s nature draws him away from that which is brutish and towards that which is human.” Just a boat’s purpose is to sail with the wind, Wilson envisioned human development to a teleological goal: freedom was the liberty to exercise or achieve peculiarly human ends.

Moreover, the exercise of liberty included an essential feature of collective participation. “Liberty consists in enlightened, authoritative public opinion,” Wilson thought, “in the realization of the purposes of active, directive popular thought. Liberty lives and moves and has its being in self-government.” He saw the progress of modern government as the steady increase in participation and debate within society at large—“Discussion has been the mother and nurse of all free governments.” Wilson emphasized the organic unity of mass opinion in modern states, which was brought about by participation, cooperation, and “common counsel” in daily life. Like many positive liberal thinkers, he also underscored the personal virtues necessary for self-rule: citizens “must have acquired adult self-reliance, self-knowledge, and self-control... soberness and deliberateness of judgment and sagacity in self-government... vigilance of thought and quickness of insight.” Though not necessarily enamored of public participation in administration itself—the tension between Wilson’s professed love of democracy and his support for an expert-run administrative state has often been noted—participation in the life of public opinion was a critical part of exercising liberty for Wilson.

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4 Woodrow Wilson, Constitutional Government in the United States (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908), quotes pp. 4, 8, 9, 16.
It is unsurprising, then, that Wilson adopted a view of democracy typical of positive liberal thought. “Modern democracy,” Wilson insisted, “is not the rule of the many but the rule of the whole.” Rather than merely a check against powerful interests, democracy was intrinsically valuable, serving to bring about the collective exercise of freedom and common development. With citizens thus acting together, “Democracy is the fullest form of state life: it is the completest possible realization of corporate, cooperate state life for a whole people.”

In fact, though he lauded democracy as a conservative and incremental regime in practice, Wilson saw little difference in principal between democracy and socialism. Democracy and socialism “both rest at bottom upon the absolute right of the community to determine its own destiny and that of its members. Men as communities are supreme over men as individuals.” Wilson could therefore “understand, and even in a measure sympathize with” socialists, who, like good democrats, aimed “to bring the individual with his special interests, personal to himself, into complete harmony with Society and its general interests,” and championed a “revolt from selfish, misguided individualism.” The focus on the primacy of the democratic community as a critical part of freedom and self-rule marks Wilson as an ideal typical positive liberal.7

These views on the character of freedom and democracy led Wilson to an expansive view of government’s role in political life. His lengthy treatise The State explicitly attacked the social contract view of government’s origins and limits: “the earliest communities were not individual men, as Locke and Locke’s co-theorists would lead us to believe, but individual families.” Government’s ancient past was that of the “absolute father-sovereign,” and its natural limits commensurately small. While modern regimes were sensibly oriented towards freedom and democracy, that did not restrict their ambit: “Government does not stop with the protection of life, liberty, and property, as some have supposed; it goes on to serve every convenience of society.”

Indeed, “government does now whatever experience permits or times demand,” its interference constituting “simply the principal of individual liberty extended.” America’s error was to have “fallen into the habit of identifying [liberty] with a large freedom of individual action.” Though the private sphere was important, “liberty, nevertheless, is not identical with individual privilege. It is a thing of social organization…. It is not in being let alone by government that my liberty consists, but in being assisted by government to maintain my equal place among my fellows.” Wilson therefore advocated a host of new roles for government so that “individual self-development may be made at once to serve and to supplement social development.” His lecture notes provide the perfect positive liberal epigram: “Law is the external organism of human freedom.”8

CENTRALIZATION OF POWER. Wilson’s orientation towards a greater role for the

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8 Wilson, The State, first four quotes and eighth quote, pp. 17, 7, 647, 651, 659; Wilson, Johns Hopkins lecture notes on administration, January 23, 1892, PWW 7: 384-391, fifth quote 385; Wilson, Lecture on democracy, December 5, 1891, PWW 7: 345-371, sixth, seventh, and ninth quotes 363-364. All emphasis is in originals. Wilson wrote extensively about his view of expanded government powers. Of special further interest is his comparative analysis of world governments in Wilson, The State, esp. pp. 1-30, 575-668; and Wilson, Johns Hopkins lecture notes on administration, January 26, 1891, PWW 7: 122-123, where he includes among the functions of government: “The state... promotes health... stands economic guardian... stands spiritual god parent....”
government in social life made him hostile to the institutional limits of the American state. Wilson spent much of his intellectual effort imagining a new constitutional structure that would reflect a critical distinction: the difference between politics and administration. Though his ideas went through several phases, Wilson maintained a basic philosophic opposition to the constitutional cornerstones of separated powers and federalism. Conversely, he showed a great affinity for executive power and the bureaucracy, which provided the concentrated power essential for the liberty enhancing functions of the administrative state.

At the core of Wilson’s political theory was the idea that the American nation was an organic entity that had been increasing in unity of consciousness and opinion since the founding. This national unity is what made real democracy, as described above, possible—it created a general will that could be realized through state action. It also made politics less necessary: modern democracies were of like mind about goals, but the particular means of obtaining them were properly the province of experts. Unfortunately, American institutions were explicit designed to prevent such enlightened administration, comparing unfavorably with Britain’s unwritten constitution. As Wilson wrote in his diary on the centennial of American independence, “How much happier [America] would be now if she had England’s form of government instead of the miserable delusion of a republic. A republic, too, founded upon the notion of abstract liberty! I venture to say that this country will never celebrate another centennial as a republic. The English form of government is the only true one.”

Separation of powers was the primary culprit holding back a less abstract, more teleological notion of liberty. Wilson’s Congressional Government attempted to refashion Congress into a parliamentary system that would be more responsive and efficient. It was “a manifestly radical defect in our federal system that it parcels out power and confuses responsibility as it does…. Checks and balances have proved mischievous just to the extent which they have succeeded in establishing themselves as realities…. The only fruit of dividing power had been to make it irresponsible.” Instead, the legislature should appoint the executive branch from its own members. As Wilson sputtered in his marginalia in a history of England, “The folly of America in taking away from the national assembly the reverent custom of appointing the great officers of state.” Wilson acknowledged that his remedies were “certainly none other than those which were rejected by the Constitutional Convention.” But America was behind the times and its institutions needed to catch up: American’s “bosoms swell against George III, but they have no consciousness of the war for freedom that is going on today.”

Federalism came in for similar calumnies in Wilson’s analysis. The devolution of power and authority to the states “often seems sadly at war with any uniform administration of the laws such as good government seems to demand.” The modern world had produced matters “of such vital and universal interest as to demand a uniform and somewhat inflexible policy,” the lack of

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9 Wilson diary, July 4, 1876, PWW 1: 148-149, quote both pages; I have added punctuation. Wilson’s most famous exposition of the distinction between politics and administration is “The Study of Administration,” c. November 1, 1886, PWW 5: 359-380, which was published in the July 1887 issue of Political Science Quarterly. The basic distinction pervades his thought. See esp. Pestritto, Woodrow Wilson and the Roots of Modern Liberalism, Ch. 4-7; Thorsen, Political Thought of Woodrow Wilson, Ch. 6.

which caused "evil that results to the nation at large." After all, Wilson noted, "Are there not States where the privilege of divorce has been so extended that marriage has become an empty mockery and every encouragement given to a licentiousness which threatens the entire organization of society with destruction?"

Fortunately, the Civil War had been "a final contest between nationalism and sectionalism," and the Union had been "confirmed in a new character and strength which it had not at first possessed." The war had made "the questions of the future... questions of internal national policy, of federal administration... Our Constitution has had a great growth. It is now neither in theory nor in fact what its framers are thought to have intended it to be." Though a Southerner, Wilson's distaste for federalism made him unsympathetic to the Confederacy, which he associated with a retrograde decentralism: "the South paid the inevitable penalty for lagging behind the national development, stopping the normal growth of the national constitution."

Finally, especially in his later writings, Wilson favored a centralization of power in the executive branch of the national government and in the bureaucracy. Wilson sadly recounted that "some of our Presidents have deliberately held themselves off from using the full power they might have legitimately used, because of conscientious scruples, because they were more theorists than statesmen." But the President's job was to lead unified mass opinion and to coordinate government through leadership of his party. In reality, "the President is at liberty, in both law and in conscience, to be as big a man as he can. His capacity will set the limit; and if Congress be overborne by him" it will be only because "the President has the nation behind him, and Congress has not." Moreover, real power ought to be given to an expert bureaucracy, "an organization that vitalizes" the body politic and "energizes the people by the measure of assistance which it affords." When administration was properly separated from politics, it would be insulated from corruption and self-interest and could efficiently manage the improvement of social conditions.

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL VIEWS. Wilson's economic opinions revolved around government regulation of business for a greater public good. To be sure, like liberals of all stripes, Wilson was basically friendly to private enterprise. Furthermore, the political imperatives of Wilson's meteoric rise in Democratic Party politics and of the subsequent 1912 presidential campaign induced him adopt non-interventionist rhetoric at times. His campaign theme, "New Freedom," was designed to contrast with Theodore Roosevelt's "New Nationalism," which stole Wilson's ideological thunder by proposing to regulate business with independent administrative boards. However, Wilson's writings leave little doubt as to his true views. As he argued in The State, "It should be the end of government to accomplish the ends of

11 Wilson, "Some Legal Needs," c. May 1, 1881, PWW 2: 60-63, quotes 60, 62-63; Wilson, "Government by Debate," 1882, PWW 2: 228-233, quote 232; Wilson, "Bryce's American Commonwealth," January 31, 1889, PWW 6: 74; Wilson to Herman Eduard von Holst, June 29, 1893, PWW 8: 271-272. For more on the important place of the Civil War in Wilson's thought, see Ibid., Ch. 3; Thorsen, Political Thought of Woodrow Wilson, Ch. 7-8. Given Wilson's sectional origin and his virulent racism, some writers have imagined Wilson as an old guard states rights Democrat. Nothing could be further from the truth—he was simply a racist.

12 Wilson, Constitutional Government, p. 70; Wilson, Johns Hopkins lecture notes on administration, January 26, 1891, PWW 7: 114-120, quote 116. To the extent that Wilson had an answer to the tension between his envisioned powerful state and democracy, it lay in believing that executive leadership could channel popular will. Whatever one might think of this intellectual solution, it is not an uncommon idea among positive liberals; Franklin Roosevelt held similar concepts. Careful analysis of Wilson's views on the executive and the bureaucracy can be found in Pestritto, Woodrow Wilson and the Roots of Modern Liberalism, Ch. 5-7; Thorsen, Political Thought of Woodrow Wilson, Ch. 9; Zentner, "Liberalism and Executive Power."
organized society: there must be a constant adjustment of governmental assistance to the needs of a changing social and industrial organization.\textsuperscript{13}

Wilson’s early work as an academic did not express well-developed views on economics, but it did show clear sympathy for economic theories that admitted a need for government intervention. Wilson collaborated at Johns Hopkins with Richard T. Ely, the leader of an intellectual assault on deductive economic theory, and who championed instead immersion in empirical statistics for the purpose of directing the economy towards public ends. Perhaps as a result, Wilson dismissed classical liberal economic theory as “mere library theories, mere fine-spun threads of logic,” in contrast to a more “practical” American approach. In an early unpublished study, Wilson singled out Francis Amasa Walker as the pre-eminent American economist, who argued that economic forces were not self-correcting and sought to protect labor. Substantively, Wilson’s major concerns appear to have been the support for the national scale of the American economy and the dominance of scientific methods for its political management. As he later described the dissenters from classical orthodoxy “a single step or two would then bring [them] within full sight of the longed-for time when political economy is to dominate legislation.”\textsuperscript{14}

These theoretical inclinations would lead Wilson to later advocate an economically and fiscally interventionist state. “The modern industrial organization,” Wilson asserted, “has so distorted competition as to put it into the power of some to tyrannize over many, as to enable the rich and the strong to combine against the weak and the poor.” Government intervention in the economy should permit individual freedom “yet guard that freedom against the competition that kills, and reduce antagonism between self-development and social development to a minimum.” Wilson saw the primary economic tasks of the state as guarding against “natural monopoly” and the “equalization of competition,” and he employed expansive definitions of the same. As Governor of New Jersey, Wilson acted on those views, passing a public utilities statute that broadly defined utilities and gave an independent board the power to “fix just and reasonable rates.” On fiscal matters, he supported the passage of the Sixteenth Amendment to the Constitution, allowing the federal government to directly tax individual income. “It is clearly

\textsuperscript{13} Wilson, \textit{The State}, pp. 660-661, emphasis in original. Along with Wilson’s Southern heritage, the circumstances of the 1912 campaign have caused controversy among historians, some of whom view him as a decentralist state’s rights Democrat that underwent a miraculous conversion to Roosevelt’s progressive platform immediately upon entering government. See Arthur S. Link, \textit{Wilson I}; Arthur S. Link, \textit{Wilson, II: The New Freedom} (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956); William Diamond, \textit{The Economic Thought of Woodrow Wilson} (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1943). However, close observers of the campaign have noted Roosevelt and Wilson had more similarities than differences. John Milton Cooper, \textit{The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 219; Clements, \textit{The Presidency of Woodrow Wilson}, pp. 27-28; Peirce, \textit{Woodrow Wilson and the Roots of Modern Liberalism}, pp. 253-259. Indeed, when Roosevelt attacked Wilson as a Jeffersonian during the campaign, Wilson clarified that “While we are followers of Jefferson, there is one principal of Jefferson’s that can no longer obtain…. It was Jefferson who said that the best government is that which does as little governing as possible…. But that time has past. America is not now and cannot be in the future a place for unrestricted individual enterprise.” He also noted in his speeches that “freedom today is more than being let alone. The program of a government of freedom must in these days be positive, not negative merely.” Wilson, “Campaign Address in Scranton, Pennsylvania,” September 23, 1912, in \textit{PWW} 25: 222; and Woodrow Wilson, \textit{The New Freedom: A Call For The Emancipation Of The Generous Energies Of A People} (New York: Doubleday Books, 1913), p. 284.

within the interest of national life that the power,” Wilson argued, “should be conceded. It will free the government of the United States to put its fiscal policy on a much more enlightened, a much more modern, a much more elastic basis than it now rests upon.”

COMPOSITE CODE. In some sense an intellectual godfather of positive liberty in the United States, Wilson represented the leading edge of a conceptual shift in the meaning of freedom within American government. He explicitly rejected the classical liberalism of the founding fathers, holding instead that liberty changed throughout history, and championed instead the development of valued human ends and their active exercise. Along the same lines, democracy was to be valued as a collective form of development and active autonomy, rather than as a check on faction. Wilson coupled these philosophic views with a corresponding assault on American institutions as they were conventionally understood: the separation of powers and federalism both inhibited active government, which needed to be facilitated by a strong executive and an independent bureaucracy. Finally, Wilson aimed to advance positive liberty through the economic and fiscal measures of the state. As such, I rate him as PL high, fully within the set of ideal typical positive liberal views.

Table 3.1: Wilson Administration’s Concept of Liberty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explicit Philosophy</th>
<th>Centralization</th>
<th>Economic and Fiscal Views</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberty changes by era; understood it to be teleological development; democracy valued as a form of active participation.</td>
<td>Anti-separation of powers; anti-federalism; pro-executive, pro-bureaucracy.</td>
<td>Supported a fiscally and economically interventionist state; attacked broadly defined “natural monopoly” and “unequal competition.”</td>
<td>PL. High: fully within the set.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GEOPOLITICAL THREAT

In measuring the geopolitical threat environment, I look for the existence of a potential hegemon in Europe, using two indicators. First, I examine several measures of latent economic power. As the discussion in Chapter Two noted, the purpose of these measures is to generate a rough gauge of the size and technological sophistication of European economies. In a war of any length, the largest and most sophisticated economies are likely to generate the most military power, and therefore pose the greatest threat. The presence of a clearly dominant economy

15 Wilson, The State, quotes pp. 659, 660, and see 659-668 generally. Final two quotes in Pestritto, Woodrow Wilson and the Roots of Modern Liberalism, p. 258. Anti-trust language is common to liberals of all stripes, but Wilson and other positive liberals tended to employ broad definitions of “monopoly,” while supporting more extensive government regulations. Note also that Wilson’s utilities policy as Governor of New Jersey was precisely the sort of policy for which he was forced to tactically express distaste during the campaign of 1912.

16 Wilson’s commitment to positive liberalism should not be taken to suggest that he was some kind of radical. If his views sound extreme, it is only because they were the leading edge of a transformation in American liberal thought. In the context of early twentieth century European thought, Wilson’s views appear middle of the road. Indeed, Wilson’s horror of Bolshevism and revolution is well known.
would indicate a potential hegemon.

Second, I survey extant military power at the start of the war. I look at estimates of the size and quality of readily mobilizable military forces, which are the principal determinants of military power in the short term. The importance of such a measurement lies in the possibility of a short war: even if no state possesses a large advantage in latent power, a state with a clear military advantage might well conquer the system before superior wealth can be mobilized against it. In short, a major lead in either economic power or military might offers the potential for winning a hegemonic war, so I survey both categories of power.

These indicators show that there was no potential hegemon in Europe from 1914-1917, as Germany and England were roughly equal in national wealth and military expenditures. Germany did possess an advantage over its continental rivals in readily mobilizable land forces, though ultimately the size of the two coalitions netted out at equality in 1914. From the point of view of the United States (as opposed to any state within the European system), the balance of power appeared secure as long as Britain remained viable.

LATENT ECONOMIC POWER. In measuring latent power, figures for GDP are an unreliable system-wide tool during this period, since the states of Europe were operating at different levels of industrialization, particularly the Eastern great powers. I therefore use the Correlates of War (COW) index for levels of national wealth, which equally weights aggregate energy consumption and steel production. Energy consumption is a gross measure of the relative size of national industry that could potentially be mobilized for war. Steel production, which depends on the mastery of a series of complex technologies and industrial processes, captures the broad level of technology resident in national economies. On the eve of the war Germany dominated its continental opponents in latent power, but only exceeded British potential by a more modest factor of 1.4.17

| Table 3.2: Relative Percentage of European Industry (COW) |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                 | 1913            | 1914            | 1915            | 1916            | 1917            |
| Germany         | 40.9            | 39.9            | 38.6            | 40.9            | 42.4            |
| Britain         | 29.6            | 33.1            | 36.5            | 35.6            | 36.3            |
| France          | 11.9            | 8.8             | 5.8             | 6.8             | 7.5             |
| Austria-Hungary | 6.8             | 6.5             | 7.4             | 5.4             | 5.0             |
| Russia          | 10.8            | 11.7            | 11.6            | 11.2            | 8.8             |

Moreover, this measurement almost certainly overstates the German advantage vis-à-vis Britain. The major element of the German edge stemmed from its advantages in steel production. As a measure of industrial size, and therefore gross economic power, steel production is somewhat misleading, since the Entente could devote a portion of its total wealth to steel produced in other markets. Since Germany and Britain shared the same level of industrialization and both had economies driven by a variety of high technology industries, other

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17 The rationale behind this simple index is discussed in John J. Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (New York: Norton, 2001), pp. 60-75. Raw data is from the dataset associated with J. David Singer, “Reconstructing the Correlates of War Dataset on Material Capabilities of States, 1816–1985,” International Interactions 14, no. 2 (1988): 115-132. My figures include only the five major powers; slightly different figures will be arrived if Italy is included.
indicators of economic size are probably more accurate. In the two tables below, I include comparisons for GDP and Paul Bairoch’s index of total industrial potential, which is a weighted measure of output from a variety of sectors, including several high technology sectors. These figures suggest that the German advantage in latent power was more on the order of 1.1 before the war, which was quickly undone by greater British production during the conflict. Note that this conclusion is born out by the COW data over the course of the war, in which the German power advantage over Britain quickly plummeted and then rebounded to only about half of its pre-war size (table 3.2). This change occurred because Britain rapidly transferred resources to iron and steel production while slightly increasing its energy consumption lead.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.3: British and German GDP, 1913-1917</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.4: British and German Latent Power, 1913</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MILITARY POWER. The situation was similar in terms of military power, although here Germany maintained more of an advantage. Recalling the discussion from Chapter Two, the key determinants of a state’s ability to win a short war are the size and quality of its military forces. In historical assessments of European militaries, Germany’s army is generally acclaimed as the highest quality fighting force in Europe. By contrast, the Russian Army was beset by problems that made it slow to mobilize and much less effective in combat, meaning that Germany’s potential Eastern antagonist was not as strong as it looked.

The pure size of each military is easier to measure: The Germans dominated the other continental powers save Russia, and outnumbered the combined British and French armies by a factor of 1.4. In total forces the Central Powers achieved equality with the Entente in 1914. Given the German size advantages and assessments of its quality, it is fair to conclude that Germany possessed some kind of military advantage in a short war.

Assessing the military balance during the war is much more difficult. In retrospect, there are certainly signs that Entente armies were straining by 1917, in spite of the Entente’s growing economic superiority. However, Allied weakness was not widely perceived in Washington.

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Most of the more obvious signals—mutinies on the Western Front and major defeats in the East—occurred after America entered the war. Wilson himself never doubted eventual Allied victory if the war was permitted to continue.

Table 3.5: European Wartime (1914) Army Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Army Size after Mobilization, 1914</th>
<th>Ratios of Interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1,710,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>110,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1,071,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria-Hungary</td>
<td>1,250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>1,800,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COMPOSITE CODE. These data illustrate that, from an American perspective, there was no potential hegemon in Europe from 1914-1917. Although Germany looked very powerful to its European neighbors, Britain’s relatively close latent power meant American statesmen had every reason to believe that the balance of power was stable. The only exception would be if Germany could overwhelm France so quickly that Britain could not get its army on the continent and force a long war. As it happened, the Entente did force a long war and out produced the Central Powers economically by a considerable margin during its course. Furthermore, whatever relative power gap might be invoked for potential hegemony, the balance of power in 1914 was qualitatively different from that in 1940 and 1946, as Chapters Five and Six will discuss.

SUMMARY OF CODING

A primary source examination of Woodrow Wilson’s extensive pre-presidential writings shows him to be fully within the set of positive liberal ideals: he held an active and participatory concept of freedom; advocated the centralization of power in the national government; and supported fiscal and economic interventionism. Indicators for the balance of latent and military power reveal that there was no potential hegemon in Europe from 1914-1917: Britain only slightly lagged Germany in economic power; the Entente had greater combined resources than the Central Powers; and Germany’s military advantage gave it only limited opportunity to force a short war. TLFP therefore predicts that the Wilson administration would pursue a grand strategy of either balancing or preponderance, depending on the American power advantage and the European reaction. The administration should have been deeply interested in defending American liberal values overseas, and the roughly equal balance of power should have held little prospect of inducing American restraint. All else equal, the Wilson administration ought to have made forward commitments in Europe for the purpose of managing the international power configuration on behalf of liberal values.

American Grand Strategy 1914-1917: Buckpassing

As predicted by TLFP, Wilson pursued a grand strategy aimed toward preponderance, a negotiated liberal peace settlement based on a League of Nations. However, American grand strategy developed slowly at first, relying on British efforts to establish the conditions for such a
peace. Therefore, code Wilson’s initial grand strategy as buckpassing. This variance from TLFP’s expected outcome was driven by Wilson’s ideas about how to bring the League of Nations about, which were intimately tied to his positive liberal beliefs.

The causal logic of TLFP is strongly confirmed by American diplomacy early in the war. The demands that a Wilsonian peace placed on the future European balance of power were enormous, and these needs made buckpassing an unstable strategy, poorly integrated with the liberal ends it was designed to serve. The collective security system necessary to protect democracy in Europe required, at a minimum, costly forward commitments of American diplomatic and military power. Thus, American neutrality from 1914-1917 is the saga of Wilson’s struggle against systemic pressures indicating the need for greater influence over international affairs in order to protect liberty abroad.

The American buckpassing strategy, and its positive liberal roots, can be seen in the nature of the Wilson administration’s response to European threats and in its diplomatic policy. As the process predictions of TLFP lead us to expect, Wilson perceived an ideological threat from the character of the German regime, rather than from the level of German power. To meet this threat and to protect European liberty, Wilson devised an ambitious strategy of collective security. In the short term, though, he believed this strategy could not succeed unless the war ended in a stalemate and a non-belligerent America mediated the peace.

In this regard, American diplomatic policy implicitly favored the Allies over the Central Powers, acquiescing in the British naval blockade of Germany while confronting Germany over its submarine campaign. When it became clear that the British could not be relied upon to facilitate the liberal peace, Wilson sought greater control over the international power configuration: he employed coercive leverage against the Allies and waged an aggressive, public, and largely impartial campaign for peace. Determined to preserve the neutrality he believed necessary to end the war, Wilson persisted in his strategy of only modest American commitments for six weeks after the advent of unrestricted submarine warfare.

This section illustrates the buckpassing character of American strategy from 1914-1917 and its foundation in a long-term plan for single preponderant pole of power in Europe—the League of Nations. It also confirms the process of policy formation predicted by TLFP: Wilson’s positive liberalism focused his threat perception on the German regime type, his goals

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20 One common source of confusion in analyzing American grand strategy during the Great War was that it failed spectacularly. But its flaws should not obscure the coding of America’s actual foreign policy posture. The League of Nations was design for preponderant power; there is simply no avoiding the fact that Wilson envisioned a unipolar power structure in Europe. This is an important observation: it points to the strategic tendencies of positive liberal values. However, his first mechanism for producing the League was to bring it about through British efforts. In my judgment, this makes his initial strategy buckpassing. Had Wilson’s mediation plans succeeded, and the commitments he envisioned been made, the coding of American strategy would change. Had he drawn back from further commitments in the face of buckpassing’s failure, his preponderant vision would be irrelevant. History being what it is, the nature of Wilson’s plan is critical for understanding what American grand strategy was, what it became, and the causes of the change.

21 A second source of confusion in analyzing Wilson’s strategy is that it was premised on faulty beliefs. It posited relationships between democracy, trade, and international organizations that are dubious in the abstract, and certainly false as applied by Wilson. When confronted by international power realities, Wilson’s strategy and the beliefs that drove it were forced to undergo change. But the inconsistency of some of Wilson’s ideas—for instance, about how much democracy in Germany was needed to make League work, or how important American neutrality was for bringing about the League—do not make them epiphenomenal or incoherent. In fact, the most remarkable feature of American foreign policy under Wilson is just how much of his core belief set remained intact and drove policy.
on the protection of American values in Europe, and his diplomacy on gaining more influence over the policy of the Allied great powers. I proceed, first by examining Wilson’s threat perception and theories of the liberal peace, and then by observing their impact on American diplomacy towards Europe.22

RESPONSE TO EUROPEAN THREATS

Wilson perceived ideological threats and prioritized positive liberal goals. Here, I examine three elements of Wilson’s threat perception and its impact on American grand strategy. First, Wilson and his advisors feared and mistrusted the character of the Imperial German regime, rather than the threat of its power. Second, Wilson sought to protect European liberalism by resolving the problem of the European balance of power—both its present cataclysm and its future state. Collective security was a doctrine with positive liberal ends and power political means. It would end the balance of power through the predominance of a single pole: a League of Nations that would combine the might of the great powers, capped by American leadership that would wield this power in the interests of democracy, free-trade, and peace. Finally, the liberal content of Wilson’s strategy led him to believe that it could only be achieved under certain conditions: if the war ended in a stalemate and the peace was mediated by a powerful but disinterested America.

AN IDEOLOGICAL THREAT. Wilson’s fears about the European war were tied to the character of the states that fought it. His later public speeches urging a war “against selfish and autocratic power” and “to accept battle with this natural foe of liberty” were no mere rhetoric, but reflected concerns that had been with Wilson for some time. Specifically, Wilson believed that the domestic political regimes of states determined their international behavior. Wilson’s characteristic language for discussing these regime problems was the denunciation of “Prussian militarism.”

This epithet was not simply an expression of America’s exalted self-image, or “exceptional” character, though certainly these ideas colored American assessments of all foreign regimes. Wilson believed that each European regime was politically suspect, with even Britain and France containing “reactionary” elements and failing to measure up to the standards of American democracy. But the aristocratic-military classes that ran the Central Powers were particularly worrisome. “Junkers” and other analogous groups were seen as an oligarchy managing a cartelized politics on behalf of their own interests; such regimes were inherently dangerous if they could not be changed.23

In early September 1914, Wilson laid bare his fundamental Allied sympathies to the British ambassador Cecil Spring-Rice, agreeing that “Prussian militarism is the question at issue

22 I address Wilson’s military policy from 1914-1917 in the following section, both to reduce disruption to the narrative and because American military posture was largely disconnected from its diplomacy before belligerency.  
and that if it triumphs in Europe America will have to defend itself.” In a rationale redolent with concern for liberalism abroad, he alluded (apparently while crying) to Wordsworth’s sonnet on British freedom, especially the lines “we must be free or die/who speak the tongue that Shakespeare spake.” In 1915, as Germany sought to wriggle out of the friction caused by its submarine campaign against British shipping (in this case the sinking of the British passenger liner Arabic), Wilson underscored his hard line policy to his closest advisor, self-styled Colonel Edward House, by noting that “he had never been sure we ought not to take part in the conflict and if it seemed evident that Germany and her militaristic ideas were to win, the obligation upon us was greater than ever.”

In his December 1914 meditation on the Great War, Wilson argued that if the war were to end in a decisive victory, “I cannot see now that it would hurt greatly the interests of the United States if either France or Russia or Great Britain should finally dictate the settlement.” Britain, though engaged in disreputable imperial activities, “has got more than she wants” and primarily “wishes to be let alone.” In the East, “Russia’s ambitions are legitimate” and she would likely liberalize as her trade boomed. The Central Powers, on the other hand, had regimes that were likely to be much more dangerous in victory: “the Government of Germany must be profoundly changed, and... Austria-Hungary will go to pieces altogether—ought to go to pieces for the welfare of Europe.”

Importantly, this fear of the German regime was not connected to the possibility that it might be powerful enough to threaten American interests. In November 1914, Wilson argued to House that “no matter how the Great War ended there would be complete exhaustion, and, even if Germany won, she would not be in a condition to seriously menace our country for many years to come.” He nonetheless accepted that there were nefarious “designs the military party evidently had in mind” and went on to express a number of paranoid fantasies about the Germans laying the foundations for artillery across the United States and constructing wireless espionage from the Maine tree-tops.

The President agreed with House in 1915 that “we had no intention of permitting a military autocracy to dominate the world if our strength could prevent it. We believed in democracy and autocracy and we would stand with democracy.” But he also refused to take House’s advice to implement this policy, and “seemed to think we would be able to keep out of war. His general idea was that if the allies were not able to defeat Germany alone, they could scarcely do so with the help of the United States because it would take too long for us to get in a state of preparedness.” The obvious implication is that America was not at military risk from a

24 Spring-Rice to Grey, September 8, 1914, PWW 31: 13-14, quotes 14; House Diary, September 22, 1915, PWW 34: 506-508, quote 506; and Herbert Brougham Memorandum of Interview with the President, December 14, 1914, PWW 31: 458-60, quotes 459. The Brougham interview was off the record, and its contents were not published until 1931. See Knock, To End All Wars, Ch. 3, n8.

25 House Diary, November 4, 1914, PWW 31: 263-266, first two quotes 265. Such expressions were clearly not to be taken as the hope for a kind of preponderance by subtraction, since Wilson was shortly expressing the opinion quoted in the previous paragraph that an Entente dictated peace, though not “an ideal solution,” was perfectly reasonable from the vantage point of American interests. After all, the Entente had flawed but non-threatening regimes that were likely liberalizing. The German regime was a threat to peace and European liberalism, but did not have the reach to threaten American security in the short term. The ideal solution—the one Wilson was pursuing in earnest by 1915—was a preponderant League. For the quote, see Herbert Brougham Memorandum of Interview with the President, December 14, 1914, PWW 31: 458-60, quote 459.
German victory, but would rather have to contend with the malign intentions of an ideologically hostile power. 26

The dominance of positive liberal ideological threats over realist security concerns is best seen in the Wilson administration’s attitude towards possible German involvement in the Western hemisphere. The administration did take several precautionary steps in this regard, such as buying the Danish West Indies, and some, such as Secretary of State Robert Lansing, held to the traditional realist defense of the Monroe Doctrine. But the main line of thought linked the threat of encroachment into the American sphere of influence to malign regime type.

Ambassador to Great Britain Walter Hines Page mentioned the Monroe Doctrine only in the context of the “world-clash of systems of government, a struggle to the extermination of English civilization or of Prussian military autocracy.” On one of his trips to Europe to mediate the conflict, House suggested to a German minister that Germany should violate the Monroe Doctrine and colonize Brazil! This would be splendid for all involved as long Germany “had no ulterior designs on the governments of the countries” involved. Wilson thought in much the same way, agreeing with House that “Germany today would be innocuous and a satisfactory member of the society of nations if she were a republic, and there were no objections whatever to the Germans going to South America in great numbers and getting peaceful control of the governments, and in continuing them under Republican forms of government.” In short, the positive liberals in the Wilson administration were concerned with ideological hostility, not bare capability. 27

VISION OF A LIBERAL PEACE. Wilson crafted an ambitious solution to European war, designed to protect and expand liberalism overseas. Collective security, as the set of ideas would come to be known, was premised on the idea that the balance of power in Europe was fundamentally unstable, and in combination with illiberal regimes caused war. Liberal regimes and open trade, on the other hand, were not only good in of themselves, but were also causes of peace. The trick was to start a virtuous circle: a pact of states could end the balance of power system by pledging to mobilize the power of a liberal system against aggressors, which would free up space for the unmolested development of liberal values. Liberal regimes and free trade would, in turn, reinforce the collective security system by adding responsible good actors and removing the causes of disputes. Thomas Knock puts it well: Wilson’s aim was “a lasting peace that would accommodate change and advance democratic institutions and social and economic justice; and a just peace was dependent on the synchronous proliferation of political democracy and social and economic justice around the world.” 28

26 House Diary, November 28, 1915, PWW 35: 258-262, quote 258-259; House Diary, December 15, 1915, PWW 35: 355-361, quote 356. House despaired that he could not get Wilson “up to the point where is willing to take action,” by which he meant simply telling the Allies that America would not permit a German victory. Ibid., 356. For other examples of Wilson’s dismissal of a security threat, see his response to the Kaiser’s bluster in Ibid., 359; Woodrow Wilson, Unpublished Prolegomenon to a Peace Note, November 25, 1916, PWW 40: 67-70, esp. 69; Frank Lane to George Lane, February 16, 1917, PWW 41: 239-240. For Wilson’s paranoid fears of German militarist preparations, see Wilson to House, August 4, 1915, PWW 34: 79-80.


28 Knock, To End All Wars, p. 57. While promoting international openness was a major part of Wilson’s thought, I have only treated it in passing here. Politically, Wilson was more interested in democracy than free trade, though
Even before the war started, Wilson sought a militarily peaceful, economically open, and politically democratic Europe. In a 1911 address, he had urged American foreign policy to "vindicate spiritual conceptions," by force if necessary. "For liberty is a spiritual conception," Wilson hauntingly forecast, "and when men take up arms to set other men free, there is something sacred and holy in the warfare." On the eve of the Great War, House urged Wilson to approve a diplomatic trip to Europe to reduce tensions on the basis of Wilson's policies in Latin America—whose stated aim was "the development of constitutional liberty in the world." Once in Europe, House made a series of proposals for more open trade, financial cooperation, and a disarmament conference; House felt that "a long stride has been made in the direction of international amity." Not simply concerned with peace per se, Wilson valued international cooperation because it fostered liberal values abroad.29

After the war began, Wilson's adopted a strategy for protecting liberal values with three essential parts. First, the post-war order had to feature an international organization that would use coercion to keep the peace. As early as August 1914, Wilson suggested to his brother-in-law a program for a league of nations that contained the following points: "No nation shall ever again be permitted to acquire an inch of land by conquest," and "there must be an association of nations, all bound together for the protection of the integrity of each, so that any one nation breaking this bond will bring upon herself war; that is to say, punishment, automatically." Wilson put the point bluntly to a group of pacifists in 1916, arguing that "in the last analysis, the peace of society is obtained by force.... And if you say we shall not have any war, you have got to have the force to make that 'shall' bite." In short, collective security would not do away with power, but would rather concentrate a preponderance of power in one organization.30

Second, collective security would both protect and be buttressed by democracy and open trade. In December 1914, House and Wilson decided to move ahead with a Pan-American pact in the Western hemisphere, designed to "serve as a model for the European Nations when peace is at last brought about." The heart of the pact was a "mutual guarantee of political independence under Republican forms of government and mutual guarantees of territorial integrity." The pact was pursued simultaneously with Wilson's European diplomacy, and Wilson often publically emphasized the role liberalism in the Western hemisphere was to play in the old world: "by this commerce of minds with one another, as well as commerce in goods, we may show the world in part the path to peace."

The centrality of liberal values in the peace settlement persisted throughout Wilson’s mediation attempts. For instance, in late 1916, Lansing wrote a memo entitled “Americanism”


30 There is some dispute about the exact date of Wilson’s conversation with his brother-in-law, but it occurred no later than February of 1915. See Knock, p. 35 n. 12; second quote in “A Colloquy with a Group of Anti-preparedness Leaders,” May 8, 1916, PWW 36: 634-648, quote 645. For other indications of Wilson’s early acceptance of a coercive single pole of power, see Wilson’s correspondence on the ideas of G. Lowes Dickinson and Raleigh Colston Minor: Wilson to Dabney, January 4, 1915; Baker to Wilson, January 6, 1914; Wilson to Baker, January 11, 1915; all in PWW 32: 10-11, 24, 53, respectively.
which posited the existence of a democratic peace and urged that autocratic powers be kept out of a future league. Wilson, who was anxious to get German agreement to conclude the war, replied, “This is so interesting a paper, and is so true that it distresses me to suggest that its utterance at this particular time would be unwise. But I must frankly say that I think the considerations it urges, and the policy, are what we ought to have in mind... but ought not to make explicit before the event and before the necessity to do so.” Clearly, positive liberal values played a central role in Wilson’s strategy.\(^\text{31}\)

Finally, the strategy would require a great deal of influence over the international power constellation—and this meant American commitments overseas. Very early on Wilson recognized that the war would give America a position of tremendous influence, arguing publically that “our resources our untouched, we are more and more becoming, by force of circumstances, the mediating nation of the world with respect to its finance.” By the fall of 1915 he understood that American military power would have to be added to its financial might. In response to repeated entreaties by Britain’s foreign minister Edward Grey, House urged Wilson to back an American commitment to the post-war league: “it seems to me that we must throw the influence of this nation in behalf of a plan by which international obligations must be kept, and in behalf of some plan by which the peace of the world may be maintained.” Wilson’s response was enthusiastic: “message approved. You might even omit” the qualifications in the pledge House had suggested. From that point onward, Wilson’s pursuit of international leverage through American commitments was consistent. As he put it in a draft peace note of December 1916, “We are ready to join a league of nations that will pledge itself to the accomplishment of these objects and definitely unite in an organization, not only of purpose, but of force as well, that will be adequate to their realization. We are ready to lend our every resource, whether of men or money or substance, to such a combination so proposed and organized.”\(^\text{32}\)

In sum, Wilson’s plan for a peace had positive liberal ends but power political means. Collective security was a strategy for a preponderance of power in Europe capped by American leadership and a commitment of American power. It required tremendous American influence over the other actors in the system, but also promised a substantial payoff in terms of liberal values. It was, in the abstract, a strategy of preponderance. Moreover, Wilson was actively, albeit ineffectively, working towards a peace through negotiations. He was not simply waiting for the belligerents to wear themselves out, leaving America in control by default. But two beliefs stemming from the liberal content of the strategy caused Wilson to first pursue his goals through more indirect means.

INDIRECT APPROACH. Most significantly, Wilson believed that the war needed to end in a deadlock for the liberal peace to have a chance. “The chance of a just and equitable peace, and

\(^{31}\) House Diary, December 16, 1914, PWW 31: 468-470 quotes 469-470; see also A Draft Pan-American Treaty, December 16, 1914, PWW 31: 471-472; A Welcome to the Pan-American Financial Conference, May 24, 1915, PWW 33: 245-247, quote 245; Wilson to Lansing, December 19, 1916, PWW 40: 276-277, quote both pages. Moreover, the hypothetical about the Germans colonizing South America quoted above occurred as Wilson defended the “Republican government” provision of the pan-American pact as essential to its purposes.

\(^{32}\) Wilson Remarks to the Associated Press in New York, April 20, 1915, PWW 33: 37-41 quote 38; House to Wilson, November 10, 1915, and Wilson to House, November 11, 1915; both in PWW 35: quotes 186-187, 187, respectively; Wilson to Lansing, December 9, 1916, PWW 40: 197-200, quote 199. For more on the need for American influence, see House to Wilson, December 22, 1915, and Wilson to House, December 24, 1915; both in PWW 35: 381-382, 387-388, respectively. Earlier in the war, House had been reluctant to commit America to the post-war peace when acting as Wilson’s emissary. See House to Wilson, February 9 and February 11, 1915; both in PWW 32: 204-207, 220-221, respectively.
of the only possible peace that will be lasting, will be happiest if no nation gets a decision by arms,” he argued in late 1914. Wilson reasoned similarly in 1916 that victory would lead “to the complete crushing of” the defeated powers, while the victors “would then be more concerned as to the division of the spoils than they would for any far reaching agreement that might be brought about looking to the maintenance of peace in the future and the amelioration of the horrors of war.” The defeated powers, on the other hand, would never accept an unjust peace, but would smolder with revanchism and seek to overturn the system.33

Instead, “the aim of far-sighted statesmen should be to make of this mightiest of conflicts an object lesson for the future by bringing it to a close with the objects of each belligerent still unaccomplished and all the mightiest sacrifices on both sides gone for naught.” Each side had to be made “weary of the apparently hopeless task of bringing the conflict to an end by force of arms... the victor suffers hardly less than the vanquished.” If the conflict were to end in a hurting stalemate, a future system where a preponderant League defended the status quo and preserved peace would have tremendous appeal.34

American neutrality was almost as important to bringing about the liberal peace. Again and again, Wilson expressed his fear that “the worst thing that could possibly happen to the world would be for the United States to be drawn actively into this contest—to become one of the belligerents and lose all chance of moderating the results of the war by her counsel as an outsider.” During the Sussex crisis of 1916, caused by another sensational German U-boat attack on a British passenger liner, Wilson “was afraid if we broke off relations [with Germany] the war would go on indefinitely and there would be no one to lead the way out.” America’s disinterested offices were what would move the war from deadlock to peace. “We have rolling between us and those bitter days across the water three thousand miles of cool and silent ocean,” Wilson argued in 1915, and “therefore, is it not likely that the nations of the world will someday turn to us for cooler assessment of the elements engaged?”

To Wilson, the liberal peace, American influence over the balance of power, and neutrality were all intimately linked. As he prophetically put it, “My interest in neutrality is not the petty desire to keep out of trouble.... If any man wants a scrap that is an interesting scrap and worthwhile, I am his man.... If he is searching for trouble that is the trouble of men in general, and I can help a little, why then, I am for it. But I am interested in neutrality because there is something so much greater to do than fight.”35

DIPLOMATIC POLICY

Wilson’s ideological views about how to make the liberal peace drove America’s diplomatic approach prior to belligerency. Here I detail four areas of diplomatic policy to

34 Woodrow Wilson, Unpublished Prolegomenon to a Peace Note, November 25, 1916, PWW 40: 67-70, quotes 70 and 69. The memorandum, which Wilson wrote to himself before his final mediation attempt, is an excellent summary of his views on the liberal stakes of the war and his theory of the peace. For other examples of Wilson’s theory of deadlock, see House Diary, September 28, 1914, PWW 31: 91-96, esp. 94; Page to Wilson, January 15, 1915, PWW 32: 81-82; and Wilson to House, January 16 and January 17, 1915, PWW 32: 81, 83, respectively.
illustrate how American efforts to mediate the conflict dominated other concerns. I begin with Wilson’s early mediation efforts, showing how Wilson’s vision of the peace implied that accord with Britain was the best way to bring the war from deadlock to collective security: British victory was perceived as inevitable and British opinion was sympathetic to a liberal peace.

I then examine policy toward British and German violations of American neutrality. The need to secure British support for a liberal peace was primarily responsible for the pro-British bias on the critical issues of the neutrality period. America essentially abetted Britain’s starvation blockade, contrary to both international law and American economic interests, while challenging Berlin over a set of fictitious neutral rights.

Finally, I describe Wilson’s last effort for peace before American entry into the war. This effort amply demonstrates Wilson’s liberal objectives and his need for more leverage over European politics to achieve them. In the end, though driven by Wilson’s vision of liberal preponderance, American diplomatic policy during this period amounted to non-belligerent aid to the Allies and is best classified as a strategy of buckpassing.

MEDIATION. Wilson twice sent House to Europe to try and mediate an end to the war and a beginning to a new international system. The first attempt, in early 1915, was based on a proposal for simultaneous peace conferences. At the first conference, the belligerents would settle the war, while at the second, America and other neutrals would collaborate with the belligerents to form a new international system. The second peace attempt was a more overtly pro-Allied plan that culminated in the House-Grey memorandum of February 1916. This agreement specified that, at an opportune time, Britain would signal for Wilson to call a peace conference to conclude the war. If Germany either refused to attend the conference or was unreasonable in her demands, America would “probably” leave the conference as a belligerent on the side of the Allies. In neither case did the mediation attempts ever really amount to much: Britain was focused on total victory and never wanted the peace that Wilson proposed. Wilson’s mediation attempts are interesting principally for what they reveal about his theory for ending the war and their impact on other areas of American policy.36

Wilson’s peace feelers were premised on the idea that German defeat was inevitable—after her armies had been defeated on the Marne and the lines of the Western front stabilized, it was only a matter of time before the superior economic might of the Entente ground the Germans down. “The proper attitude to assume was one of absolute confidence in the ultimate defeat of Germany,” House argued on Wilson’s behalf, because the German leadership “knew that the war was already a failure and did not dare take the risk involved, provided they could get out whole now.” As Wilson put it, “I think that [the war] is going to be a great endurance test and that the Allies are on the whole more likely—being open to the rest of the world, to survive that test than the Teutonic monarchies are.” For these reasons, Wilson assumed that the war would end with a German evacuation of France and Belgium, an indemnity for damage caused, and German territorial concessions in both the East and the West. As German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmerman responded to House’s 1915 overture, “you are taking as a basis a more or less defeated Germany or one nearly at the end of her resources.”37

36 On Wilson’s mediation attempts see Ross A. Kennedy, The Will to Believe, Ch. 4-5; Ernest R May, The World War and American Isolation, 1914-1917 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), Ch. 4, 16, 17.
37 House Diary, December 23, 1914, PWW 31: 517-520, quotes 518, 519; Wilson to Edith Bolling Galt, August 18, 1915, PWW 34: 240-244, quote 242-243, emphasis in original; Zimmerman to House, March 9, 1915, PWW 32: 351. For other examples of the administration’s poor assessment of Germany’s prospects, see House Diary, September 28, 1914, PWW 31: 91-96; Diary of Chandler Parsons Anderson, January 9, 1915, PWW 32: 44-50; Page
Britain, on the other hand, was not only likely to win, but was the power most sympathetic to a liberal peace settlement. “There is no desire whatever,” House reported from London, “for anything out of the war excepting a permanent settlement and evacuation and indemnity to Belgium.” Time after time, Wilson based his policy on the ultimately fallacious belief that the liberal element in Britain was as eager as he to conclude a peace without victory. As he prepared to take his support for American involvement in a post-war league public, Wilson coordinated his speech with House “to make the proposal as nearly what you deem [liberal Foreign Minster] Grey and his colleagues have agreed upon in principle.”

The trick to instituting American plans, then, was to help the liberal element in Britain negotiate a peace while convincing the Germans that their best hope was the good offices of the United States. Practically, this meant Wilson’s hopes were tied to Allied military success. America had to avoid peace overtures when they might be perceived as “an unfriendly act.” It was only when “Germany was pushed back within her own borders” that a strong American proposal could be made “to England with some hope of success.” Conversely, the Germans had evidently failed to understand the situation: “Reasonableness had not yet been burned into them, and what they are thinking of is, not the peace and prosperity of Europe, but their own aggrandizement.” Grey’s summary to House in 1916 encapsulated Wilsonian assumptions: “there must be more German failure and some Allied success before anything but an inconclusive peace could be obtained.” It was the need to bring about this outcome, without direct American involvement that would endanger the liberal peace, which drove the rest of American policy.

BRITISH BLOCKADE. Over the first nine months of the war the British Navy drew an ever-tightening stranglehold on neutral trade with Germany. The blockade was a blow to American economic interests: it devastated American exports to the Central Powers, reducing them from $163 million to $1.8 million, and occurred as the United States was just recovering from recession. The blockade’s relationship to international law became ever more fictitious as time went on, culminating in a complete denial of neutral rights in March 1915 when the British declared that they would seize all cargo suspected of being bound for Germany.

In the long term, British naval policy resulted in a booming trade with American business, effectively making America the economic backstop of the British war effort while denying these resources to Germany—by 1916, forty percent of the British war expenditure was being spent on North American supplies. The detrimental effect of the blockade on the German economy is less certain, but it certainly constituted massive interference in the German war scheme, and some estimates give it responsibility for half a million civilian deaths in Germany. American policy was to aid and abet the British. Combined with Wilson’s attempt to mediate

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the war through the efforts of other states, this non-belligerent support for the Allied war effort constitutes a grand strategy of buckpassing.40

To be sure, Wilson made several half-hearted attempts to assert American rights, resulting in a series of pro-forma protests. But the tenor of Wilson’s diplomacy made clear that he supported the British policy. Wilson’s first idea was that the British publically endorse the neutral rights enshrined in the Declaration of London, but then adopt supplementary regulations that vitiated those rights. Wilson urged Page to show “how completely all the British government seeks can be accomplished without the least friction with this Government and without touching opinion on this side of the water on an exceedingly tender spot.” Wilson’s only interest was to put American accommodation “in unimpeachable form.” Wilson ultimately decided to protest British violations of American rights on a case-by-case basis and to put the matter in the hands of his Anglophile ambassador Page. He helped the British implement their blockade by publishing the manifests of ships leaving American ports. He sabotaged a series of diplomatic notes protesting British outrages and refused to take any measures stronger than threats of post-war litigation. As the President argued after the British issued their final edict announcing a total blockade, “we are face to face with something they are going to do, and they are going to do it no matter what representations we make.”41

The origins of the American buckpassing approach lie in Wilson’s concern for the liberal peace. American public opinion was the only reason he bothered to protest the blockade at all. He told the Spring-Rice that “the methods of the Germans here were having an exasperating effect upon American public opinion…. For this reason the United States Government will no doubt have to make some strong ex-parte statement as to their action in the matter of contraband.” Nevertheless, Wilson assured the British that “sentiment inside and outside the administration was sympathetic…. But he hoped nothing would be said about the ‘destruction’ of Germany as the object was not the destruction of any one power but the preservation of all.” British aims were being supported, but only in the service of a larger liberal good.42

Wilson was even more explicit in a conversation with State Department Counselor Chandler Anderson in January 1915. He agreed that failure to aid the British system meant America “would lose not merely its extraordinary opportunity for usefulness as a peacemaker when that time comes, but also the opportunity of working in close friendship and harmony with Great Britain in the reorganization of world influences which will follow this war.” Wilson


41 Wilson to Page, October 16, 1914, PW 31: quotes 166; Wilson to William Jennings Bryan, March 24, 1915, PW 32: 424-425, quote both pages, emphasis in original. For Wilson’s proposal on the Declaration of London, which he has edited to imply the British may accept the declaration in name but not in fact, see Lansing to Page, October 16, 1914, PW 31: 163-166. On ship manifests, see Page to Grey, February 18, 1915, PW 32: 258. The best account of American policy is Coogan, The End of Neutrality, esp. pp. 210-220, which contains a damning indictment of America’s “neutral” facade, and places the character of Wilson’s policy beyond doubt.

42 Spring Rice to Grey, November 13, 1914, PW 31: 315-316, quote 315; Spring Rice to Grey, November 9, 1914, PW 31: 292. Note how small an effect extreme public displeasure has on Wilson’s actual policy.
admitted to not following the details of American policy on the blockade, but agreed that a quarrel with Britain "would have very important consequences after the war" and that "there were no very important questions of principle" being disputed with the British anyway. Or put more bluntly, it was in America's national interest to actively facilitate the starvation of Germany in the hopes of buying British support for a liberal peace. 43

GERMAN SUBMARINE WARFARE. Germany's response to the British blockade was to use submarines, or U-boats, to attack British trade. The nature of early submarines meant they could not comply with traditional maritime law, which required merchant vessels to be visited and searched for contraband and did not allow them to be sunk unless the crew's safety could be ensured. Submarines were only lightly armed and armored, making them highly vulnerable if they surfaced to conduct visit and search, and they could only ensure the safety of merchant crews under highly favorable conditions of weather and geography. Owing to a small supply of U-boats and friction with the American government, German use of the submarine was intermittent until 1917, employing them only in modest numbers against Allied merchant vessels and those passenger liners carrying contraband. When Germany finally unleashed the submarine in February 1917, it proved to be a powerful weapon: the U-boat campaign sunk more than six million tons of allied shipping in 1917, well in excess of the amount Germany had calculated necessary to starve Britain. 44

American policy was to deny Germany the use of this weapon, further exacerbating the British economic advantage—an additional element of Wilson's buckpassing grand strategy. As soon as the Germans announced their intention to target British trade, Wilson denounced any attacks on American lives as "an indefensible violation of neutral rights" that would be "very hard indeed to reconcile" with continued amity in German-American relations. He further promised "to hold the Imperial German Government to a strict accountability" and to "take any steps it might be necessary to take to safeguard American lives and property and to secure to American citizens the full enjoyment" of their neutral rights. 45

The tenuous nature of these stylized "rights" was illustrated in a series of increasingly tense crises centered on the sinking of the British passenger liners Lusitania, Arabic, and Sussex. Although not one of these ships was a neutral vessel, and although all of them carried munitions and other contraband, Wilson confronted Germany on the grounds that American citizens must be permitted to travel unmolested on belligerent ships. This claim was entirely novel with regard to contemporary international law. Nonetheless, Wilson coerced Germany into a series of escalating promises culminating in the Sussex pledge of May 1916, wherein Germany promised to abide by the rules of commercial warfare used by surface ships. In other words, Wilson used

43 Diary of Chandler Parsons Anderson, January 9, 1915, PWW 32: 44-50, quotes 48 n.2 (reproducing a memorandum of October 21, 1914), 49, 47. In this extraordinary meeting, Anderson justifies a long train of British outrages and recommends that America actively facilitate the British blockade. Wilson agrees. For other examples of Wilson's concern for British opinion influencing his policy on the blockade, see House Diary, September 28, 1914, PWW 31: 91-96; House to Wilson, October 8, 1914, PWW 31: 137; Bryce to Wilson, September 24, 1914, PWW 31: 81-82; Wilson to Bryce, October 9, 1914, PWW 31: 138; House to Wilson, March 9, 1915, PWW 32: 349-350.


American diplomatic might to neuter one of Germany’s most powerful weapons in order to dispute a specious legal claim.46

Wilson’s aggressive diplomacy with Germany was the mirror image of his compliant attitude towards Britain and was motivated by the same logic: the need to curry favor in England on behalf of the liberal peace. In response to Page’s hysterical warnings that without a firm response to the Lusitania “the United States will have no voice or influence in settling the war nor in what follows for a long time to come,” Wilson worried that “It is a very serious thing to have such things thought, because everything that affects the influence of the world regarding us affects our influence for good.” In rejecting Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan’s plea for a policy of actual neutrality, Wilson argued that “we cannot afford even to seem to be trying to make it easier for Germany to accede to our demands by turning in a similar fashion against England concerning matters which we have already told Germany are none of her business. It would be so evident a case of uneasiness and hedging that I think it would weaken our whole position fatally.”47

The Sussex crisis, which occurred just as Wilson was trying to force British action on the House-Grey memorandum, further underscored the administration’s basic liberal concerns. “I tried to impress upon him,” House wrote, “that he would lose the confidence of the American people, and also of the Allies, and would fail to have any influence at the peace conference. I tried to make him see that we would lose the respect of the world unless he lived up to the demands he has made of Germany.” Page reported from London that the British believed “the Germans have caused us to submit to delay so long that delay is equivalent to surrender” and that “we can be of no use for any virile action—the bringing of peace, or the maintaining of it.... When action is required we do not even keep our own pledge, made of our own volition.” Faced with these concerns, Wilson ultimately took strong action, making a public ultimatum in front of a joint session of Congress. American policy was well summed up by the American ambassador to Germany, James Gerard: “I am very careful to impress on everybody that in return for any concessions from Germany there could be no agreement by the U.S. to enforce the law against England.”48

THE LAST CHANCE AT PEACE. By the summer of 1916, international resistance had made the disparity between the Wilson’s liberal goals and his diplomatic impotence clear. Diplomatic dithering and naval outrages made it evident to the President that the British were intent on winning a military victory. Wilson railed privately at “the stupidity of English opinion” and told Page that “when the war began he and all his men were in hearty sympathy with the Allies; but that now the sentiment towards England had greatly changed.” At the same time, a renewed clash with Germany over the submarine seemed imminent. The Germans were issuing veiled threats that they would re-start the submarine campaign if peace negotiations did not bear fruit—

the German interpretation of the Sussex pledge had been contingent on the Allies also stopping their violations of international law.

No European pole was responding correctly to Wilson’s strategy. As Wilson put it to House in November, unless the British were to suddenly accept his overtures, “we must inevitably drift into war with Germany upon the submarine issue.” Wilson’s expedient, in December 1916, was to adjust his diplomatic commitment upward to match his ambitious goals: he sent all the belligerents a peace note asking them to state their terms for ending the war. The note implied that American action was near at hand, alleged that all of the warring parties wanted merely their own security and a peace of justice, and promised that people of the United States “would cooperate in the accomplishment of these ends when the war is over with every influence and resource at their command.”

Wilson’s new approach sought greater influence through greater involvement and impartiality in the politics of war termination. He reversed the diplomatic tactics of the past three years: rather than courting the British, Wilson sought more control over the peace settlement by putting the screws on them. Rejecting House’s advise that his renewed peace campaign might bring America into the war on the wrong side, Wilson countered that “if the Allies wanted war with us we would not shrink from it... they could do this country no serious hurt.”

Meanwhile, Wilson used the leverage of the tacit Anglo-American alliance to try and set the course of British policy. Having learned that the Allies would be in severe financial distress by early spring 1917, Wilson worked to deny them the short-term loans they needed to avoid an exchange crisis. Wilson instructed the Federal Reserve Board to issue “explicit advice against these investments, as against the whole policy and purpose of the Federal Reserve Act, rather than convey a mere caution.” The final statement of the Board advised both banks and investors to steer clear of Allied short-term securities, putting intense financial pressure on the British war effort to complement Wilson’s diplomatic pressure. Germany, on the other hand, Wilson begged, pleaded, and cajoled to come to the peace table. “If Germany really wants peace she can get it,” he wrote, “and get it soon, if she will but confide in me and let me have a chance.”

Wilson’s positive liberalism was behind the new peace campaign as surely as it had driven his past efforts at mediation. In January 1917, Wilson stated liberal aims clearly in his famous “peace without victory” speech, which was forwarded to the belligerent governments as a diplomatic document several days before it was given to Congress. “No peace can last, or ought to last,” Wilson argued, “which does not recognize and accept the principle that

50 House Diary, November 15, 1916, PWW 38: 656-661, quote 658; Wilson to Harding, November 26, 1916, PWW 40: 77-80, quote 77; Wilson to House, January 24, 1917, PWW 41: 3-4, quote 3, emphasis in original. For more on Wilson’s knowledge of Allied financial difficulties and moves to exploit them see A News Report, November 21, 1916, PWW 40: 19-20, 20 n.1; Davison to Wilson November 25, 1916, PWW 40: 75-76; Diary of Charles Sumner Hamlin, November 25 and November 27, 1916, PWW 40: 76-77, 87, respectively. For more on the diplomatic shift towards impartiality, see Link, Wilson V, Ch. 5. Thomas Knock assesses this period as “the lowest ebb in Anglo-American relations since the British burned Washington in 1814.” See Knock, To End All Wars, p. 80.
governments derive all their just powers from the consent of the governed... and that henceforth inviolable security of life, of worship, and of industrial and social development should be guaranteed to all peoples.” American policy would add its “power to the authority and force of other nations to guarantee peace and justice” so that “it might in all that it was and did show mankind the way to liberty.”

But America would not, could not, participate in a peace that was “a victor’s terms imposed upon the vanquished.” Such a peace would not last long and would only lead to a new balance of power; but “mankind is looking now for freedom of life, not equipoises of power.” Furthermore, the tendency of positive liberal goals to drive Wilson towards a strategy of preponderance was also clear in the new peace initiative. It was “absolutely necessary that a force be created as a guarantor of the permanency of the settlement so much greater than the force of any nation now engaged or any alliance hitherto formed or projected that no nation, nor probable combination of nations could face or withstand it.” This kind of arrangement would end the calamities of the unstable balance of power: “there must be, not a balance of power, but a community of power; not organized rivalries, but an organized common peace.”

Wilson refused to abandon the new diplomatic approach even after Germany unleashed unrestricted submarine warfare on January 31, 1917. Wilson hoped that by delaying hostilities he could coax Germany back to the negotiating table. He publicly stated his belief that Germany would not actually follow through on its pledge and would commit no “actual overt acts” that would require American belligerency. Privately, he engaged in a series of overtures to the Central Powers. Through the Swiss minister in Washington, the administration implied that it would permit submarine warfare against belligerent merchantmen if neutral ships were spared. Wilson also attempted to use Austria-Hungary as a route to the liberal peace by promising that she would not be dismembered after the war if she would help bring Berlin around “to peace upon terms... of his recent address to the Senate.” Finally, the administration refused numerous requests by the British to begin “a general scheme of co-ordination and organization of all industries for common defense, or of submarine measures for the protection of life and property at sea.” Cooperation of any kind was not on the table; Spring-Rice reported to London that “it is the evident desire of the President to avoid any appearance of preparation in view of a war with Germany, especially of a war conducted in co-operation with the Allies.”

Wilson also pursued an interim policy of “armed neutrality” that aimed to maintain America’s position as an impartial mediator as he tried to lead the way back to negotiations. The thrust of the policy was that American merchant ships would be armed, and perhaps convoyed in conjunction with other neutral powers. They would fight off submarine attacks but would not otherwise engage in hostilities. Though not announced until February 26, and never really implemented, the administration’s thinking on the policy is instructive. A memorandum on armed neutrality by Columbia Professor Carlton Hayes was forwarded to Wilson by several of

51 An Address to the Senate, January 22, 1917, PWW 40: 533-539, quotes 536-537, 534, 536, 535, 536. For more on the evolution of the speech and its international as well as domestic character, see Arthur S. Link, Wilson V, pp. 253-277; Knock, To End All Wars, pp. 111-117.

his progressive allies and seems to have made a distinct impression on him, as he sent it to Lansing for "the most careful consideration." The memo listed among armed neutrality’s advantages that "it will not throw 100 million [Americans] into the world war, and so wipe out... the world’s last reservoir of goodwill and resources for the generous purposes of reconstruction.” Moreover, such a position would "not involve us in accepting the views of the Entente Allies... or in agreeing to make peace only in concert with belligerent allies.” It would not relinquish America’s position as “the one strong neutral from which conceivably great mediatory steps can be taken in bringing in peace without victory” but would instead "make us first and foremost among a group of neutral nations rather than last and least of the belligerents in the day of settlement.”

Indeed, armed neutrality and diplomatic outreach to Germany were consistent with Wilson’s dogged adherence to his theory of the liberal peace—a “peace without victory” produced by American mediation. While debating the break in relations with Germany, he argued against Lansing and others that "if he believed it was for the good of the world for the United States to keep out of war in the present circumstances, he would be willing to bear all criticism and abuse.... Contempt was nothing unless it impaired future usefulness.” The ability to rebuild the liberal order of “white civilization” would be dependent on America staying out of the war. At a cabinet meeting on February 2, "In answer to a question as to which side he wished to see win, the President said that he didn’t wish to see either side win,” and “he then went on to argue that probably greater justice would be done if the conflict ended in a draw.” Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels reported that the Chief of Naval Operations agreed: “he had the same abhorrence of becoming enlisted with either side of the combatants that you expressed. His view is that if we lose our equipoise the world will be in darkness.” In short, a more committed but more impartial diplomacy represented the last best chance at the liberal peace.

SUMMARY OF AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY, 1914-1917

As TLFP predicts, Wilson’s positive liberal views led him to envision a preponderant pole of power in Europe, in the form of an American led League of Nations. These same views, however, were connected to the idea that the League could only be formed through American neutrality. Thus, Wilson initially opted for a strategy of buckpassing.

Nevertheless, there is considerable evidence that the causal process expected by TLFP were at work. The international system pushed American grand strategy towards greater integration of its diplomatic means and ends: European recalcitrance ultimately forced Wilson to acknowledge buckpassing could not produce the League. Moreover, ideology shaped American
diplomacy: positive liberal rationales motivated Wilson’s policy; his threat perception was focused on regime type, while showing remarkably little concern for German power; and his ambitious plans required more influence, which he sought through greater leverage over America’s tacit British ally. In short, Wilson’s positive liberalism drove him to craft a long-term strategy of liberal preponderance through the League of Nations, while the international system incentivized him to make more intense commitments abroad to bring the League about.

In this regard, four pieces are especially compelling. First, Wilson displayed a clear and consistent concern for the promotion of liberal values abroad and conceived the League as the means towards that end. He repeatedly linked the liberal peace settlement to the preservation and expansion of democracy and free trade, especially through his Latin America policy, which was designed to influence European politics.

Second, Wilson’s threat perception was colored by his positive liberal ideology, which made his focus the malign regime of “Prussian militarism.” He often doubted whether Germany actually posed a security threat to America and used this to buttress the case for American neutrality. Furthermore, the classic defense of the Monroe Doctrine was of little importance to Wilson if Germany could be made a democratic regime.

Third, the critical decisions of Wilson’s buckpassing strategy—the toleration of the British blockade and the confrontation of the German submarine threat—were all directly connected to his theory of how to institute the liberal peace. The decisive considerations were influence with the British and a corresponding ability to shape the peace settlement.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, after the buckpassing strategy foundered on international resistance, Wilson sought to reorient the posture of the European poles through greater commitments. Just as TLFP predicts, the desire for control manifested itself in Wilson’s treatment of his tacit alliance with Great Britain. When the British refused to toe his policy line, he began to bring coercive leverage to bear on them through financial measures and a refusal to cooperate against the submarine. By contrast, even after the Germans launched unrestricted submarine warfare, Wilson went to great lengths to bring them back to the negotiating table. Wilson’s ambitious ends required greater and more impartial diplomatic engagement, and when confronted with a trade-off, he opted to seek more diplomatic control.

It is worth noting that, although the beliefs that led Wilson to buckpassing were erroneous, they were not completely crazy. As the outcome of the war demonstrated, a victory for one coalition was not likely to lead to a new liberal system all parties could accept. This fact meant that a hurting stalemate probably did offer the best route to the League, and a neutral America willing to make a serious power commitment did represent a reasonable theory of how to get from the hurting stalemate to a liberal negotiated peace. Of all the great powers, Britain probably was indeed the most liberal in the abstract, so trying to rally British liberalism did have a certain appeal. Wilson’s theory of why the Entente would be victorious—their superior wealth would ultimately break Germany—was by no means silly. Once the liberal premises of Wilson’s preponderant solution are accepted, the buckpassing strategy makes a certain amount of sense.

Wilson was wrong because he greatly overestimated the European desire for peace on liberal terms and because the Entente could not translate superior wealth into military advantage. Faulty causal beliefs, like many factors that sometimes influence international politics, can perturb the predictions of the most comprehensive theory. However, the perturbing beliefs in question were intimately tied to Wilson’s positive liberal ideology and would have likely exerted zero influence in its absence. And as the next section shows, once Wilson understood that his beliefs about neutrality could not produce the League, he abandoned them for enormously costly
balancing commitments. In addition, there is little reason to believe alternate explanations better explain American buckpassing, as discussed in the final section of the chapter. Ultimately, Wilson could not resist the logic of TLFP.

*American Grand Strategy 1917-1920: Balancing*

On March 20, 1917, Wilson decided on a major ground force intervention in the Great War, shifting American foreign policy to a grand strategy of balancing. Forward commitments had long been implicit in Wilson’s thinking on the League of Nations: collective security envisioned European power concentrated in a single pole, capped by the commitment of America’s own might. But the advent of unrestricted submarine warfare and international resistance to Wilson’s subsequent diplomacy revealed the bankruptcy of a buckpassing grand strategy. Wilson simply could not gain sufficient influence over the European system to build an American-led League from a position of neutrality. Rather than abandon his positive liberal ideals, the President chose to change his strategy. The United States built up a massive army and intervened directly in the ground war, in an effort to position itself to dictate the peace settlement. The strategy paid dividends, allowing Wilson to importantly reorient the foreign policies of the major powers after the war. Though failing to achieve either its ambitious liberal ends or an effectively preponderant League, Wilson’s balancing strategy briefly made America the geopolitical pivot in Europe, the de-facto manager of European politics.

Wilson’s new strategy of balancing is evident in the forward commitments of American military and diplomatic policy from 1917-1920. The United States undertook large increases in military power, with a particular emphasis on ground forces—Wilson believed that the size and independence of the American Army would be especially important for achieving and implementing his peace objectives. Diplomatically, he worked to shape the post-war posture of the great powers and the character of the future German regime. At the Paris peace conference, Wilson staked everything on the creation of the League of Nations, while also seeking additional provisions to force German power and French ambitions in line with the new League system. Systemic resistance forced Wilson to pay large costs to secure this kind of international control: radical departures in the size of the American military and firm commitments to European security. In short, the incoherence of Wilson’s initial League scheme gradually gave way to more serious balancing commitments under international pressure.

This section elucidates the content of Wilson’s balancing strategy and its positive liberal origins. TLFP accurately predicts both the character of the strategy and the process that brought it about: Wilson’s strategy was motivated by the preservation of European liberty, displayed positive liberal preferences for using diplomatic entanglements and ground forces as tools for political control, and bought these preferences at the price of potentially costly international commitments. I chart the new American strategy by investigating Wilson’s initiatives in military and diplomatic policy from 1917 forward. I conclude the section with a discussion of the strange death of Wilsonian grand strategy in American domestic politics.  

*MILITARY POLICY*

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56 Having addressed threat perception in the previous section, I omit further analysis of it here. Wilson remained focused on ideological threats and positive liberal goals. For further discussion of this issue during the 1917-1920 period, see N. Gordon Levin, *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America’s Response to War and Revolution* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1970), Ch. 1; Ross A. Kennedy, *The Will to Believe*, Ch. 7.
The Wilson administration’s military policy underscores that its ambitious goals required greater weight in international councils. I treat five important examples of Wilson’s military policy, focusing on the use of the military to arrange and implement Wilson’s envisioned post-war structure of power. First, I chart Wilson’s response to the pre-belligerency campaign for preparedness, which resulted in large spending increases and a departure from American military tradition. Second, I examine the military aspects of Wilson’s decision for war. He made the decision for war only after it became clear that “armed neutrality” could not be “neutral” in any real sense; it was merely a strategy of undeclared naval war on Germany. Wilson opted for a costly ground force commitment over a strategy with a more limited approach because of the greater influence it would provide on the peace settlement. Third, while Wilson’s conduct of the naval war was largely cooperative, he seriously hampered ground operations by insisting on the creation of an independent American Army—another policy designed to maximize American influence over the peace settlement. Fourth, Wilson used the presence of this army to manipulate the armistice negotiations, setting terms for the post-war German regime and the priorities of the peace settlement. Finally, Wilson’s post-war military plans were consistent with the expanded military forces necessary to implement his expansive grand strategy.  

PRE-WAR PREPAREDNESS. The fact that the United States entered the Great War thoroughly unprepared for the massive campaign it would fight does not owe to a Wilsonian disinterest in military policy. In fact, some scholars argue that during the neutrality era, “The single most divisive issue in American politics was...the state of the nation’s military preparedness.” Though the outcome of this controversy was heavily dependent on the whims of domestic politics, Wilson took a historically strong stand: he advocated large increases to the Army and Navy, as well as organizational changes that would make them effective instruments of policy. Wilson’s connection between increased armaments—especially ground forces—and greater international influence is characteristic of his positive liberal views, as he came to recognize that such political impact comes with a higher price tag.

The Wilson administration drafted and supported the Naval Act of 1916, responding to the preparedness controversy by promising a “Navy second to none.” The Act approved a three-year building program designed to make American forces the naval equal of Great Britain’s by 1919. In addition to numerous destroyers, submarines, and miscellaneous small craft, the

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57 A caveat is in order here: a great many influences acted to shape American military policy in addition to Wilson’s positive liberal views. A long-standing anti-militarist tradition held American rearmament on land down; domestic political contests pulled military policy back and forth; organizational and systemic incentives helped push the character of American policy before, during, and after the Great War. But despite anti-militarism and domestic politics, Wilson championed raising American land armament to historic highs before and after the war, and of course, chose a ground intervention over a purely naval policy. He dictated a naval policy that contravened organizational incentives, while he facilitated an Army policy that ran up against systemic pressures. Though many factors played a role in setting each policy, Wilson often pushed military policy towards positive liberal preferences against the grain of other forces.

58 Knock, To End All Wars, p. 58. It is true that this Army in no way measured up to the massive forces being employed in Europe. The force was designed not for military dominance but for political effect. It represented a small but potentially effective nucleus of armed power and a willingness to expand it if necessary. This is a major departure from the ramshackle ghost of a force then in existence, and from the traditions that had produced that force. Promises and threats backed by the new force would at least have to be entertained rather than dismissed. Detailed accounts of the preparedness controversy are John Patrick Finnegan, Against the Specter of a Dragon: The Campaign for American Military Preparedness, 1914-1917 (Greenwood Press, 1975); John Whitclay Chambers, To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to Modern America (New York: Free Press, 1987), Ch. 3-4.
program included ten dreadnought class battleships and six battle cruisers. The President’s ground force policy was even more remarkable, given the entrenched American distaste for armies. In 1914, the American Army numbered about 100,000 regulars and about as many “ready reservists” in the National Guard, a force that was haphazardly organized, trained, and equipped.

Wilson proposed increasing the regular Army by a third and forming a new reserve force of 400,000, called the “Continental Army,” which would serve as the nucleus of a mass army in time of war. The National Defense Act of 1916 eventually scrapped the Continental Army in favor of more than quadrupling the National Guard to 450,000 and allowing the Federal government to draft it into service in wartime. The remodeled Guard now took a dual oath to both its state government and the national government, and was supervised, trained, and equipped under federal authority. An obscure provision of the legislation allowed the president to draft citizens into the National Guard during wartime, effectively instituting a draft in an emergency. The regular Army would be nearly doubled over the five-year period of the Act, to 175,000, and the military budget—then the dominant source of Federal expenditures—increased by twenty percent from these organizational changes alone. Wilson was in the center of domestic opinion on preparedness, but the changes nonetheless amounted to a significant change in American military policy. Not since the Civil War had America possessed an Army so large, with the potential to be quickly and coercively raised.59

Wilson’s military plans reflected his realization that the power political prominence his strategy required came at the cost of a military expansion. Though initially rejecting the preparedness movement, Wilson became interested in naval expansion as soon as trouble with Germany began, backing increases after the 1915 announcement of the initial U-boat campaign and the sinking of the Lusitania. Though the proposed force naval force bore “little or no relation” to the ongoing war, Wilson seems to have envisaged the program primarily as a way to put pressure on Great Britain and to reinforce his proposals for the League. Wilson agreed with House’s contentions that “if we are to join with other great powers in a world movement to maintain peace, we ought to immediately inaugurate a big naval program. We have the money and if we have the will, the world will realize that we are to be reckoned with. Its effect will be far-reaching and it will give us the influence desired in the settlement of European affairs.”60

Wilson’s decisions on the Army bill were similarly motivated. The orders to draw up legislation came after he was advised by House that “If war comes with Germany, it will be because of our unpreparedness and her belief that we are more or less impotent to do her harm” and by the State Department that “nothing short of fear of war with the United States will induce Germany to yield” to American demands. As Wilson would later bluntly put it to his anti-preparedness political allies, America was “a nation which, by the standards of other nations... is regarded as helpless, is apt in general counsel to be regarded as negligible. And when you go into a conference to establish foundations for the peace of the world, you have got to go in on a


basis intelligible to the people you are conferring with.” If positive liberal goals were to be achieved, then America would need more influence to negotiate a collective security system, and that meant more military options.\(^6^1\)

**THE DECISION FOR WAR: MILITARY ASPECTS.** Military considerations were perhaps the decisive factor in the American abandonment of buckpassing in favor of forward balancing commitments and war. Wilson came to understand that “armed neutrality” would be in practice indistinguishable from undeclared naval warfare against the Germans and in cooperation with the Allies. From the beginning of February, Wilson strove for an impartial naval policy, refusing aid to the British and delaying asking Congress for funds to arm merchant ships until it became clear that private interests could not do so. But the effectiveness of ship armament would turn crucially on convoying merchants, which could not be done without the cooperation of the British. As Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels put it, “Such cooperation would be easy if we were at war with Germany, but as we are not at war, would not such cooperation make us regarded as an ally of the entente powers?” Wilson mooted absurd solutions to avoid this problem, including arming American ships with small motorboats for submarine hunting, only to have naval authorities reiterate the importance of the convoy. Armed neutrality meant little less than undeclared naval war.\(^6^2\)

On March 19, 1917, after learning of recent German attacks on American merchants, Wilson asked Daniels to have “everything possible done in addition to Armed Guards [i.e. the arming of merchant ships] to protect American shipping, hoping this would meet the ends we have in view.” Daniels reported back on March 20th that “there is no effective method” other than “cooperation with the Allies and like suggestions,” an argument he had made before and had likely repeated the previous evening. That same day, Wilson held a war council where his cabinet recommended unanimously for war. Daniels argued for war on the grounds that “our present attempt by Armed Guard could not be wholly effective & if it succeeded we must cooperate with the English & let them convoy our ships while we patrolled this coast.” Only on March 24, after the decision for war, did Wilson order naval cooperation with the British. In short, Wilson became convinced America could not retain the impartial role necessary for the buckpassing strategy.\(^6^3\)

On the other side of the scale, the slow death of a peace without victory made TLFP’s logic of greater forward commitments more plausible. Since the fall of 1916, Wilson had been considering whether American belligerency might actually provide the control necessary to produce the liberal settlement. Norman Angell wrote a memorandum in late 1916, which Wilson kept in his personal file, arguing that American belligerency was “the position alone by which an international arrangement will become dependable.” Only “common action by the non-German world” could “furnish a means of controlling German action throughout the world and leverage

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\(^6^3\) Daniels Diary, March 19, 1917 PWW 41: 430-431, quote 430; Daniels to Wilson, March 20, 1917 PWW 41: 432-433, quote 432 and see esp. n.1 433; Daniels Diary, March 20, 1917, PWW 41: 444-445, quote 445, ampersands in original. For the final cooperation order, see Wilson to Daniels, March 24, 1917, PWW 41: 460-461.
wherewith to bargain” about the peace settlement. Conversely, Lansing urged him that going to war would “give this country a prominent place in the peace negotiations which will prevent unjust treatment of the Central Powers… [and] give tremendous moral weight to the cause of human liberty and the suppression of Absolutism.” British Prime Minister David Lloyd George claimed that Wilson must “make peace if the peace made at the conference is to be worth keeping. American participation in the war” would shorten the conflict and secure the liberal peace against selfish Entente interests. A system of collective security appeared to require influence over the peace that only full belligerency could provide.64

Indeed, Wilson adopted this very argument with his left-wing political allies. Based on the revelations of the Zimmerman telegram, he rejected proposals for a peaceful settlement with Germany, but spoke “as to fellow pacifists to whom he was forced to confess that war had become inevitable.” Wilson’s primary argument was that “as head of a nation participating in the war, the President of the United States would have seat at the Peace Table, but that if he remained the representative of a neutral country he could at best only ‘call through a crack in the door’…. The foreign policy we so extravagantly admired could have a chance if he were there to push and to defend it, but not otherwise.”65

In line with his positive liberal priors, Wilson interpreted the need for more influence over the post-war power configuration in terms of large ground forces. Cognizant of the possibility of war if he could not turn the German situation around, Wilson received “a letter so pertinent to the inquiries now being made” about war preparations that “I am taking the liberty of sending it” to Secretary of War Newton Baker. The memorandum was from “a very experienced man” named Herbert Hoover, who made a series of recommendations aimed at securing more influence over the peace in the event of war. Most pertinent was Hoover’s suggestion that “we should have a force in being when peace approaches. As our terms of peace will probably run counter to most of the European proposals, our weight in the accomplishment of our ideals will be greatly in proportion to the strength which can be thrown into the scale.” Wilson would take this idea far beyond Hoover’s more modest suggestions.66

In fact, Wilson had been preparing for the possible failure of his buckpassing strategy by planning for a large ground force intervention. After the break of diplomatic relations with Germany, the War Department submitted, at the administration’s request, a plan advocating “raising troops in sufficient numbers to exert a substantial influence in the later stage of the war… an army of one million five hundred thousand men.” These plans were substantially approved four days later on February 7, with the exception that Wilson and Secretary of War Baker preferred to rely initially on volunteers rather than the conscription advocated by the Army.

But Wilson was by no means ideologically opposed to conscription: as Wilson wrote to Walter Lippmann the same day about the New Republic’s proposals for conscription, “I find

65 A News Report, circa February 28, 1917, PWW 41: 302-305, quotes n. 3, 305; I have fixed subject verb agreement in the last quote. The Zimmerman telegram is addressed below.
66 House to Wilson, February 13, 1917, PWW 41: 226-229, quotes n.1, 226, 228.
myself in general agreement with you... I shall certainly try to work something out in that spirit at any rate.” The President was sympathetic to conscription as the most economically efficient way to raise large military forces, being less concerned with its costs to liberty and more concerned with the politics of such a measure. As he would later put it, the draft “was in no sense conscription of the unwilling” only a “selection from a nation that has volunteered in mass.” Such a specious remark encapsulates the low priority Wilson gave to freedom from coercion.\(^67\)

Wilson’s understanding of the potential need for forward commitments drove planning activity that would serve as the basis of the eventual American Expeditionary Force (AEF). On February 22, in anticipation of announcing his armed neutrality address, Wilson asked Baker to prepare to raise an army of one million men in case war with Germany came while Congress was out of session. Although never put before Congress, this measure would have relied on provisions in the National Defense Act of 1916 to draft citizens into the Army via the National Guard. As the author of the proposal put it, the force would become “a Volunteer Army in name only.” In the event, a flurry of activity occurred in the week after the March 20 war cabinet meeting that laid the foundation for a 1.5 million man expeditionary force, to be raised by conscription. Wilson’s alternative to a neutral policy was a large ground force commitment aimed at shaping the post-war peace. It amounted to a historically unprecedented American willingness to accept the costs associated with large-scale state coercion.\(^68\)

CONDUCT OF THE WAR. Wilson conducted the war in a manner consistent with positive liberal preferences, prioritizing the importance of American ground forces and their contribution to influencing an eventual peace settlement. The Allies faced two potential military catastrophes during American belligerency. In 1917, the success of German submarine warfare threatened to strangle the Allies before American power could make a difference: German U-boats far exceeded their tonnage targets for the first six months of the campaign. On land, the Bolshevik revolution in Russia and the Italian collapse at Caporetto effectively ended the war in the East, allowing the Central Powers to mass all their might for a final offensive in the spring of 1918. American cooperation with the British admiralty stimulated the adoption of convoy tactics that solved the submarine problem. But Wilson and the commander of the AEF, General John Pershing, both insisted on maintaining an independent American Army in order to better support American designs at the peace conference. Consequently, the German spring offensive of 1918 was met essentially without American support and the result was a near thing.

The Wilson administration was quite cooperative with Allied war plans at sea, even if friction was not entirely absent. Wilson shunned the ideas of his Chief of Naval Operations, who favored a large build-up of American Dreadnoughts and attempts at a close blockade of German ports—ideas made ludicrous by the course of naval combat in the previous three years. Instead,....

\(^{67}\) Kreidberg and Henry, *Military Mobilization in the United States Army*, p. 293; Lippmann to Wilson, February 6, 1917, PWW 41: 134-135; Wilson to Lippmann, February 7, 1917, PWW 41: 146; Beaver, Newton D. Baker, p. 33. On the administration’s early preparations for a large Army, see Baker to Wilson, February 7, 1917, PWW 41: 151-152; Baker to Wilson, Taft to Baker, Baker to Taft, February 7, 6, 7, all in PWW 41: 153-156; Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, pp. 130-132; Beaver, Newton D. Baker, pp. 22-27.

\(^{68}\) Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, p. 132. On the March Army decisions see Josephus Daniels Diary, March 24, 1917, in Josephus Daniels, *The Cabinet Diaries of Josephus Daniels, 1913-1921*, ed. E. David Cronin (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), pp. 120-121; Baker to Wilson, March 29, 1917, PWW 41: 500-501; Chambers, *To Raise an Army*, pp. 130-151; Beaver, Newton D. Baker, pp. 28-49. The decision for conscription probably ultimately owed to Theodore Roosevelt’s attempt to lead a volunteer division. The exact form, size, and departure date of the AEF evolved over the summer of 1917.
Wilson pushed early and often for a convoy system, contributing to the British Admiralty’s belated adoption of this dominant tactic. Moreover, the American Navy took two important steps that undermined its organizational preferences and post-war strength.

First, American planners completely postponed the American capital ship building program approved in 1916, and instead authorized two hundred more destroyers for anti-submarine operations. Second, American forces did not operate as an independent fleet, but rather acted “on the assumption that Allied and U.S. services are one and the same service.” American forces served primarily as an adjunct to the British Grand Fleet, integrating with the British Navy and serving as transports and escorts under British direction. As the American theater commander Admiral Sims put it, the American mission was “to treat our Service and our facilities and material as ‘reserves’ and to throw them in wherever we could bolster up in any way a weak spot…. It meant nothing else but the disintegration of our fleet.”

Wilson’s positive liberal goals produced a different approach to strategy on land. His desire to exert decisive influence over the post-war balance of power led him to insist on an independent American Army. Wilson approved General Pershing’s orders upon leaving for Europe, which stipulated “an underlying idea” that “the forces of the United States are a separate and distinct component… the identity of which must be preserved. This fundamental rule is subject” only to “minor exceptions in particular circumstances.” This approach fit with Wilson’s general strategy that by “remaining unfettered,” he “might exercise powerful and valuable influence” over the Allies after the war.

It also undermined Allied hopes for an immediate and critical contribution of American manpower to the war effort: Central Power victories causing the collapse of Russia and Italy had seriously damaged the Allied cause in 1917, and Germany was known to be re-grouping its forces for a push to end the war in the spring of 1918. Under the plan for an independently operating AEF training in France, American forces would not be ready until 1919, perhaps even 1920. In contrast, the Allies begged, pleaded, pestered, and cajoled the administration to accept “amalgamation;” placing small American units directly in Allied armies as soon as possible.

But the Wilson administration steadfastly resisted amalgamation. As Pershing put it, “when the war ends, our position will be much stronger if our Army acting as such shall have played a distinct and definite part.” After the war, he noted that “any sort of permanent amalgamation would irrevocably commit America’s fortunes to the hands of the Allies.” These kinds of reasons contributed to the nearly unconditional support given Pershing by Wilson. Even when urging Pershing to be cooperative, Secretary of War Baker wrote that “the President...

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69 Both quotes from Admiral Sims in Trask, Captains & Cabinets, pp. 83, 363. On the preferences of the American Navy, see ibid., pp. 47-49, 66-68, 77-91; on the administration’s decisions—and Wilson’s personal views—on convoys, capital ships, and fleet disintegration, see ibid., 91-101, 115-120, 360-365 and Daniels Diary, February 25, 1917, Daniels, The Cabinet Diaries of Josephus Daniels, 1913-1921, p. 105. American-British naval relations did experience some tension. For some of the more competitive aspects, see Edward B. Parsons, Wilsonian Diplomacy: Allied American Rivalries in War and Peace (St. Louis, MO: Forum Press, 1978), pp. 33-52. For instance, Sims made his remarks in the text about the use of the American fleet while complaining that the American Navy could have been even more cooperative.

wishes you to have full authority to use the troops at your command as you deem wise.” Pershing should “act with entire freedom in making the best disposition and use of your forces possible.” This kind of political support turned back challenge after challenge from the Allies seeking American support against the great German offensives of 1918. In the end, only very limited amalgamation of American troops occurred, mostly for training purposes. The American Army saw only limited combat until it could operate independently in the final months of the war. The AEF was only a minor factor on the battlefield. It could best serve the purposes of preponderance at the peace conference.71

NEGOTIATING THE ARMISTICE. The war’s end would put the test to Wilson’s strategic vision and integrate its more incoherent parts into a tighter framework. On October 5, 1918, a new German government under Prince Maximilian von Baden sued for peace on the basis of Wilson’s Fourteen Points, petitioning the United States separately from its European allies. Wilson engaged in a month of correspondence with the Germans in pursuit of armistice terms. For Wilson, the overture represented an opportunity to end the war and build the liberal peace, but also underscored the value of forward military commitments in producing such an ambitious outcome. A Wilsonian peace would require America to exert a great deal of control over European politics: to create a successful League of Nations, Germany’s regime would have to be democratized, its power reduced, and the policy of the Allies moderated. The independent AEF gave Wilson the leverage to pursue these ambitious peace requirements, by providing a plausible exit threat that could ruin Allied military plans, and a valuable bargaining chip for securing policy concessions.

The construction of a League of Nations required two changes of Germany: its power had to be reduced and its regime democratized. On the former count, Wilson insisted that any armistice maintain “the present supremacy of the armies of the United States and of the Allies in the field” and the French ambassador told Wilson the terms contemplated “would in fact amount to the very capitulation we want.” But Wilson’s positive liberalism led him to be equally concerned with the character of the German regime. His first peace note demanded to know whether the new German government was “speaking merely for the constituted authorities of the Empire who have so far conducted the war,” while a second reminded that America had promised “the destruction of every arbitrary power anywhere” such as that which “has hitherto controlled the German nation.” Wilson wrote that “it is indispensable that the governments associated against Germany should know peradventure with whom they are dealing.”

Throughout the process, Wilson and his cabinet expressed great interest in the character of constitutional reforms to the Reich, going so far as to debate the manner in which Reichstag districts should be drawn. They also had considerable skepticism and fear that democratization was not genuine. Wilson’s final note acknowledged ongoing changes, but warned that “it does not appear that the principle of a government responsible to the German people has been fully worked out” or that “the alterations of principle and of practice now partially agreed upon will be permanent.” The consolidation of a democratic polity was essential for Wilson, as America would only deal with “representatives of the German people who have been assured of genuine constitutional standing as the real rulers of Germany.” Without a truly new regime, even a

71 Pershing and Baker quoted in Trask, The AEF and Coalition Warmaking, 1917-1918, pp. 39, 38. On the long and largely consistent political opposition to amalgamation see Trask, The United States in the Supreme War Council, Ch. 5; Trask, The AEF and Coalition Warmaking, 1917-1918, Ch. 2. This is not to say that American strength was inconsequential; hordes of America doughboys gave the British and French armies the margin of strength to break the Germans through an attrition strategy in the fall of 1918.
defanged Germany could not be trusted in a preponderant League. German autocracy threatened the liberal peace as surely as German armies.  

Wilson's liberal goals led him to apply this pressure for regime change because he feared the alternatives. Many voices at home and abroad were pounding the table for unconditional surrender and externally imposing a regime. But such solution posed ideological and strategic problems. As Wilson noted about his decision to start the negotiations, "only one thing troubled him. How could he have correspondence with Germany under autocracy? Then we must go into Germany and set up a government ourselves, something unthinkable. Unless some sort of Government offers medium for communication, we might witness Bolshevism worse than in Russia." The example of Germany's revolutionary incitement in Russia terrified Wilson and he was determined not to set off forces he could not control. "If we humiliate the German people and drive them too far," he warned the British liaison, "we shall destroy all form of government, and Bolshevism will take its place. We ought not to ground them to powder, or there will be nothing left to build up from."

Conquering Berlin would lead not to liberalism, but to communism or renewed autocracy. Wilson therefore favored armistice over conquest, and on terms as generous as possible: the armistice "should be rigid enough to secure us against renewal of hostilities by Germany but not humiliating beyond that necessity, as such terms would throw the advantage to the military party in Germany." Positive liberal goals dictated American diplomacy: reform had to come from within Germany itself, or both the League and German democracy would both be lost.  

Equally important, the destruction of German power would undermine America's hold on Allied policy and its ability to construct a liberal peace. Wilson's war cabinet noted that "Today America can have more influence in peace meetings than in the future.... If we continue to win, their [Allied] selfish aims will be asserted." The total destruction of German power would leave the Europeans free to pursue their own hegemonic projects: "As the collapse of Germany becomes more certain, the demands of some of the allies, particularly France, will become more unreasonable.... In the interest of world peace, they will have to be held in check."

In order to build the liberal peace, the grand strategy of the European great powers would have to be subordinated to the League. Wilson knew there would be Allied "jealousy" of his position as "arbiter mundi," but he was willing to accept the burdens of preponderance: he felt

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72 Draft of Second Wilson note to Germany, October 14, 1918, PWW 51: 333-334, first, fourth, fifth, and sixth quotes; Jusserand to Barclay, October 11, 1918, PWW 51: 307-309, second quote 309; First Wilson note to Germany, October 8, 1918, PWW 51: 268-69, third quote 269; Third Wilson note to Germany, October 23, 1918, PWW 51: 417-419, final quotes 418-419. On the intense interest and debate on German institutions by Wilson and his cabinet, see Daniels Diary, October 22, 1918, PWW 51:412; David F. Houston, Eight Years With Wilson's Cabinet 1913-1920 (New York: Doubleday Page, 1926), 1: 310-312. For analysis of the German regime in the American government more broadly, see Klaus Schwabe, Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany, and Peacemaking, 1918-1919: Missionary Diplomacy and the Realities of Power (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), pp. 39-47, 50-55, 58-68. Schwabe notes that Wilson's vision of German democracy was flexible—he appears to have been willing to allow a British style constitutional monarchy with the Kaiser at its head.

73 Daniels Diary, October 8, 1918, PWW 51: 275; Wiseman-Wilson meeting, c. October 16, 1918, PWW 51: 347-352, quote 347-48; Baker to Pershing, October 28, 1918, PWW 51:471-472, quote 472; on Wilson's preference for generous armistice terms, see also Geddes to Lloyd George, October 13, 1918, PWW 51: 325-326. On the American fear of turning a liberal revolution into a Bolshevist one, see Schwabe, Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany, and Peacemaking, pp. 68-75, 118-123; Levin, Woodrow Wilson and World Politics, Ch. 4.
the Allies "needed to be coerced, that they were getting to a point where they were reaching out for more than they should have in justice." A liberal solution required a liberal Germany, defanged but not helpless before Allied power. Wilson summed up his strategy well in his response to British requests for naval and industrial aid in early November: "I wish no ships and nothing done until peace. I intend to carry as many weapons to the peace table as I can conceal on my person and I will be cold and firm. Great Britain is selfish."\(^{74}\)

The negotiations with the Allies over armistice terms put the military requirements of Wilson's liberal goals in bold relief. Wilson sent House to Paris in order to, as the Colonel had earlier put it, "compel the [Allied] reactionaries in authority to yield at the Peace conference to American aims." House's major goals were to get Allied assent to a settlement based on the Fourteen Points and an armistice that preserved German power—as Wilson cabled from Washington, "It is certain that too much success or security on the part of the Allies will make a genuine peace settlement exceedingly difficult if not impossible." But the Allies balked: they wanted stringent military terms on land and sea, while objecting to Wilson's points about "freedom of the seas" and reparations.\(^{75}\)

The Americans responded with pressure made possible by their autonomous army: House threatened numerous times that America would make a separate peace, remove the AEF from the center of allied lines, and depart Europe post-haste. Wilson cabled that British recalcitrance would mean "the certainty of our using our present great equipment to build up the strongest navy our resources permit, as our people have long desired." In the end, both sides compromised. The allies agreed to the American peace program, prioritizing the League of Nations and a liberal settlement, with two reservations about the meaning of freedom of the seas and the scope of reparations. Wilson agreed to a harsher than desired armistice: the surrender of the German fleet, the evacuation of the German Army behind the Rhine, and an occupation of the left bank of the Rhine and its major bridgeheads. Importantly, last concession committed 200,000 American troops to stay in Europe during the peace conference, underscoring the commitment required to manage the international power configuration.\(^{76}\)

On November 11, 1919, the Germans signed the armistice and the guns fell silent. American power remained, committed to managing European politics in the name of liberal purposes. Despite the need to take on commitments in order to facilitate his grand strategy, Wilson had cause for optimism: American ground forces had provided the political influence to build the foundations of the League. A liberalizing revolution had begun to sweep Germany, and

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\(^{74}\) Daniels Diary, October 22, 1918, PWW 51: 412; Houston, Eight Years With Wilson's Cabinet 1913-1920, p. 316; Klaus Schwabe, "Woodrow Wilson and Germany's Membership in the League of Nations, 1918-19," Central European History 8, no. 1 (March 1, 1975): p. 13; Lane memorandum on cabinet meeting, October 22, 1918, PWW 51: 413-415, quote 415; Daniels Diary, November 6, 1918, PWW 51: 615.

\(^{75}\) House to Wilson, September 3, 1918, PWW 49: 428-429, quote 428; Wilson to House, October 28, 1918, PWW 51: 473.

though worried about its permanence, Wilson believed his pressure had led to clear steps towards democratization. As he enthused after the Kehl mutinies of the German Navy, a newly liberal Germany might “ultimately be a bulwark of peace in Europe” now that it had “shaken off... the military autocracy.” Furthermore, he had received commitments from the Allies to build a liberal peace: the peace would be based on the fourteen points and the League would be the first order of business. As Wilson consoled a Senator following the Democratic Party’s defeat in the 1918 election, “America is the leader of the liberal thought of the world, and nobody from any quarter ought to be allowed to interfere with or impair that leadership without giving an account of himself, which can be made very difficult.”

POST-WAR MILITARY POLICY. Wilsonian defense measures after the war were commensurate with the collective security apparatus constructed at Versailles. “Navies must be the principal supports of a League of Nations,” leading American admirals argued, “and the United States, from its influence and power, will be called upon to contribute a very large share of the international police force which will have to be created.” This position much vexed the British, who hoped to remain the leading naval power and eschewed the principal of the “freedom of the seas.” A British representative reported with horror that Wilson interpreted the principal to mean “that no one Power in the League of Nations shall exercise its Naval strength to crush a belligerent power without the consent of the League, leaving until the occasion arises any decision as to the nationality of the police force.” America would seek a fleet to rival Great Britain’s, both to contribute to the League and to co-opt and control Britain’s Navy in the League’s service.

It was towards this goal that Wilson in 1919 reapproved the delayed building program of 1916. When Lloyd George attempted to blackmail Wilson over the issue by refusing to approve amendments to the League of Nations Covenant that Wilson needed, the President refused to back down: “The President declared he would rather take the chances with the Senate without putting in a clause on the Monroe Doctrine” rather than come to “a complete understanding... concerning the Navy building program.” Britain was forced to settle for a joint memorandum expressing a mutual desire to avoid competition and to hold a naval disarmament conference at an unspecified date. The American “Navy second to none” remained on track.

Wilson’s plans for the Army remained focused on the capabilities it could provide the League. The War Department secretly planned for a large post-war Army from 1918 forward, with the administration introducing its proposals in August 1919 at the height of the domestic debate about the League. The plans provided for a large standing Army of 510,000 regulars, backed by a 750,000-man reserve force composed of the National Guard and skeleton formations of veterans. During peacetime both the regulars and the Guard would be raised by economic inducements, though there would be a short three-month program of Universal Military Training (UMT) for 19-year old men. This force would be sufficient for aiding the League in minor

77 Schwabe, *Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany, and Peacemaking*, p. 80; Wilson to Pittman, November 7, 1918, PWW 51: 620.
78 Navy Board quoted in Trask, *Captains & Cabinets*, pp. 358-359; Geddes to Lloyd George, October 13, 1918, PWW 51: 325-326, quote 326, I have added punctuation; House Diary, March 27, 1919, PWW 56: 335-337, quote 335. On Wilson’s approval of the delayed building program, see Daniels Diary, October 15, 1918, Daniels, *The Cabinet Diaries of Josephus Daniels, 1913-1921*. On the resolution of the issue at Versailles, see Knock, *To End All Wars*, p. 248.
contingencies and also for rapidly mobilizing a mass army. It also represented a dramatic break
from American traditions and went far beyond even the National Defense Act of 1916.\footnote{Chambers, \textit{To Raise an Army}, pp. 239-241; Beaver, \textit{Newton D. Baker}, pp. 240-243.}

After this plan came under attack during the League controversy, Wilson supported a
modified plan for a 300,000-man standing Army, supplemented in war by a national citizen-
reservist force produced by four months of UMT. Though he urged his party to be flexible, this
alternative bill was also defeated. In 1920, Congress ultimately approved a 280,000-man
standing Army backed by the National Guard and skeleton divisions of reservists. Wilson nearly
vetoed this measure over its abolition of both UMT and conscription, which Wilson viewed as
“sound in principle, effective in operation, and just in distribution of military duty,... an
indispensable part of any fundamental military policy.” He decided to relent in order that “the
pending political campaign” not be prevented “from centering on the League of Nations and
Treaty questions.” It also seems likely that the proposed force was adequate to the needs of
Wilson’s commitments, since Army planners estimated it could generate an Army of 2.3 million
men after sixty days of mobilization. Wilson’s positive liberal ambitions required ground forces

DIPLOMATIC POLICY

In diplomatic policy, the influence needed to build the League required Wilson to adopt
greater alliance commitments and other entanglements abroad. At heart, these commitments
were the necessary adjunct to Wilson’s expansive strategy for defending democracy in Europe.
In this section I probe four areas of the Wilson administration’s wartime diplomacy. I initially
consider the diplomatic aspects of the decision for war, showing the potential for liberal gains
abroad to have been an important motivating factor in the switch from buckpassing to balancing.

I then review three aspects of American peace conference diplomacy: the creation of the
League of Nations, the commitments to French security, and the restraint of German power.
Wilson’s League diplomacy reveals both a devotion to European liberalism and a willingness to
absorb the costs of managing European politics. Indeed, Wilson’s concessions to the French and
restraint of the Germans demonstrate the positive liberal preference of trading higher costs for
more control, and the ability of the international system to force the trade-off. In trying to
overcome European resistance to collective security, Wilson sought limits for both French and
German policy, embroiling America in both an alliance and a military occupation in order to do
so.

THE DECISION FOR WAR: DIPLOMATIC ASPECTS. Two diplomatic considerations deflated
Wilson’s hope for a peace without victory based on American impartial mediation. First, the
Zimmerman telegram strongly implied that Germany could not be walked back to a negotiated
peace. German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmerman sent the telegram on January 19, 1917
whereupon it was intercepted by British intelligence and relayed to the Americans on February
24. The note proposed a Mexican-German alliance in the event of American entry into the Great
War and promised that Mexico could have back the territory it had lost in the Mexican-American
war.\footnote{On the Zimmerman telegram see Arthur S. Link, \textit{Wilson V}, pp. 342-346.}
As a political or military proposal the offer was laughable, but as an indicator of German obstinacy it had a powerful effect on the Wilson administration. It revealed that the Germans had been playing Wilson for a dupe during his recent peace diplomacy and that they were willing to accept war with the United States rather than make a peace without victory. Wilson displayed “much indignation and was disposed to make the text public without delay,” leaking the information to the press in order to “get the greatest result in influencing legislation regarding the arming of merchant vessels.” Combined with the first unannounced German attacks on American shipping on March 17 and 18, the Zimmerman telegram probably vitiated Wilson’s hope in a negotiated peace.82

Second, the Russian Revolution of March 1917 appeared to be a liberalizing force to the Wilson administration. Lansing pleaded with Wilson to go to war in part because “it would encourage and strengthen the new democratic government of Russia” and “would put heart in the democratic element in Germany.” American belligerency on behalf of liberalism would critically strengthen American “future influence in world affairs” on behalf of a liberal peace. Worryingly, “the longer we delay in declaring against the military absolutism which menaces the rule of liberty and justice in the world, so much less will be our influence in the days when Germany will need a merciful and unselfish foe.” In sum, “The revolution in Russia,” Lansing averred, “had removed the one objection to affirming that the European War was a war between Democracy and Absolutism…. In going to war at this time we could do more to advance the cause of Democracy” than continued neutrality. The absolutist menace in Germany threatened America and “all other countries with liberal systems of government. Such an arrangement would appeal to every-liberty loving man the world over.”83

Unsurprisingly, Wilson apparently agreed with these positive liberal aims, doubting only that the war could be justified to Congress in liberal terms. In the cabinet meeting of March 20, he stated that the principal changes in the past month were “the Russian Revolution, the talk of more liberal institutions in Germany, and the continued reluctance of our ships to sail. If our entering the war would hasten and fix movements in Russia and Germany, it would be a marked gain for the world and would tend to give additional justification for the whole struggle.” Wilson would later brag that America was the first country to recognize the new Russian government. He also noted that the revolution “ought to be good… because it had a professor at its head.” With liberalism on the march everywhere, House told the British, Wilson “was going into this war to fight against Junkerism in every country.” And despite his earlier doubts, Wilson accepted spreading liberalism wholesale in his war address to Congress, contrasting German autocracy with Russian liberalism: “Here is a fit partner for a league of honor.”84

82 Lansing Memorandum on the Message of Zimmerman to the German Minister in Mexico, March 4, 1917, PWW 41: 321-331, quotes 322, 323.
83 Lansing to Wilson, March 19, 1917, PWW 41: 425-427, quotes 426, 427; Lansing memorandum on Cabinet Meeting, March 20, 1917, PWW 41: 436-444, quotes 438, 440. To be sure, Lansing’s use of these arguments was not motivated solely by a love of democracy, as he had hoped to enter the war for months. But Lansing was a genuine believer in the democratic peace, and more importantly, understood that these arguments would be compelling for Wilson. For more on the effect of a liberalizing Russia, see Lansing to Wilson, March 15, 1917, PWW 41: 408-409; Lansing to Wilson, March 16, 1917, PWW 41: 415-17; House to Wilson, March 17, 1917, PWW 41: 422-423; Lansing to House, March 19, 1917 PWW 41: 429-430.
84 Houston, Eight Years With Wilson's Cabinet 1913-1920, pp. 241-244, quote p. 244; Daniels Diary, March 23, 1917, PWW 41: 461; third quote in Link, Wilson V, p. 414; Address to a Joint Session of Congress, April 2, 1917, PWW 41: 519-527, quote 524.
Indeed, Wilson’s war address is a fitting capstone to his strategic evolution. He declared that the old buckpassing strategy “is practically certain to draw us into the war without either the rights or effectiveness of belligerents.” America’s aim was “to set up amongst the really free and self-governed peoples of the world such a concert of purpose and of action” that it could change the nature of international affairs: “neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable” where such ambitious goals are at stake. Instead, America would “accept gauge of battle with this natural foe of liberty and shall, if necessary, spend the whole force of the nation to check and nullify its pretensions and its power.” In the end, “The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty.” Spreading positive liberal aims abroad required a strategy of preponderance. 85

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS. The meaning of Wilson’s League of Nations diplomacy remains controversial. Part of the problem stems from the fundamental flaws of collective security: states do not share a universal interest in such a system; are unlikely to cede sovereignty, power, and resources to a third party in the absence of such an interest; and a system without such a cession would prove useless. Realists have long argued that a system of collective security was unworkable as such and that therefore Wilson’s diplomacy was largely meaningless. These critics are right on the first point but wrong on the second. Wilson’s League was workable to the extent that it represented American forward commitments in an effort to shape the international power constellation—even if the institutional apparatus of the League proved superfluous. It is meaningful, from the point of view of the argument here, to the extent that such commitments were driven by Wilson’s positive liberal ambitions. 86

As we have seen from the neutrality period, there is little doubt that, for Wilson, the League represented the apogee of liberal accomplishment. His views did not change with American belligerency. One of the great questions of the war, Wilson maintained, was whether nations would “be ruled and dominated, even in their own internal affairs, by arbitrary and irresponsible force or by their own will and choice.” Cheap talk about freedom would not be enough to answer the question: Wilson argued that “Ever since the history of liberty began, men have talked about their rights,” but “unless a man performs his full duty he is entitled to no right.”

The League would fulfill American duties by protecting these rights and building the trust that would sustain and deepen liberal polities. As he put it to the industrial workers of

85 Address to a Joint Session of Congress, April 2, 1917, PWW 41: 519-527, quotes 519, 523, 525. As we have seen, Wilson employed these ideas in private as well as in public. In fact, in internal deliberations he resisted the idea of publically justifying the war in liberal terms, which he considered politically riskier than a security argument. He did not think the latter was available. See Lansing to Wilson, March 19, 1917, PWW 41: 425 (agreeing with Wilson that submarine attacks do not “materially affect the international situation” or provide a cause for war); Lansing memorandum on Cabinet Meeting, March 20, 1917, PWW 41: 441 (“The President said he did not see how he could speak of a war for Democracy or of Russia’s revolution in addressing Congress”). Wilson’s public rhetoric certainly had instrumental purposes, but it is not easily dismissed.

86 Dueck, Reluctant Crusaders, pp. 52-53. For classic critiques of collective security see George F. Kennan, American Diplomacy, 1900-1950 (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 1985); John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” International Security 19, no. 3 (December 1, 1994): 5-49. There is a large literature on the League. On Wilson’s pursuit of the League at Paris, I found the following sources helpful: Arthur Walworth, Wilson and His Peacemakers: American Diplomacy at the Paris Peace Conference, 1919 (W. W. Norton & Company, 1986); Floto, Colonel House in Paris; Knock, To End All Wars, Ch. 11-14; Ambrosius, Wilsonianism, Ch. 3; Ambrosius, Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition, Ch. 3, 5; Ross A. Kennedy, The Will to Believe, Ch. 9.
Manchester, England, “You cannot trade with men who suspect you. You cannot establish commercial and industrial relations with those who do not trust you.” In turn, a democratizing world would strengthen the promises of the League of Nations. Wilson insisted on placing a self-government requirement in the League Covenant: “We have said that this war was carried on for a vindication of democracy,” he argued in Paris, and “if we were ready to fight for this, we should be ready to write it into the covenant.” In sum, the League was a distinctly positive liberal vision of America’s world role: the policy “of a free people, of a people, because free, desiring to see other peoples free and to share their liberty with the people of the world.”

Moreover, Wilson emphasized the preponderant nature of power under the League: it would work through binding commitments backed by collective force. Though for political reasons he was deliberately ambiguous about the prospective covenant’s contents, Wilson’s private sentiments from 1917 forward mirrored his earlier views. Critiquing the British position of a purely advisory league, Wilson insisted that the League “must be virile, a reality, not a paper league.” The British Phillimore Report—an early British attempt to neuter collective security proposals—“has no teeth... I read it to the last page hoping to find something definite, but I could not.” In drafting his own preliminary ideas for the League, Wilson emphasized binding arbitration, a positive guarantee of territorial integrity, and aggressive sanctions in defense of these obligations. Violators would be completely cut off from economic and diplomatic relations, and their frontiers would be closed through “any force necessary to accomplish that object.”

Wilson fought hard to ensure Allied participation in his version of the League and to keep the Covenant as the first item on the agenda at the peace conference. He did so against the intermittent opposition of the British, who supported a much weaker structure: a negative promise not to violate political sovereignty or territorial integrity rather than Wilson’s positive guarantee. As Lloyd George put it as late as January 31, 1919, “the attempt to impose obligations of this kind will either end in their being nugatory or in the destruction of the League itself.” As such, the British attempted to derail the League on several occasions by delaying its negotiation until after the peace conference or by separating it from the main treaty. Wilson defeated these attempts and further British initiatives to weaken the collective security apparatus of the League. In return for concessions on colonial issues, the League was front and center in the Peace Treaty with full British participation.

The League of Nations ultimately negotiated at Versailles consisted of two basic mechanisms to ensure peace and security. First, there was a series of articles on the arbitration of international disputes. Depending on the nature of the dispute, states were required to submit grievances either to an arbitration panel, a newly created international court, or the League’s executive council. Dispute resolution was expected to take several months, which would provide

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87 Wilson, Fourth Liberty Loan Address, September 27, 1918, PWW 51: 127-133, quote 128; Wilson, Address in Free Trade Hall, December 30, 1918, PWW 53: 549-552, quotes 550, 551-2; Schwabe, “Woodrow Wilson and Germany’s Membership in the League of Nations, 1918-19,” p. 15; Wilson, Remarks about Christopher Columbus, January 5, 1919, PWW 53: 615-616, quote 615.

88 William Wiseman to Lord Reading, August 16, 1918, PWW 49: 273-274, quote 273; Wilson to House (draft covenant enclosed), September 7, 1917, PWW 49: 466-471, quote 469. See also Knock, To End All Wars, pp. 151-154.

a cooling-off period and add public transparency to the diplomatic process. The arbitration provisions stipulated that violators "shall ipso facto be deemed to have committed an act of war against all other Members of the League, which hereby undertake immediately to subject it" to complete commercial, financial, and diplomatic isolation, and on the recommendation of the Council, military sanctions. Second, the famous Article X held that "The Members of the League undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members of the League." Even for a treaty, Wilson’s commitments were not exactly weak tea.\(^90\)

Nor did he consider them to be so—Wilson clearly believed that America was undertaking a radical international commitment that might require resort to war. He privately argued that the lack of automatic guarantees in the covenant did not mean "that any members of the League would remain isolated if attacked…. We are ready to fly to the assistance of those who are attacked, but we cannot give more than the condition of the world enables us to give." Again and again he reassured the French about American commitment: "all that we can promise, and we do promise it, is to maintain our military forces in such a condition that the world will feel itself in safety. When danger comes, we too will come, and we will help you, but you must trust us." As the conference reached its critical point in April, Wilson reiterated “that if the United States signs this document it is solemnly obliged to render aid in European troubles.”

For Wilson, House, and their positive liberal confederates at home, American commitments under the League were large, real, and of great significance. Combined with other commitments to managing European politics after the war, Wilson’s pursuit of the League constituted at least grand strategy of balancing. He clearly hoped to create a pole of preponderant power, with America as the dominant force in an international concert acting to ensure security, and thus, the space for liberal values to flourish.\(^91\)

However, in many respects the League’s guarantees were weak. The Council could only recommend action unanimously, and even then its proclamations were only recommendations to national governments. Moreover, Germany would initially be excluded from the League, therefore undercutting its universal character. Arbitration was not binding, serving only as a method of delaying hostilities. Wilson consented to or actively supported all of these features as "what the condition of the world enables us to give." He hoped to gain international and domestic assent to the League in the short term, while evolving the League’s structure into full collective security over time.

Domestically, Wilson had long been aware of the enormous political hurdles that lay between him and the realization of the League. These potential problems informed his organic perspective of how collective security would ultimately come about. “The administrative constitution of the League must grow and not be made,” Wilson wrote to House in early 1918, because “The United States Senate would never ratify any treaty which put the force of the United States at the disposal of any such group or body. Why begin at the impossible end when there is a possible end and it is feasible to plant a system that will slowly but surely ripen into fruition?”

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\(^{91}\) Commission on the League of Nations meeting, February 11, 1919, in PWW 55: 70-80, quotes 79-80; Ambrosius, Wilsonianism, p. 60. On the views of American progressives and liberals before the signing of the Treaty, see Ross A. Kennedy, The Will to Believe, Ch. 3; Knock, To End All Wars, pp. 233-245.
Wilson argued similarly when urging William Howard Taft and other members of the League to Enforce Peace not to publish specific plans: “He said he knew [an organic approach] would be slow, but that the common law was built up that way. He gave it as his opinion that the Senate” would not accept anything that appeared an automatic commitment. The initially weaker approach taken at Versailles later allowed Wilson to parry isolationist opposition by casting the League’s guarantee as a “moral, not a legal obligation.... It is binding in conscience only, not in law.” At the same time, he argued that “a moral obligation is of course superior to a legal obligation, and if I may say so, has greater binding force.” This position was intellectually dishonest but politically adroit. In sum, though personally determined to put teeth in the League, Wilson accepted that he could not initially support too definite an apparatus. 92

Wilson also engineered a weaker League because he understood that Europe would not yield sovereignty easily: “We must make a distinction between what is possible and what is not. No nation will consent to control.” Allied resistance during the armistice negotiations had demonstrated that he could not be too demanding; the great powers would all have to agree to join some kind of League in order for it to work. They would also have to be prevented from turning it into a vehicle for their individual schemes. If the League were formed too soon “it would inevitably be regarded as some sort of Holy Alliance aimed at Germany.” If Wilson proposed too detailed a constitution, he would “have incurred the resentment of the European powers.”

Especially dangerous was the possibility of strong French provisions to the covenant that “would present inuperable difficulty.” The League’s initial weaknesses were partially intended to subordinate French policy to Wilson’s vision. The French were generally skeptical of the League and the purpose of their many amendments strengthening its enforcement provisions was to turn it into a military alliance against Germany. Wilson believed this would be “substituting international militarism for national militarism,” and he was determined to ensure French participation without turning the League into an instrument of German containment. In the short term, therefore, Wilson believed “only the essential lines could be immediately traced and that the rest will be the fruit of long labor and repeated experiences.” Wilson adjusted American diplomatic ambitions to what the system would bear; in the long term, they would transform the system itself.93

RESTRAINING FRANCE. The integrating role of the international system becomes most clear when considering Wilson’s peace conference concessions on issues of French security. French Premier Georges Clemenceau’s major goal at Versailles was to secure “a physical guarantee” against “the recurrence of what we have undergone twice in fifty years.” With barely

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93 Commission on the League of Nations meeting, February 11, 1919, in PWW 55: 70-80, quote 75; William Wiseman to Lord Reading, August 16, 1918, PWW 49: 273-274, quote both pages; Grayson diary, January 21, 1919; Edith Benham Diary, January 21, 1919; Ador-Wilson meeting, January 23, 1919; all in PWW 54: 175-178, 196-198, 233-234, third, fourth, and sixth quotes 177, 198, 233, respectively; Commission on the League of Nations meeting, February 11, 1919, in PWW 55: 70-80, fifth quote 76. For other expressions where Wilson combines a firm League commitment with an evolutionary approach to its structure, see Wilson Memorandum on the Bases of Peace, February 7, 1917; Jusserand to French Foreign Ministry, March 7, 1917; both in PWW 41: 160-161, 354-357, respectively.
half the population and industrial potential of Germany, and lacking a great power ally in the East, France had “to deprive Germany of her essential means” of attack. The French aimed at an indefinite occupation of Germany from the Rhine to the French frontier, the establishment of an independent Rhenish buffer state in the region, control of a fifty kilometer de-militarized zone on the east bank of the Rhine, and if possible, the eventual absorption of the Rhineland into France proper.\textsuperscript{94}

However, these aggressive goals contradicted Wilson’s plan for the eventual reintegration of Germany into the League concert. In his view, French policy was “stupid, petty, insane.” Annexations like those proposed would “stir up the same bad feeling there was after the Annexation of Alsace and Lorraine.” Wilson sensed “that his colleagues did not realize that the whole object is not only to settle the immediate question but to establish a condition that will make for a permanent peace. All that Clemenceau wanted to do, it appeared, was to put a barrier between France and Germany—he did not seem to have any vision for the rest of the world.” In order to realign French policy in line with his own liberal vision for the rest of the world, Wilson took advantage of the leverage provided by potential American commitments. The French desperately needed allies; as Clemenceau had put it to the Chamber of Deputies, “nothing must happen which might separate after the war the four Powers that were united during it. To this unity, I will make every sacrifice.”\textsuperscript{95}

Over the critical six weeks of the conference in March and April, Wilson grudgingly made two major American commitments in defense of France. The first was a tripartite alliance between Britain, France, and the United States guaranteeing France against aggression. This compact was independent of the supposedly efficacious League of Nations, though Wilson intended to gloss over this contradiction by having the League Council approve it as “an engagement consistent with the Covenant.” The second was a tripwire American force in Germany, as part of a broader French occupation of the Rhineland. Although Wilson’s acceptance of such costly political burdens highlighted the incoherence of his collective security vision, it added consistency to American strategy: ambitious liberal ends were supported by greater diplomatic and military commitments.

The alliance terms to which Wilson was willing to consent promised a major American commitment. Any violation of the Rhineland provisions of the treaty would be considered by the signatories “an act of hostility against them and as calculated to disturb the peace of the world.” Germany would be required to “cooperate in any inquiry” from the League Council—“acting as need be by majority”—alleging such violations. The military “plans of action” required to enforce the guarantee “could even be studied in advance,” along the lines of the Anglo-French military cooperation in the last years before the Great War. And the pledge would remain in effect until “it is agreed by the contracting powers that the League provides sufficient protection,” effectively giving the French a veto over any changes. In the hopes of moderating French policy, Wilson initiated the first American attempt at extended deterrence in Europe—a

\textsuperscript{94} Clemenceau to Wilson, March 17, 1919, PWW 56: 9-14, quotes 10. For other examples of French proposals about the Rhine, even late into the conference, see Foch Memorandum, March 31, 1919; Council of Four Meeting, March 31, 1919; both in PWW 56: 445-448, 453-64, respectively. A thorough exposition of French aims at the peace conference is David Stevenson, \textit{French War Aims against Germany, 1914-1919} (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 133-197.

\textsuperscript{95} Rappard to Sulzer, February 13, 1919, PWW 55: 151-154, quote 153; Benham Diary, March 22, 1919, PWW 56: 181; Grayson Diary, March 27, 1919, PWW 56: 312-313, quote 313; Stevenson, \textit{French War Aims}, p. 148.
promise backed with the possibility of real operational planning and aimed at holding the demilitarized Rhine sacrosanct. 96

Wilson’s second commitment was to accede to an international occupation of the Rhineland for fifteen years “as a guarantee for the execution of the present treaty.” In order to put an end to the French dreams of a Rhenish state and cement their acceptance of the League, Wilson agreed to terms that were quite stringent. The occupation would be withdrawn in three five year phases, running from the north to the south of the Rhineland, with the French maintaining the longest hold on the territory most useful for an invasion of Germany and most easily absorbed into France. If Germany did not maintain its commitments, or if the inter-allied reparations commission found that Germany was delinquent on its payments either during or after the fifteen years, the area would be re-occupied immediately. Moreover, if at the end of the fifteen years “guarantees against unprovoked aggression are not considered sufficient by the Allied and Associated Governments,” then the occupation could remain in force “for the purpose of obtaining the required guarantees.” Finally, Wilson agreed to Clemenceau’s demand that he contribute at least “a battalion and a flag”—a tripwire force. America actually stationed a division of nearly 20,000 men in Germany during the Wilson years, which occupied the middle of the three occupation zones. 97

Thus, America was forced to make serious commitments in order to orient French policy away from dominating Germany and towards the liberal League solution. These commitments would have embroiled the United States in the epicenter of European conflict during the 1920s, the Rhineland controversies. Through treaty promises, an occupying force, and the activities of the League, Wilson would have both the opportunity and the obligation to manage European politics. When an isolationist Senator asked him incredulously “Will we be maintaining American troops upon the Rhine for the next fifteen years?” Wilson replied, “That is entirely within our choice Senator; but I suppose we will.” Though understandably reluctant to absorb these liabilities, Wilson needed the political influence necessary to create the liberal peace more than he wanted to avoid American costs. Pursuing positive liberal ends required alliance commitments and ground force deployments. 98

RESTRAINING GERMANY. Perhaps the most difficult part of forging the liberal peace settlement was the question of Germany’s future power and foreign policy. The key issue for Wilson remained the character of the future German regime. Would the nascent revolution he had encouraged during the conclusion of the war stick, or would Germany succumb to either Bolshevik revolution or a rebirth of militarism? Wilson was skeptical that the German regime could be trusted so quickly: “Germany will have to redeem her character, not by what happens at the peace table, but by what follows,” he publically proclaimed before the armistice. Similarly, on his ocean liner to Europe, Wilson speculated that “Germany’s present chaotic state will undoubtedly make it necessary to put her on probation” until such time as she could prove her democratic character.

The international system underscored the inherent uncertainty of future German regime type; it also highlighted a need to secure present French cooperation. These pressures led Wilson to agree to a temporary exclusion of Germany from the League of Nations. “I think it is necessary that we should know that the change in government and the governmental method in Germany is genuine and permanent,” he argued at the end of the conference. “We don’t know either of them yet.” But he fought hard for early German entry into the League, once it had demonstrated good faith in executing the Treaty of Versailles and fulfilled the self-government clauses of the League covenant. Wilson’s balancing reasoning was blunt about the need to diplomatically control German power: “we will restrain the Germans better when they are in the League of Nations than when they are outside.”

In two other areas, Wilson also leaned towards placing firm controls on a German regime whose future was dubious: disarmament and territory. Wilson “felt that until we knew what the German Government was going to be, and how the German people were going to behave, the world had a moral right to disarm Germany, and to subject her to a generation of thoughtfulness.” He therefore supported stringent disarmament conditions: an Army limited to 100,000 men; with no air force; with few heavy weapons, submarines, and warships; with the German General Staff abolished; forbidden from taking any measures of mobilization; and banned from the production or importation of munitions. “Our principal safety,” Wilson proclaimed, “will be obtained by the obligation which we shall lay on Germany to effect complete disarmament.”

In territorial negotiations, Wilson often favored strategic considerations over the principal of self-determination when the two conflicted. He approved the transfer of more than 300,000 Sudeten Germans to the new Czech state and at first supported maximal Polish demands for territory and access to the sea. Though backing down over Danzig and Silesia, Wilson still supported the transfer to Poland of some two million Germans in the famous “Polish corridor” that cut East Prussia off from the rest of Germany. The reasoning behind these decisions was

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100 Supreme War Council meeting, February 12, 1919, PWW 55: 104-113, quote 105, and passim on the conditions of disarmament; Commission on the League of Nations meeting, February 11, 1919, in PWW 55: 70-80, quote 77-78. On the disarmament conditions more broadly see Schwabe, Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany, and Peacemaking, pp. 210-232.
often explicitly about weakening German power: “it must be realized the Allies were creating a
new and weak state,” he argued about Poland, and it was “therefore necessary to consider not
only the economic but the strategic needs of this state, which would have to cope with Germany
on both sides of it, the Eastern fragment of Germany being one of a most aggressive
character.”

Similarly, Wilson’s positive liberal threat perceptions meant that self-determination could
not apply immediately to a union of Germany and German-Austria, which would create “the
most powerful country on the continent—and a great Roman-Catholic power,” implying a
reactionary non-democratic regime. Anschluss would have to be delayed until approved by the
League, after the new regimes “have proved themselves in the eyes of the world.” Though
adamant about self-determination in the West, Wilson was aware “Germany’s ambitions had
always leant towards the South and the East” and worried about “ensuring the safety of those
regions against future German aggression” if a non-democratic regime emerged.

In the end, these terms were fairly drastic. By the time the territorial transfers were
complete, Germany had lost nearly ten percent of its pre-war population, eighty percent of its
iron ore output, and thirty-six percent of its steel making capacity. If the League system was to
work, German power had to be placed within manageable limits and an autocratic resurgence
hedged against. If these measures did not correspond to Wilson’s pre-war international vision, it
is due to that vision’s close encounter with geopolitical realities.

THE STRANGE DEATH OF LIBERAL PREPONDERANCE. Yet it was not German power, or
French pretension, or even the dubious efficacy of collective security that doomed Wilson’s
grand strategy. America retreated from balancing because, at first, the Senate would not ratify
the Versailles treaty, and finally, because Warren Harding was elected president. The history of
the treaty fight reveals that the vast majority of the Senate supported some form of the League of
Nations and that the French Alliance commanded broad support. Only a perfect storm of
contingent factors allowed a small group of “irreconcilable” Senators to defeat the treaty: the
institutional structure of American government; the 1918 election’s change in the Senate balance
of power; and the fact that Wilson suffered a debilitating stroke. This defeat assumed
permanency only with Harding’s election.

The mechanics of the treaty fight were relatively simple. Ratifying the treaty required
sixty-four votes in the Senate. The Democratic Party controlled forty-seven seats, most of which
were loyal to Wilson before it became apparent the Treaty was doomed. The Republican Party
controlled forty-nine seats, but was fractured. The majority of Republicans eventually united
around Henry Cabot Lodge’s plan to ratify the Versailles treaty after attaching reservations. The
purpose of the reservations was to underscore American sovereignty and independence,
e specially by affirming that America would not feel itself bound by the League’s Article X
guarantee unless Congress approved action in each case. A small group of around fifteen
Senators were “irreconcilably opposed” to the treaty in any form. A third group of between ten

101 Council of Ten meeting, March 20, 1919, FRUS, PPC IV: 404-422, quote 418; on Wilson’s decisions about
Eastern European boundaries see Harold I. Nelson, Land and Power, Ch. 6-7; Schwabe, Woodrow Wilson,
Revolutionary Germany, and Peacemaking, pp. 254-267.
102 First quote in Schwabe, Woodrow Wilson, Revolutionary Germany, and Peacemaking, p. 173 fn. 66; Supreme
War Council meeting, March 17, 1919, FRUS, PPC IV: 355-385, second quote 363. On the issue of Anschluss see
Harold I. Nelson, Land and Power, Ch. 11. German iron and steel losses reported by Stevenson, French War Aims,
p. 185. German population losses calculated from COW data.
and eighteen Republicans, depending on the issue, wanted to ratify a version of the covenant somewhere between Lodge's vision and Wilson's.

The treaty failed because, in the final analysis, neither side would compromise. In three separate votes from November 1919 to March 1920, the Senate failed to find a two-thirds majority for any option. The Democrats by and large followed Wilson and refused to support a treaty with reservations, while the Irreconcilables voted against every proposal.\(^\text{103}\)

To the modern observer, the debates surrounding the treaty sometimes appear semantic. Wilson was willing, in principal, to support the ratification of reservations apart from the treaty document itself. On the substance of Article X, he noted that Congress already retained the power to accept or reject particular actions recommended by the League Council, which could in turn only recommend action with the consent of the American representative. For Wilson, the obligation was moral, not legal, and he opposed reservations because he felt they tore the heart out of the moral promise America had made.

As for the Republicans, they supported Wilson's basic commitments to Europe and strongly supported the separate security treaty with France. Indeed, the Senate failed to act on the alliance only because Wilson made it clear he would not permit the Democrats to vote for it without a prior ratification of the Versailles Treaty. In essence, the vast majority of Senators were agreed on the key issues of substance: membership some form the League, the corresponding management of the Versailles settlement membership would bring, and a guarantee of French security. Understanding America's retreat into non-entanglement requires understanding the sources of gridlock despite much substantive agreement.\(^\text{104}\)

From the Republican point of view, the interesting question is not so much Lodge's unwillingness to compromise as his capability to avoid it. The Republicans had strong electoral and partisan incentives not to negotiate. The Republican Party dominated the country after the Civil War, and Wilson owed his presidency to Theodore Roosevelt's third party candidacy in 1912. Incumbency advantages then helped squeak Wilson to reelection in 1916. The Republicans were sick of losing to Wilson and feared he or a similar Democrat might win the 1920 election. As Senator Albert Beveridge argued, ratifying the treaty would allow Wilson to tote "the greatest constructive world reform in history" in the 1920 campaign.

To be sure, there were real disagreements between the two sides, and these gave additional incentive for opposing compromise. As Republican elder statesmen Elihu Root aptly summarized, "If it is necessary for the security of Western Europe that we should agree to go to the support, say, of France if attacked, let us agree to do that particular thing plainly.... But let us not wrap up such a purpose in a vague universal obligation, under the impression that it really does not mean anything is likely to happen." Opposition to Wilson's political power and distaste for his universalist purposes gave Lodge no incentive to compromise.\(^\text{105}\)


\(^\text{105}\) Quotes in Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, pp. 69, 70.
More interesting is Lodge's ability to unite the diverse opinions of his party around his set of reservations. After all, there was a sizeable group of "mild reservationists" who wanted very much to compromise with the President. Public opinion also seemed to want the treaty ratified in some form; after the initial rejection of the treaty in November 1919, public outcry forced Lodge to modify his reservations and bring the treaty back up for a vote in March 1920. Lodge was able to hold together the Republican coalition in large measure due to the election of 1918. The Republicans had gained seven seats in that election, several of them by close margins, which pushed them into a majority by two seats. Had the Democrats retained their previous strength, Wilson would have been very close to a two-thirds majority if he peeled off the Republicans closest to his view; there would have certainly been large incentives to negotiate a deal.

As importantly, the Republican majority allowed Lodge to set the agenda. He first delayed the process of ratification for several weeks by having the Treaty read in its entirety on the floor of the Senate. He then controlled the debate in the Committee on Foreign Relations, bringing in hostile testimony from a variety of interest groups and from administration officials who doubted the wisdom of the League—including Secretary of State Robert Lansing. Lodge's control of the agenda allowed him to puncture the broad but shallow support for the League and rally a core of support around an alternative, both doubtful propositions in a Democratic Senate.106

But most impressive of all was the President's own unwillingness to compromise. He had every incentive to do so. By his own account, the structures of the League, once in place, would evolve over time towards a stronger form of collective security. And he had already written the substance of the most important reservations into the League Covenant itself, by making the Council's decisions purely advisory at first. His own obstinacy made it much easier for the Republican coalition to hold together. Wilson's refusal to negotiate drove the mild reservationists towards Lodge, who was receptive to their concerns.

A variety of explanations have been offered for Wilson's all or nothing approach. Perhaps the most compelling was the rapid deterioration of his health. In an effort to rally support for the League, Wilson went on a frenzied public speaking tour that broke his body, suffering a massive stroke in October 1919. He was, by all accounts, a changed man afterwards, showing none of the acuity and political pragmatism that marked his early career. Instead, he became completely inflexible and insisted that voting down the Lodge reservations was the key to clearing the way for ratification. He took his own strategy down to defeat, insisting that the voters would vindicate his policies in the election of 1920.107

Instead, the voters elected Warren Harding, which sealed the end of Wilson's strategy. The Republican Party elite in Washington was dominated by the heirs of Theodore Roosevelt, many of whom shared a less intense form of Wilson's positive liberalism, supporting American

106 On the power of Lodge to set the agenda and maintain his coalition see Ibid., pp. 73-75; Ambrosius, 

107 On the role of Wilson's health in the treaty fight, see Edwin A. Weinstein, Woodrow Wilson: A Medical and Psychological Biography (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981). For an opposite view that stresses Wilson's moralizing personality, see Ambrosius, Wilsonianism, Ch. 10. Some authors argue, although for different reasons, that the Lodge and Wilson versions of the League were simply incompatible. See Dueck, Reluctant Crusaders, p. 69; Knock, To End All Wars, pp. 264-270.
management of European politics abroad and more modest domestic measures to manage social life at home. But party leaders were desperately concerned that the progressives who split the party in 1912 would do so again, led by the Irreconcilables from the Western states who were opposed to any European commitment. The expedient of the Republican leadership was to support Warren Harding for the nomination—a candidate perceived to be acceptable to the Irreconcilables but open to some kind of internationalism once in office. As Lodge put it to Root, “I am much more interested in getting the whole party together against Wilson and the League than I am in myself or anything else.” But, though astutely straddling the issue in the campaign, Harding was not really open to anything other than non-entanglement. He said as much in the waning days of the campaign when he said of the League: “I do not want to clarify these obligations. I want to turn my back on them.”

SUMMARY OF AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY, 1917-1920

In line with the expectations of TLFP, the United States pursued a balancing grand strategy from 1917-1920, with the eventual aim of creating a preponderant pole of power in the League of Nations. Both the content of the American strategy and the policy preferences driving its formation give confirmation to the theory. America adopted commitments abroad designed to concentrate power in a single pole, a strategy that required intense management of the policies of other states. International pressures integrated the ends and means of American strategy: preponderance was never achieved, but America’s forward commitments on the League’s behalf did briefly make it a balancer in European politics. Woodrow Wilson made these commitments to protect and promote liberal values overseas. In pursuing positive liberal ends, he was drawn to seek more international influence over Europe’s power configuration through ground force deployments and diplomatic engagements. Only an odd sequence of events and the supplanting of Wilson’s values with their negative liberal rivals prevented Wilsonian commitments from becoming a reality.

It is worth highlighting four pieces of evidence from the forgoing section. First, Wilson’s commitments were substantial and aimed at a great deal of international control. He could have opted to fight a limited naval war, but preferred to wage a ground war instead. He understood the League to represent a potentially serious American liability in the event of war, which he supported with an expansive set of post-war military plans. In order to give the League a chance to work, Wilson was willing to undertake an alliance and an occupation he preferred to avoid, commitments that would have put American power in the center of 1920s European politics. The overarching structure of all these commitments was to reconstruct European power into a single pole, though international resistance limited America to forward commitments that managed the power constellation. The war, the League, and the other forward commitments of the Versailles treaty all represented a balancing strategy, one that hoped for future American preponderance in Europe as the dominant leader of an international concert.

Second, Wilson’s positive liberal values were a core driver of this ambitious strategy. The potential for liberalization in Russia helped push him into a war for democracy. He continued to view the League as the protector of European democracy and free trade. He continued to emphasize the importance of the German regime and strove mightily to democratize Germany during the armistice negotiations. Wilson remained committed to the mutually

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108 Quotes in Dueck, Reluctant Crusaders, pp. 77, 78.
reinforcing quality of political democracy and collective security, insisting on placing a selfgovernment clause in the Covenant. Expanding the international reach of liberal values was both an object and a means of Wilson’s strategy.

Third, Wilson’s need for international influence expressed itself in an expanded military policy that placed a special importance on ground forces. As TLFP predicts, Wilson came to understand the importance a large army would have on an international settlement, and conducted the war more towards influencing the peace than blunting the German offensives. At the peace conference, he placed a trip-wire American force in the Rhineland, exploiting the ability of land power to shape the policy of allies.

Fourth, Wilson’s need for international control shaped his diplomatic engagements. As expected by TLFP, the international system forced Wilson to trim his ambitions and increase his commitments if he wanted to avoid failure. But Wilson was willing to absorb such costs in order to gain leverage over the policy of other states. Curbing French ambition meant an independent security treaty. Curbing German power meant a peace settlement unfavorable to the Germans but executed by an American led League. Diplomatically, Wilson put America in a position where it would have to manage European politics.

It is worth noting that the common critiques of Wilson’s commitments miss the mark. While it is true that the League’s institutional structures were weak, the collective security apparatus itself was always a fantasy. What mattered were America’s preponderant aspirations and forward commitments existing through the League, in whatever institutional form. Moreover, Wilson understood that the League’s structure would have to evolve, and his concessions on this point are more the mark of a shrewd domestic and international politician than of a failure to commit. Similarly, it was the loss of these political abilities after a massive stroke, along with other idiosyncratic events, that best explain the League’s domestic disintegration. The fact that the majority of the Senate supported a European commitment, and that the League remained a potent domestic political issue until Harding, illustrates the odd nature of the Great War’s American dénouement. In the end, it was the replacement of Wilson’s positive liberal views with the negative liberal ideology of Harding that ended America’s forward posture.109

Counter-Arguments

Against the argument made here, two important alternative explanations might be proposed. First, a realist approach might explain American strategy simply with reference to the balance of power: the critical decisions to pass the buck, go to war, and retreat from Europe were driven by variation in the possibility that Germany would dominate the continent. Second, one

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109 TLFP is agnostic on whether a Wilsonian strategy could have ever led to American preponderance in Europe; the answer depends on the desire of the European poles to resist American power and their relative capability and will to do so. But it is not inconceivable that something along the lines of post-Cold War NATO might have evolved, with America as the preponderant leader of a European concert. As Chapter Four will demonstrate, an extremely minimal effort on America’s part during the early 1920s was able to temporarily re-order European politics. I suspect that a dedicated and committed American policy could have achieved substantially more. The American presence in Europe today persists because American power provides a collective good of immense value to free-riding European states. There is no reason, in principle, why the same tacit bargain could not have been made ninety-years earlier. In any event, the point is of conceptual, not empirical importance: America obviously could have continued to play a balancing role after the war, which confirms TLFP.
might attribute the inconsistencies in the American strategy to "traditional isolationism," loosely conceived. Such an analysis would not articulate a coherent theoretical explanation, but could point to a variety of mechanisms that served as a "drag" on Wilson's policy. I address these claims below.

BALANCE OF POWER. A realist argument could contend that, whatever standards are invoked for potential hegemony, Germany's massive power advantage made buckpassing a prudent policy: the Allies would do the bulk of the work containing the Kaiserrich, but America would ensure their open sea lines of supply and facilitate the application of British sea power by accepting the blockade. It was only the slow military collapse of the Entente that drove America to war. As John Mearsheimer puts it, "The United States entered World War I in good part because it thought that Germany was gaining the upper hand on the Triple Entente and was likely to win the war and become a European hegemon." Having defeated Germany and re-created a multi-polar Europe, the United States returned home. Though somewhat ambiguous on exactly what power conditions trigger American intervention abroad, a rough balance of power narrative is plausible enough.110

There are features of the historical record that support such a view. Perhaps the best evidence is that several high-level policy makers in the Wilson administration did hold some balance of power concepts. Robert Lansing, in particular, believed that a German victory in Europe would pose a vital threat to American security: "Germany must not be permitted to win this war and to break even," he wrote to himself during the Lusitania controversy, "though to prevent it this country is forced to take an active part." He had little use for Wilson's idealism, writing before the war that "force is the great underlying actuality in all history, which, regardless of the higher intellectual and spiritual impulses affecting human conduct, must be recognized and reckoned with in international and national relationships." Lansing pushed hard for war after 1916, and he was joined by several members in the American peace delegation in his skepticism of Wilson's Versailles diplomacy. Colonel House, for his part, occasionally expressed concern for the balance of power in Europe, though these were more often linked to fear of autocratic structures in Germany and Russia. Given the presence of such views in the Wilson administration, it would be wrong to dismiss the influence of balance of power concerns out of hand.111

Nonetheless, the influence of this balance of power thinking on American strategy is open to serious question. To begin with, Lansing was actually an early advocate of real neutrality, supporting vigorous measures against the blockade. Wilson overruled his approach in favor of buckpassing, since for Wilson toleration of the blockade was connected with peace
diplomacy. Though Lansing did receive Wilson’s support in clashes over the submarine, his repeated attempts to bring America to war over the issue all came to naught. In the winter of 1916-1917 he strongly opposed Wilson’s more impartial peace diplomacy because it was “imperative that we draw nearer to rather than farther from the Allies.” He even went so far as to attempt diplomatic sabotage by implying publically that America was on the verge of joining the Allies. As he put it to a friend, “I must bear the blame of having made an unpardonable blunder, and I do so with perfect equanimity, knowing that my action accomplished what it intended to accomplish.”

It did not, however, stop Wilson’s peace diplomacy—only the German submarine assault could accomplish that. Nor did inveighing for war over the ensuing six weeks stop the President from struggling to get back to the peace table. Lansing put it best himself: “On no account must we range ourselves even indirectly on the side of Germany…. The amazing thing to me is that the President does not see this. In fact, he does not seem to grasp the full significance of this war, or the principles at issue. I have talked it over with him, but the violation of American rights by both sides seem to interest him more than the vital interests as I see them.” Wilson could not be moved to support a mere balance of power—what he sought was a preponderance of liberal power.112

More importantly, a balance of power explanation cannot predict either the timing or the content of Wilson’s decision for war. Realist thinkers often point to the deteriorating Allied position in early 1917, mentioning the respective mutinies of the Russian and French armies in March and May, as well as the submarine threat to Britain. But there is virtually no evidence that Wilson believed the Allies were losing the war—in fact, his view was quite the opposite. Wilson argued on February 15 that “he was not in sympathy with any great preparedness—that Europe would be man and money poor at the end of the war.” As noted above, he continually vowed during this period that he preferred the war to end in a stalemate. Wilson’s correspondence during the winter of 1917 is filled with assertions that the Allies are on the verge of victory and that the Central powers are suffering serious difficulties. Typical were Wilson’s February remarks to French envoy Henri Bergson that “the Germans are weary of Prussian militarism and perhaps of the imperial regime” and that they were on the verge of quitting the war—“They have their bellies full.” Bergson wryly commented that “I fear I did not succeed in disabusing him of this idea.”113

Furthermore, a balance of power explanation cannot predict the massive American ground force intervention. Recall that the logic of the theory dictates a prudent buckpassing commitment in order to hedge against German victory while reducing American costs to a

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113 Frank Lane to George Lane, February 16, 1917, PWW 41: 239-240, quote 239; Bergson to Briand, March 3, 1917, PWW 41: 315-317, quotes 316-317. On realist arguments about the course of the war, see Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, pp. 253-254; Desch, When the Third World Matters, pp. 39-40. For other examples of pro-Allied reports to Wilson, see Courtland to Lansing, January 22, 1917, PWW 41: 300-301; Lippmann to Wilson, January 31, 1917, PWW 41: 83; House to Wilson February 10, 1917, PWW 41: 190-192; Lansing to Wilson, March 19, 1917 PWW 41: 425-427; House to Wilson, March 19, 1917, PWW 41: 428-429. General Tasker Bliss makes it clear that Americans “did not assume that the Entente Allies were in such a condition” as to require immediate reinforcement and that “our knowledge of what seems to be the real situation began to clarify shortly after the arrival of the English and the French missions” in April and May. Bliss to Baker, May 25th, 1917, PWW 42: 408-410, quotes 408.
minimum. The same cost saving logic implies that, should greater efforts be required, a naval and financial commitment to protect British sea power would be more appropriate. After all, from a balance of power perspective, the real threat to the Western hemisphere would be the removal of the British fleet and the disappearance of a regional rival to Germany. Combining American naval forces with their British counterpart to meet the submarine threat and tapping the American financial juggernaut would both be low cost ways to keep passing the buck while fending off British defeat.14

The American ground force commitment was by no means a forgone conclusion. House urged Wilson to “constitute ourselves a huge reservoir to supply the Allies with the things they most need. No one looks with favor upon our raising a large army at the moment....” At the President’s war council on March 20, 1917, he was advised by several cabinet members that “we could best aid the Allies by standing back of their credit, by underwriting their loans” and that America should not “plan to do more than to use our navy and to give financial aid.” Voices outside the administration were similarly ambivalent. As Senator Thomas Martin said when told the Army needed money for operations in France, “Good Lord! You’re not going to send soldiers over there, are you?” But a large overseas commitment was precisely what Wilson intended. As I argue above, Wilson had been planning since early February for a sizeable ground force deployment if his peace diplomacy failed. Once it became clear that military factors meant armed neutrality was nothing more than a naval war on behalf of the British, Wilson opted for building a large expeditionary force. Such a force was not needed to maintain a balance in Europe, but was the only tool that offered Wilson’s liberal strategy the hope of success.115

Finally, the balance of power offers little in the way of explaining Wilson’s peace conference diplomacy. Whatever Wilson achieved or failed to achieve, he actively sought to build a system based on collective security. To build this system, he made political and military commitments that would have put America at the heart of European politics in the 1920s. And as we have seen, the downfall of his strategy at home was not caused by a mass movement against overseas commitments. The French guarantee treaty was extremely popular, and fully eighty percent of the Senate was willing to accept some form of commitment to Europe.

Although it was surely the case that European security conditions permitted the eventual American withdrawal, it was only the active choices of the Harding administration that made it a reality. Absent the wholly peculiar constellation of personalities and interests present during the League fight, an American balancing commitment of some kind would have likely been ratified, multipolar Europe or not.

In sum, a balance of power explanation for American grand strategy under Wilson is only superficially attractive. The major elements of American strategy—the decision to favor the British, to wage a land war, and to base the peace around the League—were made by Wilson. He made these decisions without being much influenced by traditional realist fears of state power: he perceived the Allies to be winning throughout the neutrality period and mostly feared the autocratic nature of the German regime. These policies were principally driven by a strategy of preponderance designed to serve positive liberal ends. As an impetus for variation in

114 This is the logic of Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics.
American foreign policy during the Great War, the balance of power has remarkably little to tell us.

TRADITIONAL AMERICAN ISOLATIONISM. A second alternative explanation might invoke the concept of “traditional American isolationism” in order to explain the “drag” on American strategy during the neutrality period and after the armistice. This alternative is not very theoretically coherent, but it does offer answers to some empirical inconsistencies in American diplomacy. An isolationist argument would assert that some source of the traditional American aversion to foreign commitments—either ideological opposition or simple cost aversion—was powerfully felt through some mechanism: either through Wilson’s own beliefs or through his concern for public opinion. The result was the dilatory American buckpassing policy and a less than full-throated design for League of Nations. 116

As an ad-hoc addition to other explanations, this alternative has value. As Ross Kennedy has shown, Wilson clearly demonstrated anti-militarist sentiments during his presidency. He sometimes expressed concern that a large standing army would destroy American democracy, but might be necessitated by a German victory: “we shall be forced to take such measures of defense here as would be fatal to our form of Government and American ideals,” he told the British ambassador. On the eve of his decision for war, he confided to journalist Frank Cobb that “to fight you must be brutal and ruthless, and the spirit of ruthless brutality will enter into the very fiber of our national life.” Domestically, “illiberalism” would reign supreme and “the Constitution would not survive it.” Such sentiments may help explain Wilson’s extreme reluctance to enter the war. 117

Along the same lines, as a politician, Wilson was naturally sensitive to public opinion and may have feared a lack of support for a more vigorous strategy. He sometimes argued that “we definitely have to be neutral, since otherwise our mixed populations would wage war on each other.” But at the same time, he worried that he might not politically survive to weak a response to violations of American rights. As he summed up his dilemma after the Lusitania debacle, “I wish with all my heart that I saw a way to carry out the double wish of our people, to maintain a firm front in respect of what we demand of Germany and yet do nothing that might by any possibility involve us in the war.” 118

Nonetheless, evidence is mixed on the strength of isolationist currents inside and outside the administration. Even if Wilson did express anti-militarist views on some occasions, they were not strong enough to prevent him from a historically strong stand on the size and structure of the Army both before American belligerency and after the peace. Indeed, Wilson seemed adept at talking out of both sides of his mouth on the issue of the military, assuring anti-militarist supporters that he agreed with their concerns about a build-up but that his build-up wouldn’t “lock people into a military organization and make it subject to military use.” Wilson claimed to support “widespread training” but “with no authority over the man in training; he merely

116 Several scholars make some version of the “drag” argument. Dueck, Reluctant Crusaders, argues that an aversion to costs is a part of American strategic culture and finds this constraint a major part of the treaty fight. Ambrosius, Wilsonianism; Ross A. Kennedy, The Will to Believe; Ambrosius, Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition all stress that Wilson had elements of either ideological opposition or cost concerns when contemplating American commitments. J. A. Thompson, “Woodrow Wilson and World War I: A Reappraisal,” Journal of American Studies 19, no. 3 (December 1985): 325-348, argues that public opinion is responsible for the sometimes contorted nature of Wilsonian foreign policy.

117 Ross A. Kennedy, The Will to Believe, pp. 27, 129.

volunteers.” This universal voluntary service made little sense, but then the logic of the proposal was probably not central to its purpose—as Wilson noted in the same meeting, “I haven’t the least regard for logic.” Evidently, Wilson’s ideological opposition was not strong enough to get in the way of several important strategic decisions.119

Wilson was also just as willing to spurn or shape public opinion as he was to yield to it. After the British refused to give Wilson an inch on even cosmetically modifying their blockade for the consumption of the American public, he backed down despite public outrage. Wilson often expressed contempt for public opinion while debating the merits of policy, in the sense that he was unwilling to abandon his inclinations simply because the public might demand it. Lansing, for instance, was worried that the President’s opposition to “the idea of being forced to do anything by popular opinion” was so great as to disadvantage arguments that invoked such considerations. Furthermore, Wilson was quite skilled at manipulating public opinion when he felt it was important, most notably over the Zimmerman telegram. Wilson “was disposed to make the text public without delay,” instructing Lansing to find “the best way to use it to get the greatest result in influencing legislation regarding the arming of merchant vessels.” So while public aversion to commitments may have helped hold Wilson back at times, it was rarely decisive.120

Most obviously, traditional isolationism cannot account for the “great departure:” American entrance into the war. Soon after the break in relations with Germany, Wilson was already planning for the creation of a mass army in contravention of American tradition and his supposed ideals, built if necessary by conscription. And after the Zimmerman telegram, it was the “isolationist” public that was chomping at the bit, with Wilson still trying to hold back for several weeks. The forces driving American entrance into the First World War overwhelmed the resistance of public opinion, cost aversion, and ideological opposition, none of which much influenced policy during the critical seven weeks leading up to the war decision. Ultimately, Wilson embarked upon a fantastically costly intervention that fulfilled the worst anti-militarist prophecies, including his own. Other factors must explain this critical change.121

Traditional isolationism is a useful supplement for explaining several elements of American policy. But traditional isolationism as a concept has no core theoretical structure, and it fares poorly when applied in more than an impressionistic way. Although they may have impacted a few decisions, isolationist currents of whatever kind were hardly relevant in the run-up to American belligerency, and are of secondary importance in other periods. The shape of American strategy was caused by American ideas, but of a distinctly non-traditional sort.

**Conclusion**

America’s faltering first steps in great power politics during the First World War are enigmatic: interim buckpassing, seven weeks of evading belligerency, aggressive balancing, a liberal crusade, and then retreat represent wildly disparate approaches to the constant problem of

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120 Lansing memorandum on cabinet meeting, March 20, 1917, PWW 41: 436-444, quote 443; Lansing memorandum on the Zimmerman telegram, March 4, 1917, PWW 41: 321-327, quotes 322, 323.

121 On the public’s reaction after Wilson released the Zimmerman telegram, see Arthur S. Link, *Wilson V*, pp. 353-359.
European disorder. Humility compels the analyst admit that American grand strategy, like most social phenomena, does not admit of a fully satisfactory scientific explanation. Nevertheless, this chapter has sought to demonstrate that TLFP predicts strategic outcomes with surprising accuracy and powerfully anticipates the underlying logic of American decision-making. The lack of a potential hegemon in Europe is reflected in the absence of geopolitical incentives for American policy choices. The Wilson administration did not help the British or join the war because of traditional security fears nor did the multipolar system in Europe prevent Wilson’s ambitious attempt to create a unipolar structure of power. Instead, Wilson’s strongly positive liberal ideology acted as a propulsive force pushing American posture outward, seeking greater management of international politics in the service of liberal values. And the international system eventually integrated the ends and means of American strategy, albeit after considerable time and pressure.

From 1914-1917, the United States engaged in a strategy of buckpassing: it favored the British blockade while confronting the German submarine campaign. But far from an attempt to contain a security threat on the cheap, buckpassing was chosen as a first step to liberal preponderance. Wilson was motivated by his desire to build a collective security system that would end the balance of power and protect democracy and free-trade abroad. A series of fallacious but not unfathomable beliefs led him to hope for British gains as the quickest route to an American mediated liberal peace. As international realities undermined these beliefs, Wilson’s policies changed, and American strategy began to take on more commitments to achieve his ambitious ends. The logic of Wilson’s positive liberal goals caused him to leverage his tacit alliance with the Entente, even as he strove to maintain American neutrality in the hopes of bringing Germany to the peace table.

After 1917, America shifted to a grand strategy of balancing. When it finally became clear American neutrality could not be maintained, Wilson chose a full-scale ground war against Germany over less costly naval and financial alternatives. He understood that only such a costly commitment had any hope of providing the influence to negotiate a preponderant League of Nations. Wilson waged the war and negotiated the peace with the need for such political leverage in mind: he insisted on an independent American Army; acquiesced in the French security alliance and Rhineland occupation; and sought to shape the future German regime and its foreign policy. All of these decisions were made in the service of the League of Nations, an institution that, despite its flawed structure, would have entangled American power as the manager of European politics. Wilson’s concessions once in Europe were a bow to geopolitical realities, while still constituting forward commitments of considerable importance. Wilson’s liberal goals overseas created an American balancing posture, embodied in the League and its accompanying military and diplomatic commitments.
Chapter Four

The New Era and Non-entanglement: American Grand Strategy under the Interwar Republicans

After the Great War, the United States and its erstwhile European allies faced a trade-off that could be managed but not avoided. Simply put: Europe could be rich or Germany could be weak. The great power politics of the 1920s is the history of the effort to evade facing the choice squarely.

The choice between Allied wealth and German weakness stemmed from a continent economically shattered by war and politically abandoned by America. France and Britain had placed a large reparations burden on Germany at the Paris Peace Conference and subsequent negotiations, effectively conscripting German resources to fund the reconstruction of Europe. The budgetary impact of German wealth transfers would also be useful in paying European war debts to America. But the ultimate source of these funds could only be a revitalized German industry—the mechanics of the economic transfer aside, any movement of real wealth would be in the form of German products or German resources. A Germany strong enough to provide reparations would also have enormous latent power.

The most effective possible constraint on such power was a political system balanced with American participation, as had been constructed at Paris. But after the American rejection of the League of Nations and President Harding’s election, this key premise of the Versailles system was undermined. The tension between a continent unbalanced by German potential power but in need of German economic vitality characterized the shifting attempts to manage interwar politics.

Considering this choice from across the Atlantic, American policymakers during the “New Era,” from 1921-1932, had a clear preference for increasing European wealth. They hoped a booming European economy would profit American industry and believed that the pursuit of riches would render negligible the German threat by transforming the European system along more liberal lines. But this preference was weakly held, and left the United States engaged just enough in Europe to facilitate Allied evasion and incoherence, but not nearly committed enough to bring lasting stability to the continent.

The Theory of Liberal Foreign Policy (TLFP) outlined in Chapter Two explains this outcome. American diplomats saw few threats and were willing to tolerate a variety of power configurations outside their preferred outcome. Politically, American leaders pursued ad-hoc cooperation when it was costless while avoiding major commitments to shape the balance of power. Militarily, they cut defense spending and focused on disarmament. American security was to be protected by mechanisms of deterrence in the Western hemisphere and non-interference abroad. In short, interwar America pursued a classic example of strategic non-entanglement.

As TLFP expects, it was the combination of negative liberal priorities and a benign threat environment that yielded a grand strategy of non-entanglement. Following the war, there was no potential hegemon in Europe, as Britain and Germany remained economic equals while the latter was reduced to a military pygmy. The three interwar Republican administrations were dominated by negative liberal ideals. When faced with little impetus or constraint to action from the international system, they chose a strategy that minimized domestic state-building and
resource extraction. Though recognizing potential American interests in European stability, the Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover administrations were unwilling to pay the domestic costs to liberty associated with the active management of European politics.

Moreover, the logic of TLFP is confirmed by evidence from the policy formation process. The chief concern of interwar Republicans was that European politics might interfere with American liberty at home. Such values are reflected in the common rationales given for collecting European war debts and pursuing disarmament, policies which American leaders viewed as protecting the rights of taxpayers. And as TLFP predicts for negative liberals, interwar Republicans perceived few threats to American security from either material or ideological sources. Thus, they felt America could afford detachment from European affairs. Finally, there is evidence of characteristic negative liberal priorities in diplomatic and military policy. American policy-makers drew back from anything that even hinted at an alliance or a political commitment and favored the Navy over the Army within an environment of overall spending reductions.

The international system did play an integrating role in American policy, but only a modest one—the Republican non-entanglement strategy already had fairly well matched means and ends. New Era decision-makers were willing to make some limited commitments abroad on behalf of European stability. But when European disorder indicated further costs were needed to maintain the preferred American power configuration, American leaders were inclined to abandon their less important goals in favor of maintaining a non-entanglement posture.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate that American strategy was guided and constrained by negative liberal ideals throughout the 1920s. I begin, as before, by measuring the values of TLFP’s independent variables, demonstrating that the major American policy-makers of the era held solidly negative liberal views and that there was no potential hegemon in Europe. Next, I detail American foreign policy from the election of President Harding to the end of President Hoover’s term in office, showing that America pursued a grand strategy of non-entanglement heavily influenced by the logic of negative liberty. Finally, I examine alternate explanations for the strategic outcome observed in the case.

Coding the Independent Variables

This section establishes the values of TLFP’s two independent variables from 1921-1932: the dominant concept of liberty in the executive branch and the balance of power in Europe. Following the procedures set out earlier, I code each administration’s understanding of liberalism by examining its president’s general philosophical orientation, view on the centralization of government power, and attitudes towards economic interventionism. After compiling this evidence, I judge how far each individual resembles the ideal-type views of negative or positive liberalism. I find that Harding and Coolidge were both fully within the set of negative liberal ideas, while Hoover was solidly, but not completely, within that set. That is, I code Harding and Coolidge as “Negative Liberal: High” and Hoover as “Negative Liberal: Medium.” These measurements give ample justification for assigning at least solidly negative liberal influences to each administration during the “New Era.” TLFP’s grand strategic expectations are generated for negative liberal values on the first independent variable.

I also measure the balance of power in Europe during the New Era. I do so by examining the two indicators of relative power—potential economic strength and extant military might—outlined in Chapter Two. I look for the presence of a potential hegemon, a state scoring high
enough on one or both of these measurements that it could plausibly conquer the European system. Economic data reveal that Britain and Germany remained the leading great powers of Europe, but that neither was obviously preponderant at any point during the period. Similarly, military measures show that the French military was the major force on the continent during the period, though France was much inferior to Germany in economic terms and Britain dominated the seas. Thus, I judge that the balance of power had no potential hegemon and generate TLFP’s expectations on that basis. A summary of the coding and an explicit rendering of TLFP’s predictions conclude the section.

HARDING’S CONCEPT OF LIBERTY

Warren Harding was a consummate politician and party man, never one to let principle stand in the way of electoral success. The son of a soldier in the Union Army, Harding’s birthright Republicanism was reinforced by his successful career as a publisher and journalist in the growing town of Marion, Ohio. Although not prone to deep meditations on the nature of American liberty, Harding nonetheless absorbed a reasonably consistent political philosophy from his Ohio background: the “stand pat” negative liberalism of the nineteenth century Republican Party. I examine his views on issues of general philosophy, centralization of power, and the role of government in the economy. I find that, while his commitment to particular policy positions was politically malleable, his fundamental orientation was uncompromising. I code him as “Negative Liberal: High.”

PHILOSOPHY. In an era of rapid social, economic, and political change, Harding favored a return to a traditional understanding of American government. A fierce opponent of the Progressive movement in Ohio politics, he was a consistent skeptic of reform measures of all types. Editorializing in one of his newspapers, the Marion Star, he wrote in 1911 that “the force of moral law has been ignored in seeking cure-alls in statutory laws enacted by men. There has been more concentration on civic correction than moral redemption…. The latter must come first and must have its beginnings in the individual heart.” His distaste for government intervention on behalf of moral ends made him personally skeptical of Prohibition, though he would later abandon that position for political reasons. “Restraint, people will submit to,” Harding thought, “But absolute interdiction—that is felt to be destructive of personal liberty.” He saw an essential opposition between liberty and state coercion, urging that “we need vastly more freedom than we do regulation.” His negative liberal views of state and society were summed up nicely in the title of an article he wrote in 1920: “Less government in business and more business in government.”

Harding also took a dim view of the Progressive faith in direct democracy, preferring the “representative democracy” he thought characteristic of America. He attacked the direct primary, popular initiative proposals, and referenda and recall provisions as inconsistent with the Founder’s concerns about tyranny of the majority. After changes were made to the Ohio


constitution following the Republican defeat in 1912, Harding thundered against them that that “The unrestricted power of municipalities, the provisions for public ownership, the initiative and referendum in law making and constitutional changes—these are the avenues for socialistic advance.” Progressive democracy made lawmaking “subject to the momentary whims of the people,” while representative democracy permitted “conference, comparison of notes and exchange of opinion.” It was “upon this principal that we have made orderly progress and unequaled advancement,” not least because factions could be checked from hijacking the government and wrecking business. Harding’s was the negative liberal faith of “representative democracy as adopted in the Federal Constitution.”

CENTRALIZATION OF POWER. Harding resolutely opposed further concentration of power in the hands of government, defending traditional constitutional forms. No doubt these opinions were more strongly held when the Republican Party was in opposition; nevertheless, Harding attacked centralizing tendencies over several decades at all levels of government. For instance, the Ohio Constitutional revisions of 1912 were damned not just for their reliance on direct democracy, but also for their tendency to centralize power in the hands of government and undercut the separation of powers. “The revolution is on,” Harding wrote. “A crowd of selfish schemers and socialistic dreamers... have opened the floodgates for every form of government experiment and folly; they have swept away the legal safeguards of a century.... The judiciary has been revolutionized and no man can henceforth be said to have a certain knowledge of the law.”

Similarly, once in the U.S. Senate, Harding became an (unsurprising, perhaps) opponent of executive power. Opposing the Overman Act, which gave President Wilson the authority to reorganize government as he saw fit during the war, Harding claimed that Congress might as well “complete the program by delegating the taxing and appropriating power, adjourn, and go home.” He defended his opposition with the argument that rather than “create a smoke screen for a retreat from our boasted popular government to the establishment of a complete dictatorship I think I would rather fight a bit.” Throughout his six-year Senate career Harding was a reliable opponent of increasing government power or centralizing American institutions. He would later explain his opposition to extra-legally ousting socialists from public life during the Red Scare as a defense of existing institutions. As he summed up his defense of government structure then: “if one who sometimes elects to go back to an old and efficient method and retain it is a standpatter, then I am going to chose to be one.”

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL VIEWS. Harding’s negative liberal attitudes are evident most clearly in his virulent opposition to government regulation of the economy. He was a dyed-in-the-wool fiscal conservative, favoring a balanced budget and tight money, the latter preference dating back to his strong opposition to free silver at the turn of the century. He saw most government attempts at economic regulation as little less than tyrannical attempts to subvert negative liberal rights. The income tax was “the socialistic drift of the day. One man has talent and industry, and saves and acquires; he must be penalized for these because the man who spends his all, or lacks talent and industry, demands the unnatural equalization.” Progressive victories in Ohio meant “Property has been stripped of its rights, and provision made to plunder

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it in the interest of the idle and improvident.” The sad result was that “Burdens have been placed upon enterprise which will drive capital into other and saner states.”

Harding naturally looked very favorably upon business. To him, businessmen had always been the real “progressives,” and he frequently called for government to “strike the shackles off of industry.” He defended the laissez-faire economic system in classical liberal terms: “Reasonably left alone, business will adjust itself to the small competitor, because we cannot abolish mediocrity nor eliminate failure. The survival of the fit will obtain as long as competition endures…. Cheapened output means larger production attended by lowered percentage of profit, and the pinch of competition will ever remain until paternalism or socialism, or both, abolish the rewards of merit.” Speaking in opposition to the public production of naval armaments, he argued that it would kill the spirit of private enterprise, “which made us what we are.” It was “the wizards of iron and steel” that had made America great. Free-enterprise had made America such a going concern: “our capital is uncounted and our credit unlimited and our stockholders, the American people.” Harding was committed to preserving the capitalist system from government encroachment.

Conversely, Harding had a typical negative liberal opposition to the labor movement. He began his career by opposing the eight-hour day, though he later relented as the idea became more popular. After all, “the more a man works the more he will earn and save, and few men working for themselves will stop at eight hours a day.” Labor agitation for such measures would only harm the market system: “with the reduction in hours will come that struggle between capital and labor… which will further unsettle the business interests of the country.” Harding strongly favored a right to work, arguing that “It is more tyrannical than [anything that] has yet been charged against capital to deny any man the right to earn an honest living.” Strikes were an anarchist plot where “The most essential of personal rights was violated. Every man had the right to seek employment as he chose;” strike-breakers were to be lionized for standing up to the “Czars of labor.” Harding praised Ohio laborers for “paying for homes and for their families” rather than “spending their time and money in studying how to control their employers.” Labor in the publishing industry, by contrast, was by and large “a drunken worthless set, the majority of whom are supported by and sail under the prestige of typographical unions.”

COMPOSITE CODE. Though by no means a deep thinker, Warren Harding still expounded a reasonably consistent worldview. It was the negative liberal outlook of nineteenth century America, which Harding refused to abandon in the face of the challenges of the twentieth century. He viewed government as the enemy of liberty and associated unrestrained capitalism with freedom and progress. Democracy as instituted by the Founders' constitutional design was to be praised, but the positive liberal vision of democratic political control was anathema. Harding defended a variety of negative liberal rights and worried that they would be trampled if power were centralized in the federal government and free reign given to the executive branch. Most of all, Harding detested interference in the market economy. His views of business and labor seem almost a caricature to the contemporary observer. In short, Harding was fully within the set of negative liberal opinion.

COOLIDGE’S CONCEPT OF LIBERTY

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Calvin Coolidge’s upbringing was in the backcountry of rural Vermont, his education received at small town Amherst College, and his political career largely spent on Beacon Hill in big city Boston. Coolidge’s political philosophy was shaped by all three experiences, ending up a consistent example of negative liberal thought. I investigate Coolidge’s views across the categories of basic philosophy, attitudes towards political centralization, and ideas about government intervention in the economy. I find that, although his political constituency at times shaped his public behavior, his private views were a vintage example of negative liberalism. I code him as “Negative Liberal: High.”

PHILOSOPHY. Calvin Coolidge’s political philosophy was textbook classical liberalism. He saw liberty in terms of natural rights whose protection was the central legitimate purpose of government. Democracy was interpreted as a system of restraints that prevented the abuse of government power. The role of government was correspondingly small, although Coolidge did recognize a duty to collectively care for those who could not care for themselves. 9

Coolidge usually spoke about freedom in terms of Lockean natural rights, particularly mimicking Locke’s broad definition of property. Man “has a right that is founded upon the constitution of the universe to have property that is his own,” Coolidge contended, and “Ultimately, property rights and personal rights are the same thing. The one cannot be preserved if the other be violated. Each man is entitled to his rights and the rewards of his service be they never so large or never so small.” These rights were to be protected by government, but were not the kind of things that were exercised in tandem with government. Coolidge thought state efforts to improve the condition of life were often misguided, since the ultimate source of human improvement was in the individual. “Real reform does not begin with a law,” he chided, “it ends with a law. The attempt to dragoon the body when the need is to convince the soul will only end in revolt.” 10

Coolidge saw democracy as an institutional means of protecting individual liberty. In his traditional natural law thinking, laws coordinated individual actions so that rights could be protected; they were not a collective expression of freedom. Coolidge therefore insisted that “Men do not make laws. They do but discover them. Laws must be justified by something more than the will of the majority.” Like Harding, Coolidge championed representative democracy over direct democracy, which could result in the tyranny of fleeting majorities. “We have done too much legislating by clamor, by tumult, by pressure,” he thought. Coolidge contended that “This does not mean that the opinion of constituents is to be ignored. It is to be weighed most carefully, for the representative must represent.” But, “Opinions and instructions do not outmatch the Constitution. Against it they are void.” In the end, democracy fulfilled its roll as a check on arbitrary power best through constitutional forms: “The latest, most modern, and

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nearest perfect system that statesmanship has devised is representative government…. No nation has discarded it and retained liberty.”

Unsurprisingly, Coolidge admitted only a relatively limited role for the federal government in social life. “The people cannot look to legislation for success,” he thought, because social progress would come mostly from the private sphere: “We shall search in vain in legislative halls, executive mansions, and the chamber of the judiciary for the greatness of the government of our country. We shall behold there but a reflection, not a reality, successful in proportion to its accuracy.” The best way to preserve freedom was to slow down the tendency to government interference. Coolidge admonished politicians not “to build up the weak by pulling down the strong. Don’t hurry to legislate. Give administration a chance to catch up with legislation.” Such intervention would be useful only in limited cases: “Government cannot relieve from toil…. It can, of course, care for the defective and recognize distinguished merit.” Coolidge’s belief in government support for “the defective” was real, and led in part to his support for some progressive social legislation in Massachusetts. But ultimately, “The normal must care for themselves. Self-government means self-support.”

CENTRALIZATION OF POWER. Coolidge feared the increasing centralization of power in government hands, believing it would lead to an abridgement of fundamental rights. He abjured the “autocratic method of government” Wilson exercised during the war, seeking to return control to “the people of their government and their property.” Coolidge had actually begun to adopt these views almost as soon as he entered public service, even though he represented progressive working class constituents in Western Massachusetts. As he later put it while Governor, “When I first went to the legislature I was a very young man. I suppose that those who voted for me considered me a Radical or a Liberal. I had only been a member of the legislature a few months when I made up my mind that Massachusetts at any rate was legislating faster than it could administer and that the same thing was to call halt for the time being.” As Governor, he also attacked inefficient administration, reducing the number of Massachusetts’s agencies down to twenty from one hundred. Coolidge sought to reduce state power and concentrate its efforts on key legitimate functions. He summed up his attitudes well when he declared that “In general, it is time to conserve, to retrench rather than reform; a time to stabilize the administration of present laws rather than seek new legislation.”

Reinstituting the separation of powers and federalism was key to this mission. America had forgotten that “the three coordinate branches, executive, legislative, judicial, are separate and distinct and neither one directly or indirectly exercises any of the function of either of the others.” Similarly, Coolidge championed local autonomy, arguing that “The functions of city hall ought not be performed by the state house.” He held firm to these views even during the Boston police strike that made him famous, refusing to intervene until local authorities confessed their inability to handle the situation. More generally, while the Union was “the source from which the States derive their chief title to fame,” Coolidge believed that “we must also recognize that the national administration is not and cannot be adjusted to the needs of local government. It is too far away to be informed of local needs, too inaccessible to be responsive to local needs.”

12 McCoy, Calvin Coolidge, pp. 55, 126.
Federalism and the separation of powers together formed the constitutional bulwark without which "all liberty, all security is at an end, and force alone will prevail."  

**ECONOMIC AND FISCAL VIEWS.** Coolidge lionized the free-market and advocated non-interference. He strongly favored balanced budgets and tight money, was generally friendly to business, and had a mixed view of the labor movement. To be sure, as a Massachusetts office holder, Coolidge did support a number of progressive economic measures, both for political reasons and out of conviction. Still, the core of his economic position was a laissez-faire faith in individual action and against government interference, which increased with time and is evident in his privately expressed sentiments. 

Coolidge gave the characteristic negative liberal defense of market society: individuals who sought their own benefit also brought about the good of all. “All true Americans are working for each other,” he asserted, “exchanging the results of the efforts of hand and brain wrought through unconsumed efforts of yesterday, which we call capital, all paying and being paid by each other, serving and being served.” While the market order brought about inequalities, these differences were something of an illusion: “We are reaching and maintaining the position... where the property class and the employed class are not separate, but identical. There is a relationship of interdependence which makes their interests the same in the long run.... This is the ideal economic condition.” Extensive state intervention could only disturb this condition and undermine the capacity of the market to produce wealth. 

Coolidge therefore supported a traditional negative liberal political economy. He was an ardent budget balancer, cutting spending and reducing debt both as Mayor of Northampton and Governor of Massachusetts. He worried about the corrosive effects of inflation and favored tight money. As a young man, he viciously attacked the bimetallism of the populists as “financial heresy” and “an attempt to debauch the monetary system of America”; William Jennings Bryant was accused of harboring a desire “to pollute the sacred shrine of the public credit.” Coolidge was much less concerned about unemployment, and opposed government action to forestall the problem. “The state is not warranted in furnishing employment for anybody so that that person may have work,” he argued, and “anybody who is not capable of supporting himself is not fit for self-government.” He once bluntly remarked that “If a man is out of a job, its his own fault.” Finally, revenue extraction was bordering on excessive, and in an effort to hold down Massachusetts taxes he advanced an early version of supply-side economics: “There is a limit to the taxing power of a State beyond which increased rates produce decreased revenues.... There is before us a danger that our resources may be taxed out of existence and our prosperity destroyed.”

Given his views of the market, Coolidge was naturally friendly towards business interests. Though his later remark as President that “the chief business of the American people is business” is often used to paint a straw-man portrait of his views, it does reflect an important truth: Coolidge gave the benefit of the doubt to market concerns. He frequently argued along these lines: “It may be that the fostering and protection of large aggregations of wealth are the only foundation on which to build the prosperity of the whole people. Large profits mean large payrolls.” Coolidge’s attitudes about labor were more nuanced. He represented a working class

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15 McCoy, *Calvin Coolidge*, pp. 125, 156.
community early in his career, was sympathetic to the individual laborer, and sometimes tried to mediate labor disputes as Governor. However, he feared labor radicalism and disliked strikes, which marred the business climate. Following the Boston police strike, Coolidge called out the National Guard, imposed a kind of martial law, and fired all the striking police officers. His famous response to Samuel Gompers is a pithy summary of his views: “There is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, any time.”

In contrast, it should be recognized that Coolidge supported many of the economic ambitions of Massachusetts’ progressives as an office-holder. He supported workman’s compensation legislation, a reduction to a forty-eight hour workweek, public health measures, and improved compensation for public servants. His rhetoric could be pitched to match these policies. Part of his response to the post-war inflation was to take on “price-gouging,” arguing publically that “Government fails as an administrator of justice if it permits to go unchallenged an exorbitant charge upon the public.” When defending public teachers he declaimed that “We compensate liberally the manufacturer and merchant; but we fail to appreciate those who guard the minds of our youth.” Coolidge definitely had a public record, particularly in his early career, at variance with some of his personal views.

Some of this variance was due to personal conviction: Coolidge firmly believed that the government needed to provide for the sick and the poor. Defending hospital construction, he argued that “the time has come when the people must assert themselves and show that they will tolerate no delay and no parsimony in the care of our unfortunates.” Much of his mixed record was due to political considerations. Coolidge represented a working class community in Western Massachusetts and then won statewide office just as elections in the Bay State came to be dominated by Democratic voting immigrant populations. Early in his career Coolidge bragged that he could get Democratic votes because “They knew I had done things for them, bless their honest Irish hearts.” Later he would complain that he was considered hostile to labor even though “I have signed every bill which had the backing of the workers, with the exception of the bill to increase the salaries of members of the legislature.” When one of his major backers in the business community criticized him as Lieutenant Governor for standing too strongly with the Progressive Governor, Coolidge replied that “my duty is perfectly clear—to back up the Administration to the limit, whether I like it or do not like it…. If any protests are to be made, they must be made by the rest of you.”

COMPOSITE CODE. Calvin Coolidge adopted political ideals that place him strongly within the set of negative liberalism. He defended individual rights and sought to limit the government to protecting those rights. He understood democracy as a check against the potential of government excess, not an expression of collective freedom. Coolidge opposed the centralization of government power and sought to defend the ideas of separation of powers and federalism. Economically, he praised the market economy for creating prosperity and opposed extensive government intervention in its workings. He adopted typical negative liberal views on balanced budgets and tight money. While he did sometimes support economically interventionist measures in Massachusetts, political necessities and humanitarian convictions plausibly consistent with the negative liberal worldview provide much of the explanation.

17 McCoy, Calvin Coolidge, p. 55; Greenberg, Calvin Coolidge, p. 31. On Coolidge’s fiscal conservatism as Mayor and Governor, see Robert E. Gilbert, The Tormented President: Calvin Coolidge, Death, and Clinical Depression (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), pp. 66-68; Fuess, Calvin Coolidge, pp. 186-187.

18 Sobel, Coolidge: An American Enigma, pp. 119, 117.

19 Third quote in Ibid., p. 118. Others found in Gilbert, The Tormented President, pp. 78, 66, 79.
Because of his consistent non-interventionism over a range of areas, I code Coolidge as “Negative Liberal: High.”

HOOVER’S CONCEPT OF LIBERTY

Herbert Hoover’s political ideology has often been caricatured, by friends and enemies alike, as emblematic of the old “laissez-faire” liberal order. In truth, his political vision was both more complex and inconsistent than is generally acknowledged. Hoover’s political thought—which among Presidents is exceeded in substance and depth only by Wilson’s—sought to reconcile the twentieth century American economy with nineteenth century American values. I trace these tensions through an examination of Hoover’s philosophic ideals, attitudes towards government centralization, and views on fiscal and economic matters. I conclude that Hoover is solidly, but not completely, within the set of negative liberal ideas exemplified by Harding and Coolidge, coding him as “Negative Liberal: Medium.”

PHILOSOPHY. Hoover’s political thought attempted to preserve America’s traditional anti-statist ideals in an economic environment that he perceived as tending towards centralization and control. Hoover’s commitment to individualism, distaste for government bureaucracy, and distrust of state coercion place him within the negative liberal camp. But these baseline political values co-existed with an appreciation of the problems stemming from modern economies and a concerted effort to ameliorate them. He therefore leavened traditional negative liberal concepts of liberty, democracy, and limited government with a broader notion of the legitimate role for the state: promoting equality of opportunity.

Hoover’s pre-eminent political value was individualism, and his understanding of liberty focused on the progress of the individual in contrast to the group. The great human goods of “individual self-expression” and “personal achievement,” Hoover believed, “can only thrive in a society where the individual has liberty.” He therefore defended individual liberties against those who, through the force of law, “hope to regulate free speech, or free representation, who hope to reestablish control of the government for profit and privilege.” And as went the individual, so went society. The exertions of the Great War had developed an insidious group consciousness among Americans: “many men came to believe that salvation lay in the mass and group action.... They have forgotten that permanent spiritual progress lies with the individual.” Indeed, group rights were antithetical to social advances and threatened to undermine American values: “Progress of the nation is the sum of progress in its individuals.... The crowd only feels: it has no mind of its own which it can plan. The crowd is credulous, it destroys, it consumes, it hates, and it dreams—but it never builds.” Hoover was explicit in his rejection of the collective interpretation of freedom sometimes seen among positive liberals, insisting instead that “A free

society maintains as many potential centers of enterprise, leadership, and intellectual and spiritual progress as there are individuals.”

In the same vein, Hoover offered the traditional negative liberal defense of democracy: as a protection against the capture of the government by self-interested factions. Hoover argued that “Democracy is merely the mechanism which individualism invented as a device that would carry on the necessary political work of its social organization.” It was only “where dominant private property is assembled in the hands of the groups who control the state that the individual begins to feel capital as an oppression.” Thus, democracy was a valuable as check against concentrated power, against which it could mobilize the diffuse interests of individuals who made the American system work: “The unit of American life is the family and the home…. It is the economic unit as well as the moral and spiritual unit…. It is the beginning of self-government.” These deep roots in diffuse interests combined with individual freedoms led the America towards progress. As Hoover summarized American social philosophy, “its inspiration is individual initiative. Its stimulus is competition. Its safeguard is education. Its greatest mentor is free speech and voluntary organization for public good…. It is the essence of this democracy that the progress of the mass must arise from the progress of the individual.”

Negative liberal anti-statism followed naturally from Hoover’s focus on individualism and his emphasis of the prophylactic benefits of democracy. He advanced the common argument that the state should be at most a neutral arbiter of clashing individuals, praising it as “the umpire in our social system” which had chief among its virtues the preservation of “an equality before the law and a development of legal justice.” Hoover believed that government should involve itself in an activity only when that activity is “beyond the capacity of individuals or groups,” giving as an example the building of the Panama Canal. He contrasted this position with a vigorous attack on socialism, which “contains only destruction of the forces that make progress in our social system.” Hoover saw “many fundamental objections to continuation of government experiments in socialism necessitated by the war. They lie chiefly in their destruction of initiative in our people and the dangers of political domination that can grow from governmental operation.” In his view economic coercion would not preserve American liberty, “Nor does salvation come by any device for the concentration of power, whether political or economic.” Government’s monopoly on coercion was a danger, and should only be used sparingly.

However, Hoover was also quick to argue against the standard laissez-faire vision of the minimal state. While he affirmed that in America “we build our society upon the attainment of the individual,” social progress entailed a bargain: “we shall safeguard to every individual an equality of opportunity… while he in turn must stand up to the emery wheel of competition.” Equality of opportunity was what made the individualist system run; without it “individualism run riot” would lead to Europe’s “careful reservations of castes and classes.” Hoover attacked what he called the eighteenth century ideal that “it is every man for himself and the devil take the

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23 First, second, fourth, and sixth quotes in Hoover, American Individualism, pp. 50, 66; Best, The Politics of American Individualism, p. 95.
hindmost.” America had “confirmed its abandonment” of such a system, “in terms of legislation, of social and economic justice—in part because we have learned that it is the hindmost who throw bricks at our social edifice.” Hoover affirmed that there was a role for the positive state to play, seeing some progressive era regulations as fundamentally compatible with an essentially negative liberal account of government.  

Nonetheless, Hoover cautioned against too strong a doctrine of equality of opportunity: “Out of fear we sometimes even go too far and stifle the reproductive use of capital by crushing the initiative that makes for its creation.” He criticized those who “would assume that all reform and human advance must come through government.” Government restrictions could be highly beneficial towards leveling the playing field, but “they need tuning to our social system if they would not take us into great dangers.” Hoover was careful to distinguish between equality of opportunity and equality of outcome: “We in America have had too much experience of life to fool ourselves into pretending that all men are equal in ability, in character, in intelligence, in ambition. That was part of the clap-trap of the French revolution.” In the end, the state could only help on the margins—“all we can hope to ensure the individual through government is liberty, justice, intellectual welfare, equality of opportunity, and stimulation to service.”

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL VIEWS. Herbert Hoover held heterodox economic views but mostly adhered to orthodox negative liberal shibboleths about government intervention in the economy. Fiscally, Hoover was a conservative budget balancer. These attitudes, and the delicate intellectual edifice that held them together, have often perplexed those who would evaluate Hoover’s ideology. Given his operational aversion to more than minimal government coercion on behalf of his economic vision, I argue that Hoover is found more within than without the typical negative liberal set of opinions.

Hoover believed in an American form of corporatist economics, one with a much lighter government touch than its fascist counterparts in Europe and its American successor under the New Deal. Hoover saw stable and continuous economic growth as the key to preserving American society from the dysfunctional social structure of Europe. “That high and increasing standards of living and comfort should be the first of considerations in public mind and in government needs no apology,” he argued. Judging from the European experience, “failures of equitable sharing of the product” of the market economy led to destructive clashes over “the division to each of his share of the comforts and luxuries.” Hoover argued for economic growth rather than major redistribution by the state, and such growth meant “greater invention, greater elimination of waste, greater production and better distribution of commodities and services.”

Fortunately, technical expertise, industrial coordination, and rational planning could facilitate the conditions of growth. If information could be disseminated and best practices coordinated, “wasteful” and “irrational” outcomes could be eliminated. The business cycle could be tamed, industrial-labor relations harmonized, and economic productivity increased. Hoover believed the government had a role to play in “eliminating the frictions from a basically superior economic order.” He liked to argue that the beginnings of economic regulation in the twentieth

25 Ibid., pp. 34, 67, 58, 19.
century were “proof that we had gone a long way to abandoning the ‘capitalism’ of Adam Smith.”

But Hoover also held many traditional liberal economic views, on both practical and theoretical matters. Abstractly, he believed that economic growth was “dependent upon the creative minds of those individuals with imaginative and administrative intelligence who create or carry discoveries to widespread application.” He worried that government intervention would stifle these talented individuals, arguing that “They must be free to rise from the mass; they must be given the attraction to premiums for effort.” Hoover therefore employed the time-honored tactic of viewing policies with which he disagreed as socialist, summarizing broadly that he was against “any form of socialism, whether it be nationalization of industry, or other destruction of individual initiative.”

More practically, he shared typical negative liberal concerns about inflation, balanced budgets, and excessive taxes. He favored tight money in the aftermath of the 1922 recession, fearing inflation levels of 6 percent or more, and wanted to replace incentive-destroying income and corporate taxes with an equality of opportunity-favoring inheritance tax. He was also in part responsible for the advent of the modern Federal government budget process, attacking the ad hoc “hit-or-miss” system in place before the war. “The budget system,” he argued, “is so universal among civilized governments and competently conducted business enterprises… that its absence in our Federal government is most extraordinary.” He would continue to vigorously press for balanced budgets, lower taxes, and tight money throughout his political career.

Hoover reconciled these sometimes-conflicting views through an ideology of voluntary cooperation. He sought to rationalize the economy through cooperation within trade associations, professional societies, and collective bodies of farmers and workers. These voluntary societies would exchange information on supply and demand and best practices within industry, while also promulgating codes of business ethics and standardizing production along certain lines. The idea was that by eliminating waste and destructive competition, voluntary business decisions could stabilize the macro-economy and steadily increase standards of living. The state would assist in this process by helping to publicize and organize industrial conferences and new trade organizations; collecting and disseminating statistical data; and encouraging cooperation with the recommendations of the various associations. Rather than a night-watchmen state or a welfare state, America would be governed by the “associative state.” As Ellis Hawley encapsulates the idea, “The state would act only as a clearing house, inspirational force, and protector of international rights, not as a trader, investor, or detailed regulator.”

Though Hoover’s model was of dubious economic validity, he by and large stuck to it during his time as Secretary of Commerce. For instance, during the recession of 1921-1922, Hoover pressed for voluntary methods to end unemployment—essentially a series of loosely coordinated programs of business investment and state and local public works. He noted “With the vast unemployment there came a great demand that the Government should… give out doles

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28 Hoover, American Individualism, pp. 22, 23; Clements, The Life of Herbert Hoover, p. 53.
to our unemployed from the public treasury.” But such “direct doles to individuals” were one of
the “most vicious of solutions” to unemployment, which would lead to an “ultimate paternalism”
and “undermine our whole political system.” Instead, the Harding administration “drew up a
plan for handling the unemployed through voluntary action... without resort to any pauperizing
or wasteful expenditure of public money.” Though Hoover’s Commerce Department did
occasionally “establish some measure of legal coercion” in matters of “unquestioned federal
jurisdiction,” in general it focused on liaising with industry, organizing new trade associations,
and distributing all-important statistical data. 31

In the end, Hoover’s fiscal and economic views lie substantially within the set of negative
liberal ideals, despite his corporatist theories. He saw the associative state as a way of avoiding
more interventionist government on behalf of special interests pleading their “suffering from
some kind of injustice, and that something ought to be done to save them from difficulties of
some sort or the other.” In the absence of voluntary cooperation, he foresaw “no other situation
than the constant pressure in Washington for further and further expansion of Federal activities.”
He hoped that over time, the associative state, like its Marxist counter-part, would wither away. 32

Hoover understood that the cooperation he advocated might be turned towards the
cartelization of industry, and he opposed anything that smelled of “trade conspiracy” and warned
that prosecutions would “properly and inevitably follow such conduct.” Government power
ought to be legitimately employed to prevent collusion. But that did not mean all trade
associations were therefore collusive; he believed that even though bricks “can be used to
commit murder, it is not necessary to prohibit the construction of brick houses in order to prevent
it.” On the whole, the Commerce Department was active but not activist, avoiding coercion
through force of law or regulation. Hoover even had his first clash with Franklin Roosevelt over
using government power on behalf trade associations, when he “absolutely rejected [Roosevelt’s]’
suggestion that he apply coercion in support of” an association’s programs. While no libertarian
economist, Hoover maintained a large-part of the traditional negative liberal anti-statism
regarding government intervention.

CENTRALIZATION OF POWER. Hoover combined a conventional negative liberal fear of
centralized power with efforts to make government more efficient. Like most negative liberals
he favored federalism, the separation of powers, and the privileges of the legislative and judicial
branches of government. He also displayed a model negative liberal distaste for bureaucracy,
which led him to several attempts to streamline the government organizations. These efforts
were unsuccessful, and occasionally even counter-productive, but detract little from Hoover’s
overall decentralist tendencies.

Hoover shared the classical liberal aversion to power, dreading its effects on freedom.
“The domain of liberty can be defined by virtue, reason, the common will, and by law,” he
argued, but “It cannot be defined by arbitrary power.” He therefore attacked what he saw as

31 Clements, The Life of Herbert Hoover, pp. 142, 134, 142, 138-143; Hawley, “Herbert Hoover, the Commerce
Secretariat, and the Vision of an ‘Associative State,’ 1921-1928,” p. 127. For in depth assessments of Hoover’s
associative approach as Secretary of Commerce in a number of economic areas, see the essays in Ellis W. Hawley,
ed., Herbert Hoover As Secretary of Commerce: Studies in New Era Thought and Practice (Iowa City, IA:
University of Iowa Press, 1982).
32 Clements, The Life of Herbert Hoover, p. 197. On the ultimate fate of the associative state, and on its role in
preventing interventionist government, see Ibid., p. 201; Hawley, “Herbert Hoover, the Commerce Secretariat, and
socialistic tendencies, which would undermine “the election of an independent legislative body or any other independent official” in favor of delegating legislative “authority to a dictator.” By contrast, it was the separation of powers between the federal branches of government that made for a “government of laws, not men.” Hoover also defended traditional state prerogatives against the federal government: “The whole process of Regimentation with its enormous extension of authority and its centralization in the Federal Government grievously undermines the State jurisdiction over its citizens; State responsibility, and in the end State’s Rights. It thereby undermines one of the primary safeguards of Liberty.”

Hoover was particularly hard on the ills of the federal bureaucracy. Socialist interventionism in the economy was to be avoided, because it “necessitates a bureaucracy of the entire population which, having obliterated the economic stimulation of each member” requires “A Tammany Hall… or some other form of tyranny.” The existing federal government, though not yet captured by a “Bolshevik Party,” was “woefully inefficient as the result of a hundred years of accumulation of poor administrative organism.” For this reason, Hoover asserted that he was “not a believer in extending the bureaucratic functions of the Government,” preferring instead his corporatist approach of intervening only “to induce active cooperation in the community itself.” As Secretary of Commerce, he devoted himself to reorganizing government. The Harding administration had saved money by “slashing federal expenditures” and eliminating “extravagance and unnecessary personnel,” Hoover bragged. But these were just the first steps in draining “the swamp of bad organization” such as the “200 different bureaus, boards and commissions,” that had been “thrown hodge-podge into ten different executive departments.”

Hoover’s attempts to reorganize government were a failure, and made him decry an unholy alliance of “vested officials” and “paid propagandists” who had produced a “confusing fog of opposition” to his efficiency schemes. Hoover’s response was a self-interested exception to his general proclivities: he sought to expand the jurisdiction of the Commerce Department, where he could reorganize and rationalize to his heart’s content. Of course, Commerce’s bureaucracy was “different,” bringing high returns on “invested” tax dollars, “responsive” to the needs of the economy, and “cooperated” with its clients instead of “meddling.” These transparent inconsistencies aside, the aims of Hoover in reorganizing government were recognizably negative liberal in origin, seeking to increase executive power over its departments and accountability for their actions.

COMPOSITE CODE. Herbert Hoover’s ideological impulses were unique, but retain the core views associated with negative liberal thinking. A devoted individualist, he associated freedom with limited interference from government and emphasized that liberty was a concept providing opportunities for action, while insisting that there should be a baseline equality of opportunity for all. Democracy’s primary value was in preventing an otherwise limited government by being hijacked and expanded by special interests. Hoover’s economic thought was heterodox by negative liberal standards, as he held a corporatist vision of market order. But he nonetheless limited the role of the “associative state” in this vision, preferring to focus on voluntary cooperation. He similarly maintained a distrust of centralized power and bureaucracy, defending instead America’s traditional separation of powers and federalism. Given his interest

in a somewhat more active state and corporatist aims, Hoover is certainly not the ideal typical negative liberal. Nonetheless, his general ideological orientation and operational anti-statism place him solidly within the negative liberal camp. I code him as Negative Liberal: Medium.

### Table 4.1: Republican Concepts of Liberty in the New Era

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Explicit Philosophy</th>
<th>Centralization</th>
<th>Economic and Fiscal Views</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harding</strong></td>
<td>Liberty opposed to regulation; against direct democracy; limited role for government</td>
<td>Opposed institutional change; against executive power; defended constitutional institutions</td>
<td>Defender of property rights; loved business; hated labor</td>
<td>NL: High, fully within the set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coolidge</strong></td>
<td>Defender of natural rights; championed representative democracy as a check; limit government legislation</td>
<td>Anti-executive expansion; anti-institutional reform; pro-federalism; pro-separation of powers</td>
<td>Strong defender of market economy; fiscal conservative; pro-business; did support some government intervention as state official</td>
<td>NL: High, fully within the set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hoover</strong></td>
<td>Highly individualist; democracy as a check against faction; government can promote equality of opportunity within limits</td>
<td>Pro-federalism; Anti-bureaucracy; feared socialism and the concentration of arbitrary power</td>
<td>Corporatist economics based on an “associative state”; fiscally conservative; defender of the market; countenanced only limited intervention</td>
<td>NL: Medium, solidly within the set</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GEOPOLITICAL THREAT**

In this subsection, I measure the balance of power in Europe during the 1920s. To do so, I look to two benchmarks: the relative distributions of latent economic potential and extant military might. A state that could dominate either or both of these indicators could plausibly conquer of all of Europe’s wealth and turn it against the Western hemisphere. That is, such a state would be perceived as a potential hegemon by the United States and would shape TLFP’s strategic expectations as such.
First, I look at three gauges of relative economic power: an index of steel production and energy consumption drawn from the Correlates of War (COW) project on national capabilities, a simple measure of GDP, and an index of industrial capacity developed by economic historian Paul Bairoch. The idea is to facilitate comparisons of raw economic size and technological capability, both of which are required to generate large-scale military power. The COW index is a rough but useful way of generating a composite measurement of these latent power qualities among states at different levels of industrialization. Among the most advanced states, GDP and Bairoch’s assessment probably represent more accurate measures of relative strength.

Second, I judge the relative levels of rapidly mobilizeable military power in the European system. This measure is necessary because a weaker state could potentially overwhelm a state with greater latent power if the former could win a short war before the latter could mobilize. The possibility of such a situation might draw the attention of American decision-makers. I record measures of standing military size and investment, as well as historical assessments of relative quality.

Based on these indicators, I conclude that there was no potential hegemon in Europe from 1920-1932. Great Britain and Germany remained the leading economic powers in Europe, rivaling each other in strength throughout the period. The French were militarily preponderant on land for most of the period, although the Soviets were spending a great deal of money in the East. Britain ruled the waves. Germany continued to be hobbled by Versailles Treaty restrictions until Hitler came to power, so that its military strength was artificially deflated. In short, European power was fractured and systemic pressures were minimal.

LATENT POWER. Table 4.2 records the relative economic potential of the four major European great powers in several years according to the COW index; it also displays the 1928 figure for Bairoch’s index, which is his representative year for the 1920s. The COW data are expressed as percentages of total of great power energy and steel production; energy consumption and steel production are given equal weights. Bairoch’s index is expressed relative to the industrial level of Great Britain in 1900, which is scored as 100. The index is a weighted output of cutting edge industries in each country, including a number of high technology industries reflective of the ability to wage modern war. The data show that by the mid-1920s, Germany had recovered to become Europe’s premier economic power. However, Britain was close behind; the ratio between different power levels hovers around 1.15 over the course of the decade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1925</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1928 (Bairoch)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

37 The rationale behind the simple COW index is discussed in John J. Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (New York: Norton, 2001), pp. 60-75. Raw data is from the “National Military Capabilities” dataset associated with J. David Singer, “Reconstructing the Correlates of War Dataset on Material Capabilities of States, 1816–1985,” International Interactions 14, no. 2 (1988): 115-132. My figures include only the four major powers; slightly different figures will be arrived if Italy is included.
Table 4.3 compares German and British GDP at five-year intervals. This comparison is apt for assessing economic potential between two states at similar levels of industrialization. The data come from Angus Maddison’s well regarded series and indicate millions of 1990 International Geary-Khamis dollars. They show an even closer competition, with Germany and Britain at about parity throughout the 1920s. Clearly, there was no dominant economic power on the continent for the times under study.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1925</th>
<th>1930</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>170,235</td>
<td>223,082</td>
<td>258,602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>212,938</td>
<td>231,806</td>
<td>249,551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MILITARY POWER. Table 4.4, drawn from work by John Mearsheimer, shows the relative size of European armies. The size of standing armies in the modern era can be a misleading measure of military power, since states can often rapidly mobilize reserves for battle. Nonetheless, the data show that there was no clear candidate for a potential hegemon purely from the expansion of standing armies. As the system draws down from the war in 1920, France becomes the preponderant land power. By the end of the decade, the Soviet Union has started to rival French strength. Both powers were economically distressed during this period, making it unlikely they would challenge a single great power, let alone the whole system. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>1925</th>
<th>1930</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>99,086</td>
<td>99,191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>485,000</td>
<td>216,121</td>
<td>208,573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>660,000</td>
<td>684,039</td>
<td>522,643</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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39 Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, p. 305. The Soviet Union is still fighting against the Mensheviks and the Poles in 1920, explaining its high figure.
Qualitative assessments give the most accurate story of the European military balance during the 1920s. Put bluntly, the militaries of Europe were in bad shape during the decade following the First World War. The Soviet Union did not return to its pre-war level of industrial production until 1928 and spent much of the interval violently reordering its society. Although tremendous sums were invested in the military during this period, the fighting effectiveness of the resulting force is in serious doubt: the Soviets mass produced obsolete equipment, manned their regiments with uneducated and poorly trained forces, and purged talented leadership. France had reduced its term of conscription and built a defensively oriented Army based around the idea of holding off defeat while French society and its European allies mobilized. As Posen puts it, the French Army during the 1920s was “unsuited for offensive action and barely adequate for defense.”

Great Britain placed most of its efforts into thinly stretched naval power; ineffective and offensively minded airpower; and a near non-existent ground force capability outside the empire. Finally, the German Army had been stripped of its heavy weapons and manpower by the Versailles Treaty. Though cheating around the edges of these constraints, German power was still very limited, and the Reichswehr leadership was focused on rebuilding a devastated and demoralized organization. Given the large constraints facing all the European militaries, there is little justification for finding the seeds of European hegemony during the 1920s.

SUMMARY OF CODING

A detailed analysis of New Era presidents reveals the dominant influence of negative liberty in the executive during the 1920s. All three presidents surveyed affirmed negative liberal concepts philosophically, sought to halt the further centralization of government power, and were unwilling to intervene heavily in the marketplace. Hoover moderated these views somewhat by emphasizing limited government intervention for the purposes of equality of opportunity and countenancing somewhat more intervention in the economy. Together, these attitudes indicate that negative liberty was solidly or highly present in each administration.

Indicators of the European balance of power show relative quiescence: Germany and Britain remained the leading economic powers but easily rivaled each other; France was the leading land power but an economic lightweight; Britain ruled the oceans but had limited strength on land; the Soviet Union was an economic and political basket-case, albeit one that had a large standing Army. There was nothing resembling a potential hegemon in Europe from 1921-1932.

Given these values on the independent variables, TLFP predicts that America would pursue a grand strategy of non-entanglement during the period. No administration should have had any systemic incentive to make commitments abroad, and each administration should have had strong negative liberal incentives to cut costs and restrain commitments. All else equal, New

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Era Republicans ought to have been willing to tolerate a number of outcomes in the shape of Europe’s power constellation, preferring instead to protect American liberty at home through limited liability in foreign policy.

*American Grand Strategy, 1921-1932: Non-entanglement*

TLFP’s expectations are confirmed by American foreign policy under the Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover administrations: the United States pursued a grand strategy of non-entanglement. The basic premise of this strategy was that America’s preferred European power configuration was not worth the costs of engagement. The best route to American security was to build defenses adequate to preserving the Western hemisphere and to avoid costly commitments associated with European quarrels. To be sure, Republican policy-makers recognized a non-vital economic and ideological interest in European prosperity and were willing to engage in limited efforts to protect that interest. Ultimately, though, America was so cost sensitive that it was willing to tolerate a wide variety of power configurations in Europe if American commitment could be avoided.

The character of this strategy can be inferred from its component policies. American decision-makers did not perceive many threats, believing America to be geographically secure, economically powerful, and safe from emerging illiberalism in Europe. Diplomatically, American policy abjured alliances, made few political commitments of any type, and only engaged economically in the most optimal circumstances. Its principal interest was the collection of war debts owed by its former allies. Militarily, America focused on defending the continental United States and the Western hemisphere, refusing to take on any security commitments outside these traditional domains. Republican leaders dismembered the remains of Wilsonian military policy and focused on disarmament, underscoring their distaste for the vagaries of power politics.

Furthermore, the logic of negative liberty is clearly present in the historical record detailing America’s interwar grand strategy. Policy-makers across three administrations were ideologically exercised about European war debts, insisting that cancellation would deprive American taxpayers of their rights. Defense cuts and disarmament initiatives further reflected negative liberal hostility towards resource extraction and economic management. Negative liberal priorities for cost and control are also clear in American diplomatic and military policy. America’s European diplomacy during the 1920s was characterized by a strong distaste for the burdens of alliances and political entanglements, favoring engagement only where American liability could be limited by superficially “apolitical” methods. Military policy was minimized across the board, but favored the offshore power of the Navy, which could defend key interests without getting tied down.

Geopolitical threat also served as an integrating force, although on a strategy whose ends and means were already reasonably well adjusted. American statesmen disassembled the Rhineland occupation less swiftly than they preferred and did eventually make a limited diplomatic intervention on behalf of European stability in the Dawes Plan and Locarno Accords. The Hoover administration was not without a response to the Great Depression, and it did offer to make some concessions to buttress the disintegrating political order in Europe. European reactions demonstrated that American efforts were needed if the preferred American power constellation was to be achieved, and those the New Era statesmen made represented relatively narrow commitments commensurate with the second order aims they served. But negative
liberal ideology was highly restrictive of available means. Beyond a certain point, America refused to bear further burdens, preferring non-entanglement to European order.

This section details the Republican non-entanglement strategy and its negative liberal logic. I proceed in familiar fashion, analyzing American grand strategy across three policy areas relevant to the causal process of TLFP: America’s response to European threats, its diplomatic policy towards allies, and its military posture at home and abroad.

RESPONSE TO EUROPEAN THREATS

American policy in the 1920s was largely indifferent to the structure of power in Europe because American leaders perceived no threats worthy of costly commitments to domestic liberty. Here I outline four aspects of the American threat perception and response. First, I review several possible power structures for Europe after the Great War, linking them to the fundamental tensions in reparations politics and briefly summarizing the relevant history. Second, I survey the preferences of American diplomats for the European power constellation. America sought an economically prosperous Europe with a strong Germany at its center, but gave this outcome low priority vis-à-vis their negative liberal objectives of reducing costs. Third, I assay the impact of European ideological developments on American threat perception, showing they caused little response. Finally, I analyze the American perception of material threats. Policy-makers considered America to be naturally secure and were therefore willing to tolerate several European power configurations that deviated from their preferences.

POSSIBILITIES FOR A EUROPEAN POWER STRUCTURE. The structure of European power during the 1920s depended on the outcome of reparations politics. If Britain and France prioritized shifting the costs of war debts and post-war reconstruction to Germany, they would have to accept the return of German power and the deconstruction of the Versailles political system. If they sought instead to contain German capabilities, they would never see any reparations payments. Though this trade-off had several potentially stable equilibria, efforts to avoid it charted the course of interwar Europe through conflict, intermittent stability, and depression.42

Europe’s choice between wealth and security arose because the payment of reparations depended crucially on German cooperation. The use of force might well solve the political problem of German power, but it could not deliver reparations from a people who would not work. In order to fund a large wealth transfer, Germany would have to make serious economic sacrifices, cutting domestic consumption and investment. The most plausible way to gain German consent for the undertaking was to offer political inducements: to disassemble the remaining constraints of the Versailles system. Absent the liquidation of the Rhineland occupation, the return of the Saar, territorial revisions in the East, and the removal of Versailles disarmament provisions, even the most liberal of German governments was unlikely to cooperate.

in the payment of large sums. Alternatively, if reparations were reduced or eliminated and the
domestic constraints maintained, the Europeans would face the budgetary crisis of repaying their
war debts to the United States. An intermediate political system might also have developed, with
some measure of German political reintegration exchanged for some measure of economic
cooperation. But the basic tension remained in all scenarios: a wealthy Europe or a weak
Germany, but not both. 43

Attempts to avoid facing this trade-off sent European politics through three phases. First,
a period of political uncertainty and economic decline followed the ratification of the Versailles
Treaty, as the Allies sought to assess and collect large German liabilities and the French sought
to enforce harsh Versailles constraints. This period saw a series of conferences concerning
reparations and economic reconstruction at London (1920), Spa (1921), and Genoa (1922). The
lack of any Allied concessions meant that the Weimar Republic, though protesting the sincerity
of their efforts all the while, made no real attempt to pay reparations. The attempts at evasion
helped produce a hyperinflation of the Reichsmark and helped send the European economy into a
tailspin. The conclusion of this drama was the French occupation of the industrial Ruhr Valley
in 1923, an attempt to take reparations by force with the potential to undermine German unity. 44

There followed a brief period of stabilization and growth after the American intervention
on behalf of the Dawes plan and Locarno accords of 1924 and 1925. These modest efforts by the
Coolidge administration succeeded in over-throwing the major part of the post-Versailles power
structure. Under the Dawes Plan, German payments were rescheduled and France was deprived
of her artificial hegemony under the Versailles Treaty—though importantly, a final reparations
settlement was postponed. The Locarno accords created a nascent European security system,
where all the western great powers pledged to guarantee the Franco-German border. American
private loans flowed into Europe, continental economies took off, and France and Germany
briefly pursued a process of political negotiation and accommodation.

Finally, Europe saw a calamitous descent into economic deprivation and political turmoil
following the onset of the Great Depression and the rise of Hitler. Economic pressure brought
the contradictions of the Dawes plan to the fore, but further American intervention appeared too
costly to Republican leaders. Political and economic chaos ensued. War debtors defaulted,
reparations were dispensed with, and the remains of the Versailles constraints disassembled.
Faced with a choice between wealth and security, Europe ended up with the worst of both
worlds: economic weakness and an unconstrained Third Reich.

43 Was it even possible for Germany to pay large reparations? The high end of various different reparations
proposals amounted to a yearly annuity of, roughly, about 7% of Weimar Germany’s interwar GDP after its
economy had recovered. Economically, there are several examples of unilateral transfers on such a scale since the
industrial revolution, including Britain’s capital export during the first globalization, France’s first year of
reparations to Germany after the war of 1870, and perhaps the American capital transfer during the First World War.
Stephen A. Schuker, American Reparations to Germany, 1919-33: Implications for the Third World Debt Crisis
cost of two Marshall Plans a year for a generation, and would have required substantial austerity measures in
Germany. Additionally, the political will among the European Allies to take the money was dubious: a
reinvigorated German economy would have caused adjustment difficulties in their own industries.

44 For the basic history recounted in the next three paragraphs see the works cited earlier in this subsection and Sally
Marks, The Illusion of Peace: International Relations in Europe, 1918-1933 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan,
1976).
REPUBLICAN VISIONS FOR EUROPE. American decision-makers had a vision for how the tensions in European politics were to be managed: interwar Republicans were basically pro-German revisionists. They imagined a Germany economically rehabilitated, politically integrated into the European system, democratically governed, and economically cooperative with all of Europe. Such an outcome would turn Europe from a battleground into a marketplace, benefiting American trade, European prosperity, and world peace—the conventional liberal vision of international politics. However, the preference for this idealized political order was weak. American diplomats were, in fact, willing to tolerate a range of political configurations, so long as they did not require the involvement of the American pole. The American grand strategy was one of non-entanglement. 45

America's interest in Europe stemmed from its economic goals, which required a settlement of the reparations dispute. As Hoover argued in a memo to Harding that Europe's problems lay "in the economic relationships of France and Germany alone." He thought that "In the last analysis the rebuilding of economic life among [western and central Europeans] is of daily importance to every worker or farmer in our country and the whole world." Harding's Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes agreed, and told the French ambassador he "would not disclaim the intense interest that the American Government felt in the settlement of the matter of reparations; that this lay at the foundation of the economic recuperation of Europe which was of concern to the whole world and in a very important degree to the United States." 46

Washington foresaw a business-like renegotiation of the European order. A reparations settlement did not mean France had to abandon any hope of payments. "No one desired to see Germany escape her just obligations," Hughes claimed, and "No one desired to see France sacrifice a Sou of what she was entitled to obtain." But "the fact remained that France could not get any more than Germany could pay." France would have to adjust its claims on an economically reasonable basis—there was no "pot of gold in the Ruhr that the French could go and pick up... The only pot of gold there was a net balance that would remain after expenses as a result of production and trade." Implicitly, assuring even reduced reparations terms would require French political concessions. 47

Politically, American policy-makers hoped for a process of peaceful change in Germany's favor. All three Republican administrations had at least a modest preference for the evacuation of the Rhineland and the termination of military controls on Germany. As Henry Stimson, Secretary of State under Hoover, put it, the "occupation of the Rhineland" was a policy "this Government was not interested for its own sake, but was acting on the requests of its associates." American statesmen also favored revisions in Germany's favor to the eastern border disputes in Danzig, Upper Silesia, and the Polish Corridor. That all of these changes would threaten French security was acknowledged by Washington, but did not elicit serious concern.

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47 Hughes to Jusserand, December 14, 1922, FRUS, 1922, II: 187-192, quotes 189, 191.
The whole tenor American policy was well summed up in a 1929 State Department conference on French security: “the rub came down to the definition of the word ‘security.’” If the French meant the perpetual freezing of the postwar status quo, including the maintenance of unjust and bitterly resented treaty provisions, and a preponderant military force to guarantee it, then we could not agree with them. Our idea was a tranquilized Europe, which meant the solution, one by one, and by peaceful means, of the problems that were preventing it from settling down.48

But policy on behalf of this yearned for reordering of the balance of power was subject to fundamental ideological limits. Negative liberal views dominated each administration, which meant that any overseas engagement was subjected to a rigorous test of cost. To begin with, Washington believed the costs of disengagement were low. Hoover argued that America could “reestablish its material prosperity and comfort without European trade,” a view he continued to hold even at the height of the Great Depression. Similarly, even the generally pro-export Treasury Department noted that “this country may enjoy a great deal of prosperity even when very unsatisfactory conditions prevail abroad.” Diplomats felt America could be made more prosperous by European stability, but saw the home market as an essentially economically self-contained system: the world’s biggest free trade area. They therefore believed American interests were engaged by the political imbroglio surrounding reparations, but were not willing to make major sacrifices for its resolution. As Leffler aptly summarizes, Washington simply “did not consider these interests to be of sufficient importance to justify the involvement of the United States government in the political matters attendant to the indemnity issue.”49

Political action on behalf of any proposed European power constellation risked tying America down on behalf of commitments that could be costly. In particular, European political maneuvering triggered the negative liberal suspicion of alliances. The United States “does not believe that the peace of the world or of Europe depends upon or can be assured by treaties of military alliance,” Kellogg argued. American diplomats instead emphasized the beneficent influence they could exercise with a free hand. Hughes defined America’s twin foreign policy principles as “Independence—that does not mean and has never meant isolation. Cooperation—that does not mean and has never meant alliances or political entanglements.” America would help where it could, but would not become enmeshed in quarrels that were not its own.50

The Republican administrations also shared a similar negative liberal reticence towards military power and its potential drain on American freedoms. To be sure, the Republican Party of the 1920s stood for preparedness and a strong defense, and no administration sought to economize on protecting American interests in the Western hemisphere. But each administration feared the burden on the taxpayer from armaments. Harding thought military budgets the “first and primary obstruction” to prosperity at home and stability abroad. Coolidge warned that “the necessity of lifting the burden of taxation” from Americans and their European confederates “by

50 Leffler, “Political Isolationism, Economic Expansionism or Diplomatic Realism?,” p. 418; Cohrs, The Unfinished Peace after World War I, p. 86.
limiting armaments is becoming daily more imperative.” Stimson stressed that America favored a “commercial and non-military stabilization of the world,” and the State Department justified its pursuit because “general international peace prevents the economic waste of war and precludes the necessity for piling up economically wasteful armaments.” For these characteristic negative liberal reasons, the interwar Republicans eschewed military commitment and pursued disarmament, not least so that American citizens could relieve their own burdens.  

In short, though America hoped for a favorable European balance of power, its most important concern was to remain detached from the system. American leaders resisted alliances and other political commitments, cut the military and reduced its role in foreign policy, and generally pursued an ideal negative liberal grand strategy: non-entanglement.  

NO IDEOLOGICAL THREAT. The Republican priority for limited liability is reflected in American threat perception throughout the 1920s. Like most Americans, interwar Republican policymakers favored European democracy and felt a serious distaste for illiberal politics of all stripes, especially Bolshevism. But although it was generally conceded that illiberalism in Europe was bad for American interests, these views were inconsistently held and rarely acted on. American decision-makers sometimes thought illiberalism inconsequential, occasionally even encouraging, and never worth costly opposition.  

The economic unrest on the continent did cause American diplomats to worry about the potential for illiberal regime change. “Already the Bolshevist tide is beating against the barriers of European civilization,” Ambassador Houghton warned from Berlin in late 1922. Absent American intervention to stop German hyperinflation, “That tide will sweep resistlessly to the Atlantic. This is not mere rhetoric.” Despite these warnings to top policy-makers, American intervention was not forthcoming until the crisis had bottomed out a year later. And even after limited American efforts had helped stabilize the situation somewhat in the mid 1920s, the top State Department official for Western Europe, William Castle, believed that the Briand government in France would be followed “at an attempted fascism, with a dictator... or perhaps communism.” His resulting conclusion, though, was that America should stay clear of European entanglements.  

Americans also sometimes perceived European illiberalism as potentially beneficial. During the Ruhr crisis, German industrialists approached American diplomats in Germany about a potential right-wing coup establishing “a dictator and the abolition of parliamentary government.” Such a maneuver, one industrialist outlined, would be “a purely fascist movement... to restore law and order.” Houghton and Castle feared that a coup attempt would ultimately lead to a “Red Republic,” but found the attack on democracy plausible. After all, a dictatorship “might easily be to Germany’s advantage,” as “parliamentary government in Germany has not succeeded.” Houghton would applaud Reichswehr general Hans von Seeckt’s assumption of temporary emergency powers in October 1923. Similarly, American diplomats refused to facilitate the economic recovery of Poland until Josef Pilsudski’s coup of May 1926. “The net result of the revolution,” the Ambassador to Poland argued, will be “a strong honest government which will lean towards America and American ideals rather than towards France,”

51 Leffler, “Political Isolationism, Economic Expansionism or Diplomatic Realism?,” quotes pp. 434, 419, 421.; Coolidge Address to Congress, January 4, 1926, FRUS, 1926 I: 42-44, second quote 44;  
52 Houghton to Hughes, October 23, 1922, FRUS 1922, II: 171-175, quotes 173; Cohrs, The Unfinished Peace after World War I, p. 315. For the administration’s response to Houghton, see Hughes to Houghton, November 14, 1922, FRUS, 1922, II: 181-182.
and its eastern alliance. The negative liberals running American policy did not usually see a threat from illiberalism. 53

Even as the Great Depression and the Nazis began to tear through European politics, American non-entanglement trumped the importance of ideological threats. American officials in Germany described Hitler’s increasing electoral success as “a body blow to the Republican form of government” and a sign of a “dangerous mentality at present possessed by a large proportion of the population.” But there had been “so many occasions” when “republican institutions have been brought to a precarious pass” that “developments may still be appraised with less alarm than if they constituted an entirely new phenomenon. The body-blow is not necessarily a knock-out blow....” Stimson argued that “it was easy to find in any nation... elements that are disturbing or wrong” but that he “was not going to judge Germany until I saw how she reacted after the election.” 54

In 1932, the American embassy in Berlin criticized the belief “that there is no limit to future Nazi gains and that they will continue in geometric progression” as “undoubtedly erroneous.” One of the last dispatches from America’s German ambassador, just two months before Hitler seized power, concluded that “The Nazi movement... is now on the decline.” No doubt some of these views reflect the persistent under-estimation of Hitler common to many observers of his rise, but they also show an ideological indifference characteristic of negative liberal threat perception. In any event, none of the America’s limited efforts to stabilize European politics during the Depression were driven by fears of illiberalism. 55

NO MATERIAL THREAT. The negative liberal statesmen of the interwar years also failed to perceive any material threat from the European balance of power. The United States was regarded as secure in its hemispheric fortress, immune from the vagaries of power politics. Thus, despite clear preferences for a European order that integrated Germany on equal terms, American leaders were willing to accept a wide range of power constellations in Europe. French political predominance was viewed with distaste, but was not thought worthy of the costs of prevention. Similarly, the resurgence of German power produced occasional worries but infrequent action.

Interwar politics did not produce many occasions for considering American security requirements, but when it did Republican policy-makers adopted a restrictive view of potential threats. Hoover’s opinion was that American defenses needed to be strong enough such that “no foreign soldier will land on American soil” but which also “must not exceed the barest necessity for defense” lest they become “a threat of aggression against others and thus a cause of fear and animosity in the world.” He was therefore willing to sacrifice American possessions in the Pacific in the event of war, preferring to only defend the Western hemisphere. Decision-makers more generally were impressed with American geographic advantages. William Castle argued


54 Gordon to Stimson, September 17, 1930, FRUS, 1930, III: 77-79, quotes 79; Stimson meeting with French ambassador, October 23, 1930, FRUS, 1930, III: 89-90, quotes 89.

55 American embassy memo, January 5, 1932, FRUS, 1932, II: 278-281, quote 278; Sackett to Stimson, December 14, 1932, FRUS, 1932, II: 321-323, quote 323.
that it was “nonsensical to try to ignore the necessarily regional character of the world” in arms negotiations, since America shared no common security threat with Europe. And Coolidge’s Secretary of State Frank Kellogg summed up American policy well when he noted that “our detached position and our geographic isolation from those areas of the world where conflicting territorial or political issues have led to the maintenance of large standing armies” was the driving factor allowing American land armament to be “voluntarily reduced to the minimum.” In essence, the interwar negative liberals accepted “fortress America” as a tacit or explicit assumption in their grand strategy. 56

With the Western hemisphere a strategic bedrock, American statesmen were reticent to invest heavily in their preferred constellation of power in Europe. As noted above, the Harding administration clearly feared the consequences of reparations policy on the politics and economic health of Europe, arguing in 1922 as Weimar hyperinflation began that “unless something is done immediately, there is no possibility of saving Germany.” Indeed, the British were threatening to remove their troops from the Rhineland to avoid the ensuing trouble. But the same dispatch concluded that “While such a situation is deplorable, we regard such [British] withdrawal as better than further compromise because German disaster is certain unless bold and comprehensive action is taken immediately and it is better to come quickly than to drag along.”

Houghton summarized the emerging course of politics with characteristic vigor: “having destroyed any balance of power in Europe and left France for the moment all powerful, we have simply let loose a great elemental force... It can only be dealt with as a force. And unless it is met by armed force in the shape of armies, it must be met by economic forces in the shape of threatened ruin. That is the whole story. France must be met by force. One might as well try to reason with the law of gravitation.” Yet the Harding administration refused to consent to any intervention whatsoever, content to let France’s Ruhr policy develop rather than step in to preserve a European order. 57

Moreover, the Harding administration understood French policy during the Ruhr occupation as a malign attempt to re-cast the structure of power. Hughes believed “the futility of expecting an economic return from such an occupation was quite clear and that the dangerous consequences which might ensue were fairly obvious.” As a result, “The conclusion was that in occupying the Ruhr the object was not to get reparations but to dominate German industry and prostrate Germany.” Indeed, the State Department feared that France intended to break up Germany into several states, which “would jeopardize seriously not only American interests but those of the whole of Europe.” As Hughes implored the French, “if Germany was to pay reparations there must be a Germany to pay them... The French would be left with the Ruhr in their hands and from this they might obtain some political security... and even the matter of political security might be impermanent, for Germany might in time reunite.” 58

57 Herrick to Hughes, October 14, 1922, FRUS 1922, II: 165-168, quotes 167; Leffler, The Elusive Quest, p. 85. See also Hughes to Herrick, October 17, 1922, FRUS, 1922, II: 168-170, where the administration typically demurs from action.
58 Hughes-Geddes meeting, December 18, 1922, FRUS, 1922, II: 192-195, quote 194; Hughes-Wiedfeldt meeting, December 12, 1922, FRUS, 1922, II: 186-187, quote 187; Whitehouse to Hughes, October 24, 1923, FRUS, 1923, II: 76-78, quote 78; Hughes-Laboulaye meeting, October 26, 1923, FRUS, 1923, II: 79-83, quote 82.
Still, the disintegration of the biggest power in Central Europe was a result America was willing to risk. “The American government did not desire to dictate in any way,” Hughes lectured, “it did not care to make any uninvited suggestions… the desire abroad was more that it should become a partisan than that it should be an impartial adviser.” Calls for action sounded suspiciously like calls to infringe on American liberties, and America would not “countenance an arrangement which would be in effect the placing upon our people of the burden of the German indemnity.” Even after the Coolidge administration decided there was a case for limited financial intervention on behalf of the Dawes plan, it refused to act until the French agreed to every last American term. Absent such deference, “each side would probably have to ‘enjoy its own bit of chaos’ until the disposition to create a fair settlement had been created.” America was just too secure to risk the high costs of departing from the strategy of non-entanglement.59

Other potentially malign power constellations were equally incapable of disturbing American strategy. After the financial stabilization of the early 1920s, a European balance dominated by a resurgent Germany took on a renewed relevance, and American policy-makers were aware of the problem. Castle thought Germany was “certainly getting enormous strength in all but the military sense,” while the American military believed that “Germany is like a young giant in chains whose growing… powers cause him to expand in one direction as rapidly as constrictions are applied in another.” Despite a strong distaste for the words “balance of power,” Americans understood the structural problems of an unrestrained Germany: “Rome had put the civilized world order under one overlordship. We have broken it to bits [at Versailles] and erected thereby innumerable centers of unrest. And against communism we have fascism, which certainly does not add to the chances of peace.”60

Even so, American statesmen felt that there was no solution to German potential power. During disarmament negotiations Castle argued America “could hardly ask the Krupp factories to go out of the business of making ploughs because, in war, they might make guns.” Similarly, provisions for limiting total defense spending or adjusting arms limits based on war potential were “an artificial effort to equalize that which is not and cannot be made equal.” Later, as the Depression tore the European system apart and Germany’s potential power skyrocketed in importance, the Hoover administration understood that “The first part of the problem is to ease the political frictions which exist between France and Germany.” However, “Except for using our good offices in conciliation we can take no part in this.” Dealing with German strength might require serious commitments, and though it might render moot any attempt to save the system from crashing, “We could not be a party to the political or semi-political demands on Germany that the French have outlined.” The problems of power in Europe were somebody else’s problem. The ensuing disintegration of Europe only underscores the Republican strategy of non-entanglement.61


61 Cohrs, The Unfinished Peace after World War I, p. 372. Kellogg to Gibson, April 23, 1926, FRUS, 1926, I: 80-89, quote 87; Castle to Stimson, July 17, 1931, FRUS, 1931, I: 275-278, quotes 275, 277. On the need for Europe to
DIPLOMATIC POLICY

American diplomacy during the 1920s was largely aloof from European concerns, concentrating on the interests of the American taxpayer. In this section, I survey three policy periods. First, I summarize the orientation of the Harding administration to war debts and reparations politics, stressing its unwillingness to assist European stabilization for fear of absorbing large costs. Second, I give an account of the American role in Europe’s mid-decade stabilization. With minimal commitment, Coolidge administration’s support for the Dawes plan and Locarno accords helped re-structure the European balance of power. Last, I analyze American economic diplomacy from Locarno until the election of Roosevelt, showing a basic posture of detachment even in the face of the Great Depression.

ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY, 1921-1923. America’s new grand strategy of non-entanglement was most evident in the crosscutting pressures surrounding post-war European economic stabilization. As noted earlier, the Harding administration was not unconcerned about the economic and political calamities facing the Old World. Hughes knew that “there can be no economic recuperation in Europe unless Germany recuperates. There will be no permanent peace unless economic satisfactions are enjoyed.” The advance of American trade and European liberalism were tied to a prosperous Europe. The Harding administration was eager to support European re-construction and financial stabilization.

Moreover, Harding and his advisors were well aware—whatever their rhetoric—that economic concerns also had a distinctly political dimension. European recovery had to be founded on a stable balance of power, one that reintegrated a defeated Germany on acceptable terms. Harding and Hughes both agreed that the “only way for France to obtain real security is by taking Germany into camp.” As the economic situation deteriorated in 1923, its political causes became more acute: the situation was “near breakdown,” Hoover argued, and France must either chose “to support democratic government in Germany or to face implacable hate and constant danger.” American economic and ideological goals were incompatible with a European politics run at German expense.62

But the Harding administration also understood that policies inducing European stability would come at a cost. Economic concessions concerning the thicket of war debts, loans, and reparations threatened American liberty—their costs would be paid through taxation, further public debt, and inflation. These were ideologically unacceptable burdens. Harding felt that it was “unthinkable to expect a business revival and the resumption of the normal ways of peace while maintaining the excessive taxes of war.” Europe’s war had been financed “by taxation and internal loans,” Hughes stressed, and American citizens expected to be repaid. And as Hoover noted, it was “the most unlikely event on the economic earth,” given Europe’s reluctance to pay its debts, that “the United States, as a government, [would] again engage in any governmental loans.” European reconstruction would have to be financed by private initiative rather than

provide for its own solution to power problems, see Castle to Mellon and Stimson, July 19, 1931, FRUS, 1931 1: 280-282.

government coercion. In short, though hoping to assist Europe where they could, interwar Republicans placed strict limits on their policy: the trick was, in Harding’s words, “how to fully assert a helpful influence abroad without sacrificing anything of importance to our own people.”

These negative liberal sentiments limited debt forgiveness towards Europe, producing a posture of non-entanglement. The Harding administration asked Congress for broad authority to negotiate debt settlements with European countries, but this request was rejected in favor of giving negotiating power to an independent War Debt Commission (WDC) with a highly restrictive mandate. This outcome was probably only of modest importance, since, as Melvin Leffler points out, the Harding administration “was not considering cancellation or even partial cancellation” as it was “too pre-occupied with converting the short-term floating debt, reducing the public debt, and lowering taxes to be generous to former Allies.”

Where the rights of the American taxpayer could be protected, Republican policy-makers aimed for leniency, ultimately negotiating European settlements that deferred and considerably reduced interest payments to all comers. For instance, in 1923, Hoover and Treasury Secretary Mellon negotiated the British settlement over a period nearly three times as long, and an interest rate only two-thirds as much, as the law required—though still generating a sizeable return on the American investment. But liberal fiscal considerations meant that debt accords were “adjusted in relation to long term interest rates,” a fair standard for the taxpayer, “rather than attuned to the performance” of European economies. The economic pressure of the debt was reduced, but not nearly enough to ease Europe’s dire economic straits.

The desire to limit financial liabilities led the Harding administration to resist anything that resembled a political commitment. Most importantly, American diplomats steadfastly refused to acknowledge the link between reparations, war debts, and the European economic morass. “It is idle to propose any course leading to the discussion of Inter-allied debts, and especially of debts due the United States,” Hughes forcefully said, as “This Government’s position has always been that the question of debts is irrelevant to the question of German reparations.”

It was not that the administration did not understand the mechanics of balance sheets or the severe problems facing central Europe. American consular officials sent dire warnings during the German hyperinflation of 1922/1923 that Germans “live, literally, from hand to

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mouth.” The influential American ambassador to Germany, Alanson Houghton, proposed that if “our debt were cancelled against other debts, a large part of the burden would be lifted. The situation would instantly become better. Despair would give way to hope, and with hope economic prosperity would quickly follow.” But Hughes and Harding decided “that it would not be at all possible to authorize you to make such a statement as you suggest.” Financial commitments would entangle American power, and “This Government, while wishing to assist in every possible way, does not desire to become a dictator or arbitrator in the reparations problem.” 65

As Europe fell to economic pieces in 1922-1923, the Harding administration only became more committed to non-entanglement. Harding was deeply suspicious that “the nations of the Old World [would] put upon our shoulders the main burden of finding a way out of the present deplorable state of affairs.” European proposals, such as Lloyd George’s attempt to stabilize Europe at the 1922 Genoa financial conference, were likely political quicksand. For this reason, Hughes declined participation at Genoa because it was “a conference of a political character in which the Government of the United States could not helpfully participate. This Government cannot be unmindful of the clear conviction of the American people... that they should not unnecessarily become involved in European political questions.”

Similarly, when Germany proposed a treaty that would abjure European war without national plebiscites, Hughes would only pursue it as a paper promise. When the French ambassador “asked whether that meant that the Government of the United States would guarantee such an agreement. The Secretary said that it would not; that he did not think any such guarantee could be looked for.” The Germans might “welcome any arrangement by which the Government of the United States would in a sense be a ‘trustee’” of European security; the French might change “their disposition... even to amend their constitution” if “the United States were brought into the matter.” But the Americans would not be tied down. 66

What the United States was willing to offer was “apolitical” financial mediation. After earlier secret diplomacy failed, Hughes publically suggested that European governments “invite men of the highest authority in finance” to form a private committee that would suggest a plan for working out the reparations tangle. The basic idea, replete with negative liberal shibboleths about the tyranny of the majority, was that French and German statesmen were being recalcitrant for domestic political reasons. “There is gravest necessity of prompt action,” Hughes acknowledged, “but I can see no prospect of an agreement unless Governments can arrange to interpose between themselves and their public the findings of an impartial committee.” Once the clear heads of the private sector had worked out reparations on “a business basis,” governments could stand behind their impartial report, and the United States might choose to bring its financial weight to bear in implementing the bankers’ plan. 67

65 Hughes to Herrick, October 17, 1922, FRUS, 1922, II: 168-170, first two quotes 169; Houghton to Hughes, October 23, 1922, FRUS 1922, II: 171-175, third and fourth quotes 172; Hughes to Houghton, November 14, 1922, FRUS, 1922, II: 181-182, quote 181; Hughes to Herrick, January 6, 1923, FRUS, 1922, II: 202-203, quote 203. Also imploring a response from Washington are Castle to Hughes; Boyden to Hughes; October 24 and November 9, 1922 both in FRUS, 1922, II: 176-177, 180-181, respectively. I have edited some of these telegrams to render them in standard English.


67 Hughes Speech to AHA, December 29, 1922, FRUS, 1922, II: 199-202, quote 202; Hughes to Herrick, October 17, 1922, FRUS, 1922, II: 168-170, quote 170; Hughes to Houghton, November 14, 1922, FRUS, 1922, II: 181-182,
But this proposal was the absolute limit of commitment the Harding administration could tolerate: “nothing could be done without the voluntary action of the Powers entitled to reparations, and that if they were unwilling to consent to the suggestions that had been made, nothing further could be done about them.” After the French rejected the overture, Hughes washed his hands of them. “The United States feels that it has done all that it now can do to contribute to solution of the situation, the real control of which rests with other nations.” Four days later, on January 10, 1923, France implemented its own plan for the collection of German reparations— it invaded the Ruhr valley.68

THE DAWES PLAN AND LOCARNO ACCORDS. It was following the of the Ruhr occupation that American grand strategy reached the apex of its interwar engagement with Europe. Appalled by the economic and political disorder, American statesmen pressed for European financial and political stabilization under the Dawes Plan and the Locarno Accords. In the short term, the results were impressive. The Dawes plan and Locarno accords re-ordered the European balance of power by undoing the basic terms of Versailles: France could no longer unilaterally sanction Germany for its failure to deliver reparations; Germany was integrated into the European order as a diplomatic equal and agreed to pursue only peaceful change; Britain guaranteed the sanctity of the Western territorial settlement; and private American capital was deployed to stabilize currencies and under-write reconstruction. However, the modest American support that produced these gains was not sufficient to sustain them. The American concern with negative liberty did not permit the kind of engagement to deepen the European peace during prosperity or to save it in depression.69

The Coolidge administration (Harding having died in 1923) engaged with European stabilization only after Europe acceded to terms of American non-entanglement. The Ruhr invasion had caused serious financial distress in France and near starvation in Germany. By the end of 1923, after British prodding, the French were willing to accept Hughes’ original proposal for a committee of financial luminaries to propose a new plan for the payment of German reparations. Although Hughes urged “the formulation of an adequate financial plan” without “the interjection of questions of a political character,” the Dawes approach was supremely political. The State Department picked American industrialists Charles Dawes and Owen Young to direct the plan, decided on an American treasury official to oversee the plan as agent-general, and even instructed these supposedly unofficial representatives that their mandate amounted to “just remember you are Americans.” Most importantly, the plan embodied the preferred American vision for the European balance of power: a rehabilitated Germany and an end to French containment.70

quote 182. For an excellent exposition of the Administration’s “apolitical” theory, see Hughes-Jusserand meeting, December 14, 1922, FRUS, 1922, II: 187-192, esp. 190.

68 Hughes-Wiedfeldt meeting, October 23, 1922, FRUS, 1922, II: 170-171, quote 171; Hughes to Herrick, January 6, 1923, FRUS, 1922, II: 202-203, quote 203.


70 Cohrs, The Unfinished Peace after World War I, p. 131; Costigliola, “The United States and the Reconstruction of Germany in the 1920s,” p. 486. Hughes contempt for the France’s preferred power constellation was clear: “France, of course, had her treaty rights and even if they took a position which involved the ruin of all of Europe they would still have their treaty rights.” But if France wanted American help, she would accede to American terms, which were “broad” and required “unrestricted expert advice with regard to every detail of German receipts and
The genius of the Dawes approach was to superficially promise payment of the extant reparations schedule, but undermine it in practice. The plan instituted a special tax in Germany that would be paid into a reparations account. At the end of each year, the American agent-general, Parker Gilbert, would decide whether the German balance of payments permitted direct transfers to the Allies. It was expected that German foreign exchange would be insufficient for direct payments. The balances would instead be available for the Allied purchase of German goods, the financing of large development projects, or low-interest rate loans within Germany. The process would be jump started with a large loan floated primarily in the American financial market. In short, the Dawes system would use reparations monies to reconstruct the German economy and revive European trade, while demonstrating the infeasibility of the reparations system that had driven Europe into chaos. As Chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York (FRBNY) Benjamin Strong put it, the plan “promises impossible things and sets up alternatives to employ when the impossibility has been demonstrated.”

American representatives coupled these financial measures with political conditions that further re-oriented the European balance of power. At the London Conference of 1924, France was forced to give up her abilities under Versailles to decide upon German default and impose sanctions. The ability to declare or impede default under the Dawes regime now effectively lay with Gilbert and other unofficial American representatives in charge of overseeing the plan. Similarly, Hughes insisted that the result of the conference be something the Germans “would be willing to sign,” agreeing with the British that “if we impose on Germany a signature... by force majeure... the agreement thus obtained will have little value.” The terms of the agreement were still difficult for the Germans—France was allowed to maintain its occupation of the Ruhr for another year and the overall reparations burden remained theoretically the same. But Berlin’s leaders basically understood the political shifts taking place. As Foreign Minister Stresemann argued, “what is now taking place, in this report, is... the initiation of Anglo-American world-economic tendencies against French imperialism.” In effect, in return for a system that would rebuild European economies and produced the prospect of some reparations payments, France was forced to give up its artificial predominance and accept Germany on more equal terms.

Though publically and privately protesting its non-involvement, America judiciously applied financial power to coerce the Europeans. “It is obvious that the plan cannot become operative except with the accord of the United States,” Hughes ominously instructed the


71 Leffler, The Elusive Quest, p. 103. For succinct analysis of the plan’s mechanics see Costigliola, “The United States and the Reconstruction of Germany in the 1920s,” pp. 485-491; Leffler, The Elusive Quest, pp. 90-100. The question of insufficient foreign exchange was an important part of the argument for why reparations were impossible. Popularized by John Maynard Keynes, this “transfer approach” assumed that Germany’s ability to transfer wealth (through foreign exchange) was based on an autonomous balance of trade, independent of attempts to manipulate the terms of trade. The Dawes plan was a diplomatic subterfuge based on politically leveraging this supposed truth. But “transfer” reasoning was faulty, since both the currency market and state intervention can change the terms of trade, making transfers possible. These mechanisms partially explain the failure of the Dawes plan. The transfer approach nonetheless dominated governmental thinking about the reparations problem. See Trachtenberg, Reparation in World Politics: France and European Economic Diplomacy, 1916-1923, pp. 77-84. The Dawes plan also installed controls on several sectors of the German economy that would be the subject of later reparations negotiations.

72 Cohrs, The Unfinished Peace after World War I, pp. 161, 149, 138-139. For thorough accounts of the London diplomacy, see Ibid., Chs. 9-10; Leffler, The Elusive Quest, pp. 100-112.
ambassador to France, “of special importance being the friendly interest of this Government in the proposed loan.” Kellogg, then ambassador to Great Britain, was to strive at the London Conference to ensure that “measures of [French] compulsion which may not flow from the plan and from its spirit may be avoided.” These included the proposed “retention of measures which would amount to economic interference in the occupied [Ruhr] territory” to which Kellogg should reply “that under those conditions the loan could not be floated in the United States.”

Germany also received its share of pressure: Hughes told Berlin that the Dawes plan was “the American policy. If you turn this down, America is through.” Ambassador Houghton intimated that a rejection of the Dawes plan would “render either private or public loans impossible or difficult,” and that “it might be a hundred years” before America “extended her hand to Germany” again. On the other hand, should Germany accept the plan, the initial Dawes floatation would probably draw additional “private loans in considerable amounts.” The meaning of the administration’s diplomacy was blunt: America would abandon Europe to its financial fate if it did not change its political structure. 73

Still, the Coolidge administration’s non-entanglement strategy is most notable for how much it achieved with so little investment. Hughes steadfastly insisted that with regard to the Dawes loans, “the Government of the United States is not in a position to guarantee this financing or to assume any responsibility in regard to it.” The administration had “no right to pledge” guarantees for the loans, “either legally or morally.” Such an action would force the taxpayer to “liquidate” the consequences of the Great War. American investors would have to bear the risk of the plan by their own individual choice, and indeed, when the loans went bad in 1934, it was J.P Morgan that wrote down the loss.

Bankers acknowledged that public support for the loans was “as good as we could get” from the Coolidge administration. Coolidge then pumped the Dawes plan enthusiastically to encourage capital markets, arguing in negative liberal style that “Sound business reasons exist why we should participate in the financing of works of peace in Europe.” Coolidge emphasized that “We have determined to maintain, and can maintain, our own political independence, but our economic independence will be strengthened and increased when the economic stability of Europe is restored.” Diplomat Joseph Grew probably provides the best coda for the America’s Dawes plan diplomacy: “we are going as far as we can in every manner without entering into European entanglements.” American would give neither political commitments nor financial guarantees. 74

American economic diplomacy was buttressed with political support for the Locarno accords, although American non-entanglement was made even more explicit in matters of

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73 Hughes to Logan; June 14, 1924, FRUS, 1924, II: 18-22, quote 22; Hughes to Kellogg, June 27, 1924, FRUS, 1924, II: 32-35, quotes 34, 34, 35; Cohrs, The Unfinished Peace after World War I, p. 172; Costigliola, “The United States and the Reconstruction of Germany in the 1920s,” p. 492. American diplomats also made explicit threats to the French and German opposition parties that, if they didn’t support the Dawes plan, a financial terror was in the offing. Leffler notes that “Hughes warned [former prime minister] Poincare that if Herriot were toppled on the issue of the Dawes plan, American interest in European problems would end.” Moreover, France was able to get the loans to support its currency entirely at American sufferance. As Houghton concluded, “England and America have the franc in their control and can probably do with it what they want.” Quotes in Leffler, The Elusive Quest, p. 108; Costigliola, “The United States and the Reconstruction of Germany in the 1920s,” p. 490.

security. The Locarno treaties have been justly referred to as “the political expression of the Dawes plan.” They embodied the European attempt to reach a stable territorial settlement that would remove the political uncertainty and fear of war inhibiting financial investment. The basic premises of Locarno were that Germany would recognize the sanctity of its Western borders and renounce the use of force for changing its borders in the East. Britain and Italy would then guarantee the western part of the pact, promising to resist any aggressor, including any French attempt to unilaterally sanction Germany over reparations. Germany would enter the League of Nations the following year, on the understanding that it would become a member of the League’s council, and France would withdraw from the first of its three occupation zones in the Rhineland. The pact was in part an attempt to signal to politicians and financial elites alike that Europe was filled with highly resolved status-quo powers, more interested in trade than war.\textsuperscript{75}

American diplomats provided a critical measure of support for negotiations once they got off the ground. In May 1925, Houghton delivered a speech published under the title “America’s peace ultimatum to Europe.” He stressed that American investors were contributing their savings to Europe in order to “rebuild markets” where there could be a “permanent peace.” They were not “interested in speculative advances.” Coolidge and Kellogg sent word through the diplomatic corps that “Americans would not lend their money unless they thought peace firmly established and the safety of their investments thus ensured.” Benjamin Strong decamped to Berlin from the FRBNY to tell politicians that there would be no central bank cooperation until a security pact was signed, and that breakdown in the talks “sent a chill over the financial community” on Wall Street. Once again, American financial pressure delivered. As one American diplomat in France put it: “The fact that America is the creditor nation and is trusted in all Europe even where she is despised, is a tremendous factor in our favor and also gives us a potential power to straighten out affairs over here.”\textsuperscript{76}

As TLFP predicts, though, the Coolidge administration was adamantly against any actual American participation in European security affairs. Washington categorically rejected two pre-Locarno measures, the Treaty of Mutual Assistance and the Geneva Protocol, which were designed to turn the League of Nations into an effective collective security organization. Kellogg suspected that these were the beginnings of a “new holy alliance” and reiterated that America was “not bound by any obligations to maintain the political integrity and independence of all the turbulent nations of Europe.” Hughes emphasized that any attempt to “provide guarantees of mutual assistance and to establish the competency of the Council of the League of Nations” was inconsistent with “the constitutional organization of this Government.” Even after the more acceptable Locarno ideas began to gain steam, Americans were adamant that they would not become the “guardian of European peace” by acting as the pact’s “trustee.” America simply had “nothing to offer as an inducement” in the security field. Houghton pithily summarized the American strategy of non-entanglement: security “was a work Europe must do for itself.”\textsuperscript{77}


\textsuperscript{76} Costigliola, “The United States and the Reconstruction of Germany in the 1920s,” pp. 497-498; Cohrs, \textit{The Unfinished Peace after World War I}, p. 248; Leffler, \textit{The Elusive Quest}, p. 100.

\textsuperscript{77} Cohrs, \textit{The Unfinished Peace after World War I}, p. 203; Hughes to Drummond, June 24, 1924, FRUS, 1924, I: 80-83, quotes 82; Cohrs, \textit{The Unfinished Peace after World War I}, pp. 222-223; Costigliola, “The United States and
In the final analysis, America’s successful financial engagement on behalf of the Dawes plan and Locarno accords illustrates its non-entanglement policy and the negative liberal views that drove it. “How much more influence will we have if we maintain our freedom of action,” Kellogg rhetorically asked, positing that America could not “have accomplished so much in the Dawes Plan settlement if we had been parties to the League, the sanctions, and tied up in European politics.” Hoover argued that American diplomacy “necessarily leaves to private enterprise many things which other nations” left to the state, which accounted for American success. European politics simply required “much more concentrated power and responsibility than we have ever been willing to grant to our Government.” The British foreign minister Austen Chamberlin plainly understood the bottom line about Europe’s balance of power: “With America withdrawn, or taking part only where her interests are directly concerned in the collection of money, Great Britain is the only possible influence for peace and stabilization.”

ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY, 1926-1932. With a modicum of political and economic stability returned to Europe, Republican diplomacy fell back on its core negative liberal concern: the collection of war debts. But these priorities now worked to impede rather than advance European political progress. Unfortunately, the Dawes plan had worked too well. The stabilization of Europe had drawn a flood of capital into Germany. Rather than demonstrating the impossibility of reparations, easy money allowed the Weimar government to engage in fiscal profligacy while still making the small initial reparations payments stipulated by the Dawes settlement. The negative liberal insistence on protecting the American taxpayer impeded Europe’s choice between reparations payments and a strong Germany. British and French policymakers were incentivized to avoid making a final settlement with Germany in the hopes of getting a better deal from the Americans on war debts. And when they did make attempts to trade political concessions for German economic cooperation, American policy-makers neutered any plan that appeared to impinge on the full collection of already negotiated payment schedules. When prosperity was replaced with depression, the minimal American engagement on offer was not enough to save the system from collapse.

American diplomats redoubled their efforts to negotiate debt settlements after the Dawes plan went into operation. The Coolidge administration relied on its informal influence to close the American money market to any country that had not negotiated a debt settlement. This quickly brought most of Europe to terms acceptably solicitous of negative liberal rights. The WDC argued agreements struck “a true balance...between the duty of the debt commission to the American taxpayer and fairness to those nations to which was extended aid during and after the war.” Settlements were amortized over the now standard sixty-two year period, most with small initial payments and reductions of interest even greater than those the British had received. As the administration liked to stress, the present value of most agreements fell below fifty percent of the nominal value of the debt and often amounted to “forgiving” all loans made before the armistice. Still, American diplomacy featured a basic intransigence that prevented more generosity. Delaying the agreements meant that “we have taken from our taxpayers eight
hundred million dollars” that should have been paid by others. Or as Coolidge bluntly put it in response to French protests, “they hired the money, didn’t they?”

American non-entanglement doctrine grated most seriously on France and Britain, who still hoped to reduce or eliminate their debt in a final reparations settlement. Even after France reluctantly negotiated an agreement with the WDC and began making initial payments, French leaders would not ratify the accord, fearing in part that it would lock them into a position they hoped to liquidate. But a swap of war debt cancellation for reparations cancellation was totally unacceptable to Republican policy-makers. Hoover harbored “a personal resentment” against France for failing to ratify its debt settlement, and argued that “further cancellation” was both “inequitable and impolitic.” The Coolidge administration’s negative liberal prejudices saw war debts as “loans from individual American citizens rather than contributions from the Treasury of the United States.” They only took the form of inter-governmental debts because a generous America had allowed Europeans “to borrow on the credit of the United States rather than their own.” The burden of these debts “must be borne either by foreign taxpayers or by our own” and therefore further cancellation was “to do an injustice to our own taxpayers.” They could be no link between war debts and reparations, which would “transfer the burden of reparation payments from the shoulders of the German taxpayer to those of the American taxpayer.”

The American desire to collect its debts and remain politically aloof also led it to quash several potentially productive attempts to improve European economics and security. Desperate to reconstruct their finances and rebuild their country, French statesmen offered to trade political concessions for German financial assistance. The Briand government’s 1926 Thoiry initiative proposed an early French evacuation from the Rhineland, an accelerated schedule for returning the Saar, and the prospect of a German “buy-back” of the Eupen-Malmedy region given to Belgium at Versailles. In return for these much-desired territorial adjustments, Germany would agree to commercialize a sizeable chunk of railroad bonds tied up in the Dawes regime and give the proceeds to France. But American policy-makers refused to permit the commercialization of the railway debt in the New York money market, despite the willingness of a major Wall Street firm to underwrite the bond issue. The Coolidge administration understood that Thoiry had the makings of a final European settlement, as it disassembled the major remaining irritants of Versailles in Western Europe and revised the Dawes regime. But America wanted such a settlement to occur on its own terms: after French ratification of the war debt agreement and at a time of its own choosing.

When the time did come to negotiate a final settlement, during the Young Plan process of 1928-29, the American non-entanglement strategy was even more entrenched. The Young Plan originally arose because the American reparations agent, Parker Gilbert, believed that the capital influx into Germany under the Dawes regime had only encouraged German fiscal irresponsibility. He proposed a final settlement that would fix German obligations for good, at

80 Rhodes, United States Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period, 1918-1941, pp. 65-68, first and third quotes 68, 65; Kellogg to Herrick, December 30, 1924, FRUS, 1925, I: 134-137, second quote 135. On the generosity of American terms see also Kellogg to Herrick, April 29 and July 16, 1926; Kellogg to Consular Offices, August 28, 1926; all in FRUS, 1926, II: 92, 99-100, 102-106. On negotiating the later debt agreements, good accounts include Costigliola, Awkward Dominion, pp. 131-139; Leffler, The Elusive Quest, pp. 127-142, 178-182.
82 On Thoiry, see Cohrs, The Unfinished Peace after World War I, Ch. 22; Leffler, The Elusive Quest, pp. 150-154; Jacobson, Locarno Diplomacy, pp. 84-91.
reduced rates, and remove all the Dawes controls on the German economy in an effort to force fiscal rectitude onto the Weimar government. Importantly, the plan would be linked to a general reduction in war debts across creditors. As the plan was negotiated, French and German moderates tied it to parallel negotiations on an early French withdrawal from the Rhineland. Unsurprisingly, this approach was rejected by the Coolidge and Hoover administrations. Instead, the Republicans forced Gilbert to back an alternate plan promising close to the full annuities envisioned under the Dawes scheme, in return for French ratification of the debt agreement.83

Indeed, the United States would only allow private businessmen to be appointed to the Young committee on the condition that “war debts were to be entirely excluded and not brought up as a subject for discussion.” Gilbert warned the reluctant British and French that the “mere existence” of US “investments” in Europe would “not suffice to keep alive any beneficent interest in European affairs.” Their “loss” in the event of a crisis “would only affect a couple of hundred thousand bond-holders.” The “broad mass” of Americans was more interested in “the regular collection” of war debts.

If the Allies wanted to ease their fiscal situations, the best move was to negotiate an agreement now that could cover their obligations to America at the economic expense of the Germans. This result is precisely what happened. American diplomats, reversing their role during the Dawes negotiations, stayed completely aloof from the Young negotiations, including ignoring negotiations for the essential quid pro quo of a French Rhineland withdrawal. The Hoover administration also distanced America from the Bank of International Settlements, the reparations clearing mechanism under the Young Plan, ensuring it would never become the international financial system stabilizer some had hoped it would be. In every respect, American diplomacy was detached and indifferent to the European settlement, once debt reduction had been taken off the table.84

American non-entanglement was even more evident in security affairs. The Coolidge and Hoover administrations had zero interest in buttressing the Locarno process that American diplomacy had helped create. Kellogg stressed that America would make no “regional guarantees” and “must decline to become involved in such questions as those relating to the application of European security pacts.” Similarly, American diplomats re-cast France’s bid to gain tacit support for her European alliance system into the harmless, and laughable, Kellogg-Briand pact to outlaw war. The Coolidge administration rejected the French offer to bilaterally renounce war as “a kind of perpetual alliance between the United States and France, which would seriously disturb the other great powers” and allow France to “take what action she liked in Europe.”

But, considering its domestic attractiveness to the peace movement, a multilateral pact praising peace but promising nothing had a certain appeal. Aggression would have to be left undefined by the Pact, as Kellogg agreed with British realists that such specifics would be only “a trap for the innocent and a signpost for the guilty.” And naturally, there would be no repercussions for violators of the agreement. Stripped of any diplomatic meaning, the pact could improve America’s European image “without involving the United States affirmatively in purely

83 On the Young Plan negotiations, see Costigliola, Awkward Dominion, pp. 205-217; Kent, The Spoils of War, Ch. 8. For reference to Gilbert’s original proposals, subsequent correction by American leaders, and the resulting Franco-American deal, see Kent, The Spoils of War, pp. 273-286; Cohrs, The Unfinished Peace after World War I, pp. 482-485, 511-513, 521-530.
European problems” or incurring the costs “latent in the doctrine of military sanctions.” The negative liberal distaste for alliances could only be overcome by neutering them.85

The dénouement of Republican non-entanglement strategy was Hoover’s international response to the Great Depression. As the European banking system collapsed in 1930-31, Hoover was faced with a choice between sustained political and financial intervention to save the European system or a complete retreat. At first, he delayed the choice. If Germany could survive another three or four months, administration officials thought, “the question of [war debt] revision [might] be postponed three or four years” and the need to “impose correspondingly heavier taxes on Americans” avoided. But in the summer of 1931, Hoover finally took several measures that he hoped would arrest the financial collapse of Europe: private financial coordination to forestall the flight of extant loans; Federal Reserve credits to save the German central bank; and most importantly, a proposal for a one year moratorium on all inter-governmental debts.86

However, even these substantial departures from previous American policy were made half-heartedly. Although advised that the debt moratorium should be for two years and be preceded by consultation with Europe, Hoover was moved to brevity of term and a unilateral announcement by his desire to protect the taxpayer. He believed that Germany would soon suspend its reparations payments, which would lead to international financial negotiations damaging “to the interests of our own people, for at such a conference we should stand alone.” Better to stave off European demands for permanent debt cancellation “by the announcement before the situation arises of an American policy consistent with that followed in the past.”87

For the same reason, the Hoover administration refused to participate in the Lausanne Conference of 1932 where inter-governmental debts were de facto abolished. Secretary of State Henry Stimson declared publically American participation “impossible and undesirable,” while the administration privately sought to influence the results so that “the integrity of international agreements [might] be maintained and that… we [did not need to] forego all expectations of substantial payments in the future.” The conference adjourned with a deal effectively cancelling reparations and a “gentlemen’s agreement” to get corresponding concessions from the United States. Such concessions were not forthcoming and default was only a matter of time. Hoover’s devotion to protecting the freedom of American taxpayers led to the decisive disentanglement of American and European affairs—though not in the manner he had imagined.88

In sum, America was willing to make modest commitments on behalf of its second order goals when large benefits could be reaped at low costs. When the international system presented American statesmen with such an opportunity after the Ruhr disaster, they seized it. But when systemic pressures indicated that economic and ideological goals in Europe were outrunning American political and diplomatic means, the New Era negative liberals adjusted their goals

85 Kellogg to Gibson, April 23, 1926, FRUS, 1926, I: 80-89, second quote 82; Cohrs, The Unfinished Peace after World War I, remaining quotes 369, 450, 469, 451. For brief accounts of the Kellogg-Briand Pact which focus on America’s non-entanglement, see Leffler, The Elusive Quest, pp. 159-165; Costigliola, Awkward Dominion, pp. 190-192.
86 Kent, The Spoils of War, p. 335. Excellent accounts of Hoover’s scramble to stabilize Europe without large costs to America are Leffler, The Elusive Quest, Chs. 7-8; Costigliola, Awkward Dominion, Ch. 8. Hoover’s disarmament proposals, addressed below, were intimately tied up with his financial initiatives.
87 Kent, The Spoils of War, p. 345.
88 Ibid., pp. 363, 365.
rather than absorb additional costs. American policy under Hoover ended as a pure form of non-entanglement.

MILITARY POLICY

American military policy in the 1920s emphasized deterrence in the Western hemisphere and non-interference abroad. Three aspects of that policy are considered here. I begin by depicting the general American military posture on land and at sea, which featured large reductions to the forces envisioned by the Wilson administration. The following subsection discusses the Harding administration’s withdrawal from the occupation of Germany. I finish with an investigation of American disarmament policy.

GENERAL MILITARY POSTURE. American military posture in the 1920s epitomized a strategy of non-entanglement. The Army faced drastic reductions that in many respects left it dangerously unequipped for its responsibilities. Fortunately, American strategists made the Army’s primary responsibility defending the American homeland against attack, an unlikely scenario. Naval forces were considerably larger and more advanced than their land counterparts, in part due to negative liberal preferences, and in part due to the natural outcome of politics in a geographically isolated power. The Navy pursued a much more aggressive and demanding set of tasks than the Army, focusing its war plans on an offensive against Japan in the Western Pacific. But even these greater resources and a more expansive doctrine existed within a context of negative liberal budgetary economies and arms limitation.

The Republican vision for the Army was radically different from the Wilsonian approach. The Wilson administration had left military policy in limbo. Having settled for an Army of 280,000 and a revamped reserve system in order to focus on the 1920 campaign, Wilson refused to yield to congressional pressure for further defense economies, leaving office in a flurry of vetoes and veto-overrides. Questions about the future of the Army remained until President-elect Harding sent word to Congress that the Army should be reduced “to 175,000 at the earliest possible time, and that a little later another reduction, bringing it down to 150,000 should be made.” In fact, Harding oversaw an even more drastic reduction, with authorized end strength for most of the 1920s settling to 118,750 enlisted men and actual average forces sizes of around 110,000.89

These cost cutting priorities left the ground forces in a dilapidated state. Appropriations during the mid-1920s averaged around $260 million a year, perhaps one-quarter of what a high-end Wilsonian force with Universal Military Training would have cost. Cuts were made across the board; the physical plant of the Army ran down; purchases of materiel were postponed; and only low quality recruits could be attracted before the Depression. Such new money as there was went to the Air Corps, though usually at the expense of the regular forces. As Coolidge contended, “If more men are to be taken into the air service, why then... more men could be dispensed with in some other branch of the service.” New expenses must be met “by a reduction of expenditures in some other direction, especially so on account of the present condition of the...”

Treasury." Economics took their toll: by the end of the decade, the emergency field Army that could be assembled on short notice numbered only 54,000 men, and the reserve system had fallen apart. The American Army of the 1920s was not a force that could do very much. On the other hand, negative liberal statesmen did not ask it to do very much. Military planners after the war understood that planning for continued "American support in [French] European policies... might involve us in an embarrassing situation." Instead, the Army focused on continental defense, planning potential wars of maximum national effort premised on defense from foreign invasion and potentially the protection of the Western hemisphere. Small roles were given to ground forces in the Navy's more offensive minded plans for the Western Pacific, but these were strongly opposed by Army officials as the decade wore on—the Army recognized America's precarious position in the Pacific, and generally thought the defense of American possessions there a major over-extension. Army planners explicitly foreswore the possibility of another intervention in Europe, and noted in one report that "We have no plans for the invasion of any of these [great power] countries." Army doctrine was defensively oriented, envisioned very limited circumstances for the use of force, and was averse to commitments overseas.

Negative liberal thinking permeated the construction of this military posture. Coolidge and others dismissed military complaints as the typical product of bureaucratic self-interest: "It is one of the characteristics of reports that purport to emanate from [the General Staff] that they always represent the Army as just on the point of dissolution... I suppose as long as we continue to spend $300,000,000 that the General Staff would be able to provide the nation with a fair degree of defense." And, unsurprisingly, interwar Republicans were quick to look to the Army for taxpayer relief. Early in his term, Hoover ordered the creation of a commission "to reconsider the whole of our army program" in search of potential savings, since "the hope of a tax reduction lies very largely in the ability to economize military expenditure and still maintain an adequate defense." His personal "pocket budget," created to explain government spending to the "man on the street," emphasized the point by arguing that seventy-two cents of every tax dollar "was devoted to past wars and those that may occur in the future." Ground forces looked like dangerous drains on individual resources.

American leaders viewed the Navy somewhat differently. Despite a strong desire to cut defense spending, the Naval Act of 1916—Wilson's "Navy Second to None"—remained official government policy before the Washington Naval Conference of 1922. Harding was of two minds about the Navy, alternating between rhetorical support for unilateral disarmament and pushing for a "Big Navy" as a bargaining chip in arms limitation talks. Eventually, the difference was split. Naval appropriations in the 1920s fluctuated around $400 million, or almost twice what was generally spent on the Army. Thirty-one warships were authorized during interwar Republican administrations, and the United States matched its Pacific rival Japan.

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in building larger classes of ships. Even though the negative liberal search for budgetary savings put the brakes on much naval spending, the fleet was modernized from coal to oil powered over the course of the decade, and America was at the forefront of carrier aviation. Disarmament efforts did not prevent the creation of a Navy that was, literally, second to none—America maintained parity with the British and over-all superiority against the Japanese.\(^9^3\)

But the tasks envisioned for this force outstripped its capabilities. The Navy’s major concern was protecting American possessions in the Pacific from Japan. Naval doctrine was embodied by War Plan ORANGE, preparations to fight a “short, spasmodic, decisive encounter” with the Imperial Japanese Navy in the Western Pacific. The plan emphasized Mahanian concepts: it featured a fighting advance across the Pacific Ocean to relieve the thinly garrisoned Philippine Islands, the establishment of naval bases capable of supporting a sustained offensive, and the subsequent engagement of the Imperial Navy in a Jutland style encounter of capital ships. Given the distances involved and the attrition expected during the transoceanic advance, the U.S. Navy would have almost certainly found the Philippines occupied and faced a substantially larger force in any fleet action. Lengthy operations would have been difficult, since the Philippines would be enemy occupied and the Washington Treaty had ruled out the fortification of further bases in the Pacific. Still, the offensive bias of military organizations meant the ORANGE scenario was the primary device by which the Navy judged procurement and doctrine.\(^9^4\)

Civilian decision-makers largely ignored the Navy’s plans. Hoover explicitly intended to abandon American interests in the Pacific if it came to a fight, and most statesmen viewed the Navy as part of hemispheric defense and the protection of trade. So while naval forces performed useful functions that let America keep a free hand internationally, they did not need to be so large as to bust the budget. Interwar naval policy is best understood in this context. The United States had only begun to lay down keels for ten of its thirty-one warships by Hoover’s presidency and no further ships were authorized after that point. America failed to build up to its mandates under the Washington and London treaties, and was completely out-built by the other major naval powers in the destroyers, submarines, and smaller vessels uncovered by the treaties. As the final sub-section on disarmament shows, negative liberal budgetary concerns had much to do with this outcome.\(^9^5\)

**THE RHINELAND OCCUPATION.** The first step in pursuing a grand strategy of non-entanglement was to disentangle America from the residue of commitments left behind by the Wilson administration. Chief among these was the Army’s division strength tripwire force stationed in Coblenz, Germany. When asked about American troops in the Rhineland on the campaign trail, Harding’s blunt reply was that “they haven’t any business there, and just as soon as they have a formal peace we can be sure they will be coming home, as they ought to come.” His policy once in office was somewhat more complex. Harding appreciated that American forces performed a stabilizing function and that removing them would exacerbate the difficulties


of European politics while impeding other American goals. In this respect, systemic pressures slowed the American withdraw. Even so, Harding believed the leverage American troops provided was not worth the costs and risks associated with the turmoil of the Rhineland. Within a year of taking office, American strength had been reduced to a skeleton force of fewer than 2,000 men, and the troops were completely withdrawn in January 1923, after the French occupation of the Ruhr. 96

Several factors inhibited an immediate removal of the American ground force commitment to Europe. The basic issue was the Harding administration’s desire to shape a grand strategy that would limit American liability without eliminating all hope of obtaining the administration’s preferred power arrangement in Europe. As Hughes put it, the main error of the Versailles treaty was that it “departed from the original idea of the League of Nations by making it not only an instrument for conference and conciliation, with a view to preserving the peace of the world, but also by charging it with certain definite duties in connection with the enforcement of the terms of the Treaty.” As long as American engagement was limited to “conference and conciliation” rather than “enforcement,” Republican leaders thought it might be profitable for the Old and New World alike. In this respect, a politically neutral deployment in Europe could be temporarily useful. Speaking in part of the occupation, Harding boasted in the summer of 1921 that “there would be a bad mess all the time in Europe if it were not for the mollifying and harmonizing influences which are wielded by the spokesmen for this Republic.” 97

Moreover, the benefits of a quick withdrawal were impeded by other negative liberal concerns. With the rejection of the Versailles Treaty, certain American rights negotiated by Wilson were open to question, including the important priority of recouping taxpayer outlays for the occupation. The Harding administration’s method for obtaining repayment was the Treaty of Berlin, which made peace with Germany and secured American privileges under Versailles without corresponding responsibilities. But for both domestic and international reasons, ending the occupation was likely to remove American leverage in passing the treaty and negotiating repayment. As Hughes later put it, America was being “told to whistle for our money.” He argued that “In view of the unsettled question as to the payment of our Army costs, it seems to me prudent that we should do nothing which might have the effect of postponing an early and satisfactory adjustment.” Similarly, the administration desired French cooperation in reducing armaments at the ongoing Washington conference, and the French desired American forces to remain in Germany. These considerations meant a temporarily extended troop occupation: “a little temporizing in this matter might give us an opportunity which we could turn to our advantage.” 98

97 Hughes-Viviani meeting, March 30, 1921, FRUS, 1921, I: 964-967, quote 966; Nelson, *Victors Divided*, p. 189.
Ultimately, though, the administration desired to eliminate the occupation and with it vestiges of Wilsonian primacy. The occupation was reduced from 15,000 men to less than 6,000 in the fall of 1921 and to 2,000 in February 1922. In the interim, the administration ordered American forces not to inhibit Allied military action against the Germans in various reparations crises, but otherwise to remain aloof. Following the conclusion of the Washington Naval Conference, Harding decided in March to end the occupation completely, but was persuaded by Hughes to leave a 1,000 man contingent as bargaining leverage over occupation costs.

Even this small outpost worried Harding. “I think perhaps we had the right hunch when the original order was made to withdraw,” he wrote, “[since] it is very clear that their presence might involve us [in violence],... we are watching very closely and are prepared to withdraw on very short notice.” He agreed with the statement of an advisor that “no direct national interest is served [by the occupation] aside from our deep concern in the recovery and re-establishment of Europe.” By September of 1922 he was pressing “to arrange to withdraw... as soon as the Secretary of State... can pave the way for doing so without our action being given unusual significance.” After the French, defying an American ultimatum, occupied the Ruhr, the administration followed through on its threats and brought the remaining troops home. Primacy had been replaced by non-entanglement. 99

DISARMAMENT. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of American interwar military policy was its aggressive and sustained pursuit of great power disarmament. Each Republican administration launched a naval conference aimed at reducing the number of fighting ships: the 1921-22 Washington Conference, the Geneva Conference of 1927, and the 1930 London Conference. By the end of the Hoover administration, American policy-makers were also pushing radical proposals for land disarmament. Disarmament policy had multiple roots, varied degrees of success, and its retrospective merits are debatable. Nevertheless, it reflected the American grand strategy of non-entanglement, stressing America’s distaste in playing power politics. Moreover, as TLFP predicts, disarmament policy was motivated in large part by the negative liberal views of the interwar Republicans. The desire to reduce burdens on the taxpayer drove arms control efforts, while the negative liberal emphasis on naval forces and distaste for alliances shaped the character of disarmament initiatives.

American disarmament policy had two major successes. The first and most impressive was the 1921-22 Washington Conference, which blunted major naval building programs in the United States and Europe. The Washington Conference Treaties limited the number and total tonnage of all capital ships over 10,000 tons, limited the size and armament of all such ships, and established a 5:5:3:1.67:1.67 ratio of relative strength between the United States, Britain, Japan, France, and Italy, respectively. It also scrapped millions of tons of existing ships and planned construction, while instituting a ten-year building holiday in all categories controlled by the treaty. Second, the 1930 London Conference largely extended the strength ratios and numerical limits to fighting ships less than 10,000 tons (often imprecisely referred to as cruisers), though it admitted substantial variation in relative strength across different classes of such ships. It also

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reduced the number of battleships further and extended the capital ship building holiday until 1936.100

Two American disarmament efforts went for naught. The Coolidge administration’s 1927 attempt to limit cruisers at Geneva was boycotted by the French and the Italians. Agreement by the major naval powers then foundered on the unwillingness of the British and American navies to concede parity in the types of ship that would be most useful to them in the event of a blockade. Similarly, Hoover’s ambitious 1932 attempt to reduce land armaments and limit offensive weapon types petered out as the Great Depression gave states other priorities and the rise of Hitler made disarmament on land impossible.101

Republican disarmament policy had multiple motivations. Naval arms limitation impinged most directly on international politics in the Pacific Ocean, and it is no accident that the Washington Conference’s Five-power treaty establishing capital ship ratios was accompanied by treaties that guaranteed the “Open Door” in China and broke up the Anglo-Japanese alliance. It is also true that domestic politics in Anglophone countries played an important role in motivating negotiations. In the United States, disarmament was popular across the political spectrum. The Harding administration pursued the Washington Naval Conference when it did in part to steal a march on Senator William Borah, an interparty rival who championed disarmament.102

Even so, disarmament played an important part in European politics did so in consonance with the expectations of TLFP. Disarmament embodied the mechanism of non-interference characteristic of a non-entanglement grand strategy. As importantly, the negative liberal ideals held by the interwar Republicans propelled and shaped disarmament initiatives. American statesmen pursued disarmament largely because they abhorred the costs that foreign policy imposed on the individual taxpayer. Furthermore, those costs were interpreted in a way more favorable to naval spending than ground forces, while particular initiatives were crafted with a view to avoiding potential political commitments.

Negative liberal rationales were of primary importance in making Republican disarmament policy. Hughes exemplified the individualism driving American initiatives in his invitation to the Washington Conference:

Productive labor is staggering under an economic burden too heavy to be borne unless the present vast public expenditures are greatly reduced. It is idle to look for stability, or the assurance of social justice, or the security of peace, while wasteful and unproductive outlays deprive effort of its just reward and defeat the reasonable expectation of progress. The enormous disbursements in the rivalries of armaments manifestly constitute the greater part of the encumbrance upon enterprise and national prosperity; and

100 This account relies on Kaufman, Arms Control During the Pre-Nuclear Era, pp. 43-72, 113-145; Richard Fanning, Peace and Disarmament: Naval Rivalry and Arms Control, 1922-1933 (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), pp. 3-11, 106-132. The 1930 London agreement adjusted the ratio to 10:7 in favor of the Japanese. The technical details of all the agreements are more complex than there is room to detail here. Each treaty contained exceptions and side-deals necessary to satisfy the various navies involved.
101 Christopher Hall, Britain, America, and Arms Control, 1921-37 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), Ch. 2; Leffler, The Elusive Quest, pp. 159-162, 277-288. The 1927 conference ran aground on the differences between Britain and the United States over light and heavy cruisers. The former, favored by Britain, were useful for imposing blockades; the latter, favored by the United States, were useful for protecting commerce from blockades. See Fanning, Peace and Disarmament, pp. 51-54.
102 Hall, Britain, America, and Arms Control, 1921-37, pp. 24-30; Costigliola, Awkward Dominion, pp. 80-87; Kaufman, Arms Control During the Pre-Nuclear Era, pp. 24-30.
avoidable or extravagant expense of this nature is not only without economic justification but is a constant menace to the peace of the world rather than an assurance of its preservation.

Hoover concurred in such analysis, arguing during his presidency that “The American people should understand that current expenditure on strictly military activities of the Army and Navy constitutes the largest military budget of any nation in the world today, and at a time when there is less real danger of extensive disturbance to the peace than at any time in more than half a century.”

Negotiating arms limitation had two advantages from the perspective of negative liberty. Not only could the burden on the American taxpayer be reduced directly through disarmament, agreements would allow European resources to be directed at paying off war debts. As Coolidge remarked in an off-the-record session with journalists, “They have staggering expenses abroad. I don’t like to refer to it too often—they owe us money over there. I should very much prefer that they take their money and pay us, than on any account of any action we took over here feel that they should take their money and build battleships.” In the same vein, Hoover felt that the 1930 naval agreement was a $2.5 billion “stimulus to world prosperity.” He prefaced his 1932 proposals by noting that “The world is spending $5,000,000,000 a year on armament, a large part of which is unnecessary for the maintenance of internal order.” If an agreement to reduce armament on land could be reached, “the governmental debt of the world could be discharged in 20 years from these savings alone.” Reduced costs would end up in the pocket of the American taxpayer from multiple sources.

Negative liberal emphasis on cutting costs molded the character of the American negotiating position as well as providing its impetus. The Coolidge administration opposed an agreement based on extending the service life of existing vessels since it “merely puts off expenditures and in the long run does not reduce” them. Americans were also conscious of the increased costs born by their own military establishment vis-à-vis its international competitors. “While the reduction of expenditures for national defense purposes is highly desirable,” absolute levels of expenditures could not be the basis for comparison, since America was likely to spend more money on any given capability. Costs could only be cut by focusing on the ships themselves. For similar reasons, “The United States has no more than an academic interest” in land disarmament, which was inevitably caught up in the problem of European conscription. Despite its relatively pathetic comparative strength, the American Army was still quite expensive because it was raised entirely through the market mechanism. While proposals “placing all peace time military forces on a voluntary basis” should be encouraged, Kellogg and others thought it unlikely that America could usefully participate in ground force negotiations.

In part, the emphasis on naval reduction reflected the broader negative liberal priority for favoring standoff forces. As noted above, the Republican approach to land forces was relatively simple: cut them to the bone. The Navy was a different matter. Naval forces and their newly developing air wings could be useful for numerous tasks that didn’t tie America down: coastal defense, protecting trade routes and Pacific possessions, and defending the Panama Canal.

105 State Department memorandum, April 29, 1926, FRUS, 1926, 1: 89-100, first and third quotes 93, 90; Kellogg to Houghton, February 9, 1926, FRUS, 1926, 1: 50-56, second quote 50.
among others. "To meet these responsibilities we need a very substantial sea armament," Coolidge argued to Congress. America had "put away the Old World policy of competitive armaments," but it could "never be relieved of the responsibility of adequate national defense." So when the 1927 Geneva conference failed, the Coolidge administration funded a substantial cruiser building program. As he put it, the results of the conference "were mostly of a negative character. We know now that no agreement can be reached which will be inconsistent with a considerable building program on our part." American leaders felt it regrettable that further economies could not be achieved, but they were unwilling to simply rely on the good will of others in naval affairs.106

Finally, American disarmament policy was shaped by the negative liberal aversion to political commitments. In general, American leaders saw their contribution to European security through arms control as important but limited. "It would be useless to have any thought over there that there must be a constant reliance on us," Coolidge believed, since "we couldn’t help people very much until they showed a disposition to help themselves." One of the main causes of the American disinterest in land disarmament was the perception that such talks would lead to requests for security guarantees, which were out of the question. As such, interwar Republicans saw land disarmament as "peculiarly European in its practical aspects" making detachment from the process "in accordance with our policy of not intervening" in the politics of the Old World. Along the same lines, the American negotiating position was always based on voluntary compliance. Kellogg stressed that "the United States will not be a party to any sanctions of any kind for the enforcement of a treaty... nor will it agree that such treaties to which it may be a party shall come under the supervision of any international body." Arms control couldn’t be a policy that required actual commitments: international treaties "so far as we are concerned, must depend upon the good faith of nations."107

SUMMARY OF AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY, 1921-1932

The United States pursued a grand strategy of non-entanglement during the New Era, fulfilling the expectations of TLFP. Both the content of American strategy and evidence from the process of its formation verify the theory. Although possessed of a clear vision for their ideal balance of power in Europe, American leaders were in fact willing to tolerate several potential power constellations in exchange for limited liabilities overseas. This detached posture was driven by a high cost-sensitivity, stemming from an ideological desire to lower resource extraction by the American state and minimize its effect on the private economy. As TLFP predicts, the need to avoid costs expressed itself in three ways: few threats were perceived; alliances and diplomatic commitments of all kinds were avoided; and military expenditures were reduced while favoring the Navy over the Army. The negative liberals who controlled the politics of the New Era evaluated a range of policy options but came to a single conclusion—greater commitments in Europe threatened liberty at home.

106 Coolidge, Message of the president of the United States to Congress, December 6, 1927, FRUS, 1927, I: v-xxv, quotes vii, viii. On the American cruiser building program before and after the conference, see Kaufman, Arms Control During the Pre-Nuclear Era, pp. 87-91; Hall, Britain, America, and Arms Control, 1921-37, pp. 38-40, 54-58.
107 Coolidge meeting with the press, October 20, 1925, in Quint and Ferrell, The Talkative President, p. 208; Kellogg to Gibson, April 23, 1926, FRUS, 1926, I: 80-89, quote 84; Kellogg to Houghton, February 9, 1926, FRUS, 1926, I: 50-56, quote 54.
I would draw attention to three particularly compelling pieces of evidence. First, American diplomats were well aware of the power political stakes in Europe. They saw, and detested, the possibility of France breaking up Germany or otherwise maintaining an artificial hegemony on the continent. Statesmen later anticipated the potential resurgence of German power and a corresponding aggressive revisionism in German foreign policy. They also kept a close watch on the growing ideological turmoil of European politics. Yet America was rarely moved to make a commitment forestalling these disfavored outcomes. American leaders felt secure in their hemispheric fortress and were not inclined to pay the costs of managing European politics—even if it meant their vision of European prosperity and peace had to be sacrificed.

Second, American statesmen had an ideological fixation with reducing government resource extraction and its impact on the private economy: they insisted on large tax cuts, an aggressive policy of paying down the national debt, and a monetary regime of low inflation. These goals had implications for American strategy towards Europe, since they implied that European war debts to America were sacrosanct. American diplomats repeatedly ignored opportunities to cut the Gordian knot of reparations and inter-governmental debts, and in several cases actively quashed attempts at political stabilization that might have threatened European payments. The American support for the Dawes Plan and Locarno Accords was timed to maximize American leverage, imposed no costs on the treasury, and compelled the banking community to bear risk instead of the taxpayer. These negative liberal priorities not only prevented American alliances, but also worked against any sort of commitment to buttress European political stability.

Third, ideological concerns dictated the course of American military policy. Reducing taxes and debts meant cutting military spending, and the New Era Republicans reduced it across the board. But they were far harder on the Army than the Navy, cutting the former to the bone since they saw little role for ground forces in American strategy. Furthermore, the Harding administration expressed its disinclination to make ground commitments by withdrawing American forces from Europe as soon as it was politic. Last, the impulse to conserve costs was also a central motivation for, and shaped the character of, American disarmament policy.

Counter-Arguments

Although there is no explicit variation in America’s grand strategy from 1921-1932, there are two prominent alternative accounts of American foreign policy during the period that deserve to be addressed. Most explicit are a loose family of explanations grouped around the economic interests of different domestic groups. Though these explanations differ from each other, they are organized around a common theme: American foreign policy was shaped to the economic benefit of those interests who controlled the government. A second, less theoretical, account of the 1920s, emphasizes the fractured nature of the American state. The interwar Republicans might have committed more to Europe, so the story goes, but for intense Congressional pressures, the penetration of private interests, and the difficulty of mobilizing the sclerotic American bureaucracy. This explanation thus posits a kind of “drag” on American foreign policy—American non-entanglement is more the result of institutional inertia than anything else. I evaluate the strength of these claims below.

ECONOMIC INTERESTS. Among political scientists, there has been a recent renewal of interest in sectoral economic theories of American foreign policy. These theories have two parts. First, the American party system is posited to be composed of competing economic sectors
aiming to shape public policy to their benefit. Each political party represents a coalition of such groups. Second, foreign policy is assumed to economically impact sectoral interests. Therefore, just as each coalition pursues domestic policies that will line its pockets, so too will they chose the foreign policy that benefits them the most. As Narizny puts it, “(1) all states must make trade-offs in their security policy, (2) these trade-offs often have distributional implications, and (3) almost all state leaders are selected by, or rely on the support of, groups that are affected by these trade-offs.” Grand strategy therefore reflects the primacy of innenpolitik at its most basic material level.  

Distinct sets of interests yield different grand strategies. In Narizny’s formulation, economic sectors that depend heavily on Europe will favor intense engagement aimed at “stable, peaceful diplomatic relations among states in the core of the international system.” These “core interests” are especially inclined towards internationalist legal commitments, and are traditionally represented in the Democratic Party. Those sectors that depend on developing markets will seek a strategy aimed at ensuring that their “ambitions in the periphery” do not “bring [America] into conflict with other great powers.” These “peripheral interests,” which reside primarily in the Republican Party, will favor a realpolitik approach to Europe, engaging only as much as is necessary to “ensure that American trade and investment in Latin America and East Asia would not suffer from the imperial depredations of other great powers.”  

As applied to Republican foreign policy in the 1920s, Narizny predicts that in order “To support their interventionist interests in the periphery, [Republicans] should have continued to favor a realpolitik strategy toward the great powers.” American war debts early in the period should further limit engagement with Europe, and “Only when American trade with the periphery was directly threatened by events in the core should Republican presidents have considered intervention in European affairs.” Narizny claims vindication for these predictions, citing debt and Depression driven disarmament negotiations, a distaste for legal commitments, and non-intervention in the Manchurian crisis of 1931—an important test for the world legal order. More generally, the American grand strategy detailed above shows the economic theory’s appeal: America did indeed maintain a posture of non-entanglement and minimal commitment to Europe during the 1920s, which is consistent with a strategy driven by economic interests in the developing world.  

However, a closer examination reveals important inconsistencies in Narizny’s account, and the difficulties with a theoretical reliance on peripheral economic interests more generally. To begin with, Narizny’s treatment of American disarmament policy is problematic. Narizny expects the Republican Party to favor “the acquisition of a global network of naval bases and a

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battleship fleet.” Such a “Big Navy” would fulfill the “Republican leaders’ strategic imperative... to defend peripheral markets from the encroachment of other great powers.” Republican naval disarmament is thus an anomaly from a sectoral perspective, one that Narizny attempts to explain away through financial constraints: Harding and Coolidge are said to favor disarmament to defray the cost of debt payments, while Hoover supposedly did so to fend off the Depression.\textsuperscript{111}

But the financial constraints Narizny references were mostly self-imposed. By 1925 the Federal Budget was showing a $1 billion surplus on expenditures of just over $3 billion, and the national debt had been paid down by more than 30%. The fiscal effects of the Great Depression were not evident until well into 1930. So, at a minimum, neither Coolidge’s nor Hoover’s major efforts at naval reduction can be attributed to objective fiscal constraints. More broadly, such fiscal constraints as there were came from the policy of aggressively paying down the national debt, which consumed between one-third and one-half of total government expenditures during the early 1920s. Funds could have easily been freed up for naval building with lower debt payments, higher taxes, or both.

There certainly was extensive support for a “Big Navy” within the Republican congressional caucus during the 1920s. But, as the analysis above reveals, naval disarmament, lower taxes, and the push for a lower national debt all had a common source: negative liberal ideology. Interwar Republican administrations were opposed to resource extraction across the board and thought unnecessary spending on the military particularly wasteful. It was both abusive to the taxpayer, a burden on the economy, and a contributor to global instability—not least of all in Europe, the region the Republican Party is supposed to ignore in sectoral theories.\textsuperscript{112}

More importantly, most sectoral analysis completely misses the source of all the energy in America’s European strategy during the 1920s: a genuine concern for economic and political stability in the Old World. As noted earlier, Republican foreign policy makers thought European peace and prosperity would bring economic benefits to the United States. Hughes argued that “The prosperity of the United States largely depends upon the economic settlements which may be made in Europe,” while Harding told Congress that economic growth was “inseparably linked with our Foreign Relations” in Europe. These sentiments were responsible for the eventual American efforts on behalf of the Dawes Plan and Locarno accords, as well as Hoover’s flurry of activity surrounding a war debt moratorium and disarmament during the Great Depression. Ultimately, of course, Republican ideology left very little room for extensive commitments. But the concerns of policy-makers belie the interests posited by sectoral theory. Hoover justified his Depression era European diplomacy by explaining that “the problem before the world today is... to secure economic peace,” and earlier argued that without “the products we exchange, not a single automobile would run; not a dynamo would turn; not a telephone, telegraph, or radio

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., pp. 53, 117, and 142-143, 146-147 on Republican policy.

\textsuperscript{112} On the American financial situation, see Leffler, The Elusive Quest, p. 105; Randall G. Holcombe, “The Growth of the Federal Government in the 1920s,” Cato Journal 16, no. 2 (Fall 1996). On “Big Navy” Republicans, see Kaufman, Arms Control During the Pre-Nuclear Era, pp. 23-30. It is worth noting that the extremely modest amount of American intervention in the periphery under the New Era Republicans casts further doubts on the sectoral approach.
would operate.” These are not the sentiments of a Party indifferent to economic relations with Europe; they reflect a serious concern for “core” interests.113

THE FRACTURED STATE. A second kind of approach emphasizes the difficulties of concerted grand strategy in an era of state weakness. American policy-makers’ genuine concern for European stability might have gone farther, this type of explanation claims, but for the separation of powers, bureaucratic fiefdoms, and penetration of the government by private interests. As Leffler puts it, American strategy was often “the result of uneasy compromises between hostile branches of government, which themselves were wracked by a multitude of conflicting pressures and irreconcilable goals.” Cohen argues that “In the 1920s the United States was more profoundly engaged in international matters than at any peacetime era in its history,” though this was not the formal engagement of the American government. Instead, private financial interests molded American strategy: “the dollar, if not the flag, could be found wherever the sun might shine at any given moment.”

The resulting strategy was not always maximally coherent. Bureaucratic infighting further increased this drag on American foreign policy. As Jeffrey Frieden argues, “the central state apparatus found itself torn between conflicting interests” who “found allies within the government bureaucracy so that domestic sociopolitical strife was carried out within the state apparatus. The Federal Reserve system and the State Department” faced off against “the majority of Congress, and the powerful Commerce Department,” resulting in few successful initiatives. In short, non-entanglement was more the result of political fratricide among key actors and interests, rather than a principled choice.114

Although not a theoretically grounded explanation per se, there is clearly some truth in the fractured state approach. The American state, especially prior to the New Deal, is notorious for its weakness and inability to powerfully direct policy in the tradition of European states. It is not difficult to find examples of policy-makers disavowing their ability to undertake some policy for fear of disturbing Congress. For instance, Harding once dismissed a proposal to cancel war debts and reparations with the remark that “nothing of this tremendous importance could be accomplished without the sanction of Congress. Those in Executive responsibility have really very little authority.” Similarly, bureaucratic wrangling, especially over safeguards for foreign loans, was a real feature of American foreign policy. And the “apolitical” reliance on industrialists and financiers during the peak of American engagement with the continent bespeaks a penetration of government policy by private actors. It seems probable that these features did exert some kind of “drag” on American grand strategy, or at least prevented greater coherence in Republican policy.115

Still, there are important limits to what the fractured state approach can tell us. The key issue is that executive preferences often dovetailed with Congressional, bureaucratic, and private

goals for American foreign policy. As Cohrs puts it, consideration for “strong Congressional opposition to any more pronounced political engagement” was a factor in American strategy, “but was not the decisive motive for America’s official non-involvement. What the administration chose to pursue, or not to pursue, still hinged on fundamental Progressive premises.” For instance, when it came time to settle allied war-debts, the fact that Congress had made Harding and Coolidge’s preferred settlements illegal did not stop either President from presenting them as a fait accompli.16

In the same vein, bureaucracies did contend with each other about whether to supervise private loans to Germany, but quickly got on the same page when the Coolidge administration decided to embargo such credits to any country that hadn’t settled its debts. Private interests, while certainly useful to American diplomats, quickly yielded to public needs. During the Dawes and Young negotiations, in which the banker’s influence is justly touted, it was political considerations that set policy. “American and British policymakers came to use financial pressure as a strategic lever in their decisive attempt not to enforce the bankers’ conditions,” during the Dawes negotiations. And though the Young negotiations started with the plans of Parker Gilbert, recall that the Coolidge administration quickly forced him to change tack and present a completely different proposal more in line with negative liberal debt preferences. In short, fractured though the American state may have been, the executive branch could act decisively when it so chose. Apparent institutional inertia reflected its negative liberal preferences more often than not.17

Conclusion

American grand strategy under the interwar Republicans presents a model example of TLFP’s explanatory power. There was nothing approaching a potential hegemon in Europe, eliminating any systemic incentive to make commitments abroad. The Republican leadership, by contrast, had plenty of incentive to retrench and resist entanglement: their negative liberal ideology implied an active policy could impose high costs on individual Americans. When faced with the choice between European wealth and German weakness, American decision-makers appreciated the trade-off and decided it wasn’t their problem.

The Republican administrations of the 1920s were willing to tolerate a range of power configurations in Europe, as long as American power was not part of the equation. They pursued this strategy of non-entanglement despite a preference for a certain kind of European order. New Era statesmen were essentially pro-German revisionists who hoped that gradual adjustments to the Versailles settlement would integrate Germany into a peaceful and prosperous international system. But the sacrifices America was willing to make to bring such an order about were minimal. America would make no alliance commitments to reassure the French. Diplomats would not facilitate a European reparations settlement by forgiving war debts. The government would not back financial commitments to the struggling European economy. And military involvement was simply out of the question. If this detachment meant artificial French hegemony or resurgent German power, that was regrettable, but not worth making costly commitments.

17 Ibid., p. 174.
Negative liberty was the motor force of American non-entanglement. American leaders thought of war debts and military spending as impositions on the rights of the American taxpayer, placing severe restrictions on the most obvious sources of American control abroad. Indeed, the need to protect such negative liberal values impacted American strategy over an array of different policy areas. When analyzing the dangers of the European scene, Americans generally focused on their secure geography, finding little to worry about in European power concentrations or ideologies.

In diplomatic affairs, the absence of American power was palpable in the strained attempts of the Western European great powers to build a stable peace—but the United States would not brook the risks of alliances, nor the costs to its citizens of beneficial engagement. In regard to the military, Republican policymakers were ruthless in the economies they demanded of the Army, which was of little use beyond deterring an invasion of the homeland. They pursued naval reductions as well, especially through the mechanism of disarmament, but such standoff power was more palatable to statesmen who thought mostly in terms of protecting trade and hemispheric defense.

The international system had a noticeable but narrow impact on American strategy, by integrating its ends and means over time. American statesmen were willing to make limited commitments in order to support America’s economic and ideological hopes for Europe. These preferences led to Dawes and Locarno diplomacy, a slower than expected withdrawal from the Rhineland, and Hoover’s attempts to stabilize Europe during the Depression. However, when the system presented more costly demands to maintain European stability, New Era Republicans dropped their second-order goals rather than contravene ideological limits on their political means. In sum, negative liberal ideology restrained American commitments by limiting the acceptable tools of statecraft, producing a European power structure whose decisive feature was American absence.
Chapter Five

Potential Hegemons and Positive Liberty: American Grand Strategy under Roosevelt

The administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt is justly regarded as the hinge of modern American political development. In domestic politics, Roosevelt created a dominant political coalition that constructed an activist American state directed towards positive liberal ends, dealing negative liberal ideals a blow from which they would never recover. In international politics, Roosevelt grappled with a rapidly shifting structure of power, as Nazi Germany’s rise to potential hegemony in Europe posed a threat to American security unequaled before or since. In short, during this period both of the independent variables identified in the Theory of Liberal Foreign Policy (TLFP) outlined in Chapter Two were set at high values and pointed towards American activity abroad. Unfortunately, disentangling their effects is not eased by the fact that Roosevelt’s haphazard administrative style, acute political sensitivity, and eye towards history led him to deliberately obscure his decision-making process.¹

Just as importantly, the tectonic political transitions of the 1930s produced a countervailing force that acted in the opposite direction, one outside TLFP’s theoretical model. Roosevelt’s foreign policy operated under stringent domestic political constraints, particularly with regard to the use of ground forces. Disillusionment with the First World War, the Great Depression and its vicious political realignment, and an uncertain international scene all buoyed isolationism to its high-water mark in the 1930s. A combination of public opinion and congressional opposition restrained Roosevelt from his preferred strategy and ultimately forced him into elaborate deceptions and political maneuvers in order to execute it. This domestic constraint had an important impact on the course of American strategy towards Europe, which delayed TLFP’s predicted outcome but did not obstruct its logic.

Domestic impediments aside, TLFP does successfully explain the major variation in American grand strategy during the Roosevelt era. From 1937 until the summer of 1940, the Roosevelt administration pursued a strategy of buckpassing. American statesmen perceived both a security threat and a major threat to American liberal values from Nazi Germany. Domestically constrained from explicit American participation in European politics, Roosevelt sought to expand American influence on the structure of power overseas by free-riding on European efforts to contain Hitler. He made a limited set of diplomatic and military commitments aimed at organizing and supporting a great power balancing coalition, while also seeking a European settlement on positive liberal terms.

From the fall of 1940 onwards, Roosevelt sought to balance against Nazi Germany, seeking direct participation in a ground war to destroy German power. Still politically inhibited from immediate American entry, Roosevelt gradually led the country into a more diplomatically and militarily aggressive posture, hoping to precipitate an Axis misstep that would open a domestic window for the United States to enter the war. In so doing, he engaged in careful manipulation of his policy and resorted to considerable subterfuge concerning its character.

Japan finally gave the administration the needed opportunity by attacking the American Fleet at Pearl Harbor. Although the attack was certainly not the result of a deliberate conspiracy, as has sometimes been scurrilously alleged, neither was it exactly an accident. As a part of his larger efforts, Roosevelt had consciously set the United States on a collision course with Japan, expected a Pacific war, and in all likelihood planned to use such a conflict as a springboard to his primary goal of entering the European war.

Furthermore, the policy-making process predicted by TLFP is clearly evident in the formation of American strategy. Geopolitics hovers like a brooding force over the entire period. Even before the fall of France, the administration had genuine worries about a Nazi threat to the Monroe Doctrine, helping to drive a search for American influence in Europe. After the fall of France, these worries became nightmares, as the destruction or capture of the British Fleet became a real possibility. But as TLFP expects, the high level of geopolitical threat led the administration to resist pressures for non-entanglement, instead choosing to ramp up its assistance to Britain and to rapidly expand military forces.

Roosevelt’s positive liberal values are also manifest in the evolution of his foreign policy. Before 1940, his biggest fear was that the German autarkic economic project would continue to expand and perhaps even penetrate the Western hemisphere, strangling the American program of free trade. Such an outcome would violate American positive rights to compete in world markets on equal terms and would also threaten the positive liberal achievements of the New Deal at home. Germany’s autocratic regime made it likely to pursue this project with vigor and violence. Indeed, consistent with TLFP, this expanded set of threat perceptions helps explain the Roosevelt administration’s worries about Latin America in the period before Germany became a potential hegemon. Hemispheric penetration was tied up with the Nazi ideological and economic threat, to which positive liberals were especially sensitive, and the administration lacked any negative liberal reasons to dismiss security fears.

These positive liberal threat perceptions motivated Roosevelt’s push to shape the European balance of power as much as he could and were also evident in the liberal commercial terms that sat at the heart of his peace proposals. Even after the fall of France, when geopolitical concerns were unquestionably dominant, Roosevelt’s positive liberalism helped push the administration towards balancing rather than buckpassing. The buckpassing alternative of buttressing a stalemate in Europe was real, powerful, and advocated by respected military officials. But American planning documents show the influence of liberalism’s commercial values in justifying balancing and are consistent with Roosevelt’s earlier views of German autarky.

This chapter aims to verify these claims, showing the influence of both positive liberal ideas and geopolitical threats. I begin, as before, by measuring the values of the independent variables, demonstrating Roosevelt’s solidly positive liberal views and showing that Germany did not emerge as a potential hegemon until the fall of France. This allows me to generate TLFP’s central prediction: that America should have pursued a grand strategy of balancing. Next, in a break with previous structure, I then examine an alternate explanation for American grand strategy during the period that powerfully shaped American diplomacy: domestic political constraint. The following two sections chart American foreign policy from 1937 to 1941, showing it to be consistent with TLFP. I conclude by examining a case-specific alternate explanation: the common historical claim that American foreign policy under Roosevelt was the product of bureaucratic politics.
Coding the Independent Variables

This section measures the values of TLFP’s two independent variables: the Roosevelt administration’s concept of liberty and the level of geopolitical threat. I establish Roosevelt’s views on the nature of liberalism by surveying his explicit philosophical statements, his attitudes on the centralization of political power, and his views on the legitimate scope of government economic and fiscal interventionism. These observations are made during the period before he assumed the presidency, following the methodological approach laid out earlier. I assess the level of geopolitical threat by measuring the latent economic strength and extant military might of the European poles during the 1930s.

I find that Roosevelt was fully within the set of positive liberal ideals, scoring as PL: High. The structure of international power was changing to favor Germany throughout the 1930s, but Britain remained a close rival, and combined Anglo-French economic and military power was equal to or greater than German power. In 1940, Germany defeated the Allies in France, and emerged as a potential hegemon. I conclude the section by generating the expectations for TLFP’s grand strategic outcomes based on these codings.

ROOSEVELT’S CONCEPT OF LIBERTY

There is a school of historians who are fond of denigrating Franklin Roosevelt’s intellectual underpinning, denying that he had anything resembling an ideology. “At the heart of the New Deal,” Richard Hofstadter famously wrote, “there was not a philosophy but a temperament.” Oliver Wendell Holmes similarly quipped that Roosevelt possessed “a second-rate intellect but a first-rate temperament.” The tendency among this school is to laud the monumental political achievements of the New Deal but attack its intellectual inconsistencies.2

As many other historians understand, this has the story basically backwards: the politics of the New Deal were buffeted with disorder and complexity, while its central ideological vision was consistent and clear. As detailed by Sidney Milkis, Robert Eden, and others, during the 1932 campaign and his following administrations, Roosevelt developed a new “public philosophy” running along positive liberal lines: America needed a new economic and institutional order, with an active government vindicating positive rights. But my methodology conservatism largely avoids this evidence, valuable though it is.3

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Instead, I argue that a positive liberal vision was evident in Roosevelt’s thought well before he ran for president. His close associate and later head of the Democratic National Committee Jim Farley noted that “Some of the things he has done during his administration, while appearing to the ordinary man on the street as a wonderful accomplishment, quickly performed, are things I have heard him discuss not only before he was elected, but before he was nominated.” In Farley’s view, and in mine, before Roosevelt was “elected President he had a full knowledge of the [office], and had in mind more or less definitely, the program he proposed to put into effect a soon as he could bring about the necessary legislation and other actions necessary in order to carry out his ideas.” In his essential philosophic underpinnings, attitude towards government centralization, and economic views, Roosevelt held strongly to positive liberal tenets.4

PHILOSOPHY. Roosevelt’s political philosophy was dedicated to an understanding of liberty as the exercise of key capacities, both individually and collectively. Individually, citizens had positive rights that must be vindicated in order for them to flourish. Collectively, a free community had to be at liberty to act in the greater interests of all, which entailed a commitment to participatory democracy as an intrinsic good. Together, these norms led Roosevelt to endorse an active and interventionist role for government, to better provide the conditions for American freedom.

Roosevelt clearly saw liberal rights as action concepts, which were pointed towards achieving higher human goods and required preconditions for their exercise. On the subject of poor houses for the aged, for example, he argued during his time as governor of New York that “we can no longer be satisfied with the old method of putting them away in dismal institutions, with the accompanying loss of self-respect, personality, and interest in life.” Such institutions could not facilitate the real goals of freedom. Similarly, measures of welfare provision, like workman’s compensation, minimum wages, and maximum hours legislation, were essential if the workingman was truly to thrive: “modern social conditions have progressed to a point where such demands can no longer be regarded other than as matters of absolute right,” Roosevelt insisted.5

Although by no means opposed to traditional negative rights of non-infringement, Roosevelt was not particularly solicitous of them. As assistant secretary of the Navy in the Wilson administration, he enthusiastically joined the faction that favored suppressing civil liberties during the Great War. Infuriated by an article attacking compulsory service during wartime, Roosevelt wrote the Justice Department expressing his wish that “you would send the writer and his whole plant to [prison] for the rest of their natural lives.” Even A. Mitchell Palmer’s notoriously aggressive department had to inform him there was no legal cause to do so. In another case, he applauded zealous prosecutions, writing the U.S. Attorney for New York State: “Pamphlets of this kind are undoubtedly attacks not on the individuals who make up the

Government but on duly constituted government itself, and I cannot help but feeling that in certain parts of the country especially, every effort should be made to stamp them out.\textsuperscript{6}

After the war, he did take issue with an Admiral who had fired four naval yard workers for being socialists. Three of them should have instead been dismissed on efficiency grounds, Roosevelt thought, because “neither you nor I can fire a man because he happens to be a socialist....[but the fourth man] was alleged to have actually circulated revolutionary literature in the shop, literature which advocated the Soviet form of government and which, therefore, constituted, in my judgment, an attack on our own form of government. This is a very different thing.”\textsuperscript{7}

Roosevelt’s positive view of individual rights was intimately linked to his collective vision of freedom. He formulated these views very early, arguing in 1912 that “during the past century we have acquired a new set of conditions which we must seek to solve. To put it in the simplest and fewest words I have called this new theory the struggle for liberty of the community rather than the liberty of the individual.” Because in important respects, Americans could only be free together, the government must act “to restrain the kind of individual action which in the past has been detrimental to the community.” Expanding further, Roosevelt claimed social freedom was in no small part a collective capacity: “If we can prophesy today the State (or in other words, the people as a whole) will shortly tell a man how many trees he must cut, then why can we not, without being radical, predict that the State will compel every farmer to till his land or raise beef, or horses? For after all if I own a farm of a hundred acres and let it lie waste and overgrown, I am just as much a destroyer of the liberty of the community, and by liberty, we mean happiness and prosperity, as is the strong man who stands idle on the corner, refusing to work.”\textsuperscript{8}

Roosevelt believed that both the positive liberty of the individual and the collective freedom of the polity developed together in historical tandem to facilitate effective action and greater human flourishing. “Every new star that people have hitched their wagon to for the past half century,” Roosevelt thought, “whether it is anti-rebating, or anti-trusts, or new fashioned education, or conservation of our natural resources or State regulation of common carriers, or


\textsuperscript{8} David K. Adams, “The New Deal and the Vital Center: A Continuing Struggle for Liberalism,” in \textit{Franklin D. Roosevelt: The Man, the Myth, the Era, 1882-1945}, ed. Herbert D. Rosenbaum and Elizabeth Bartelme (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987), pp. 107, 108; Freidel, \textit{Franklin D. Roosevelt I}, p. 132. This speech quoted in the next paragraph and elsewhere below as well, was made publically to the People’s Forum of Troy New York. The speech occurred outside of an electoral context and before a potentially unfriendly audience, given the views Roosevelt was advocating. It seems free of any instrumental taint, and is generally regarded as Roosevelt’s first attempt to articulate a political philosophy. Were that not enough, he also expressed the same views privately at around the same time. For instance, he wrote a friend that he regarded opposition to his bill regulating timber cutting in private forests as “based on the assumption that the State has no right to tell a private individual how he shall cut trees on his own land.” Roosevelt disagreed. See Fusfeld, \textit{The Economic Thought of Franklin D. Roosevelt}, p. 44.
commission government... [each is a step] in the evolution of the new theory of liberty of the community."9

The same type of theory can be seen in the introduction to his abandoned manuscript on American history, written while convalescing from polio. Roosevelt noted that the Crusades "accomplished in the end more for civilization and democracy than any previous event. Knighthood and overlordship took on responsibilities to others. Feudal barons were taught to look beyond their own castle domains, and to work with other individuals to a common end." But while praising this development of European civilization, he also criticized the lack of effective options for the broad mass of people: "there was far less freedom as we know it for the great mass of the European population than their ancestors had enjoyed under the tribal conditions which prevailed in the days of roman supremacy... A mere handful of humanity, certainly less than one in a hundred, owned and controlled the very lives and fortunes of the other ninety-nine." Part of the development of collective social freedom involved building the capacity of individuals to control their "very lives and fortunes."10

The importance of collective freedom naturally led Roosevelt to emphasize active participation in democracy as an intrinsic, rather than instrumental, good. While he was in the New York State Senate, for instance, he wrote to a constituent that the direct primary "will be for the good of the whole Country as the whole theory of our Government is built upon the assumption that every citizen takes an active interest in his own government." Roosevelt privately eulogized Woodrow Wilson upon his death in 1924, writing a friend that "Woodrow Wilson’s administration gave to the average citizen a greater opportunity to take part in his own government than ever before" and that "Woodrow Wilson in his life gave mankind a new vision of pure democracy." The goal of politics, he argued in 1928, was to make "under [the] changing conditions of each generation a people’s government for the people’s good.” And he defended the Democratic Party’s 1928 nomination of Al Smith because a president needed Smith’s “rare ability to make popular government function..., to reverse the present trend towards apathy and arouse in the citizenship an active interest—a willingness to resume its share of the responsibility for the nation’s progress. So only can we have a government not only for the people but by the people also.”11

Roosevelt understood that securing individual and collective rights to exercising effective freedom required a much more activist role for government that had previously been acceptable in America. In 1916 he privately and publically defended the Democratic Party as the “progressive” party in America, endorsing the then-unprecedented government activism under Wilson. “We ought to go out and make the fight on the really great accomplishments of the past four years,” he argued, and swore to his wife Eleanor that the campaign made him “hope to God I don’t grow reactionary with advancing years,” a tendentious interpretation of the relatively moderate Republican candidate, Charles Evans Hughes. In August, 1916, he reported that at

9 Freidel, Franklin D. Roosevelt I, p. 132.
dinner his aunt “gave the usual line of talk ‘agin the government’ and I delivered the eulogy per contra. Think it did Aunt Doe good at least."

In general, he championed the activist elements of the Democratic Party’s past, encouraging party members to “remember that many of the ideals and principles enunciated by Mr. Bryan and his associates of those days are now law of the land, principles considered visionary then but accepted whole-heartedly today.” Upon hearing of the death of President Harding, he wrote a friend that Coolidge “will be considered, of course, a conservative, which means we must nominate a progressive without fail,” and added, “If I did not still have these crutches I should throw my own hat in the ring.” Though often seeking to unite the national party under bromides acceptable to all factions, Roosevelt’s heart lay with the progressives and their vision of active government.

This positive liberal vision came through in his execution of public policy as a state senator and governor. His test of whether a particular function should be public or private was simply “which can do it better.” As such, he sought to use the state to regulate areas where private individuals were running riot against the public interest. As a state senator, he showed pictures of the devastation caused to a Chinese town by deforestation, claiming “this will happen in this very state if the individuals are allowed to do as they please with the natural resources to line their own pockets during their life.” His proposed regulations were so extensive they could not command the support of the progressive committee he controlled in a progressive New York Senate. Roosevelt also argued the government needed to step up where society was not providing the effective conditions for real free action. As the Depression began, he spearheaded the effort for welfare relief agencies and unemployment insurance, arguing “one of the duties of the state is that of caring for those of its citizens who find themselves the victims of such adverse circumstance[s].”

Roosevelt probably best summed up his philosophy of government in an interview he gave the New York Times after he had been elected governor. “I believe that in the future the State—and when I say the State I do not mean New York alone—will assume a much larger role in the lives of its citizens. Public health, I believe, is a responsibility of the State, and I think there will be a general widening of its activities to promote general welfare. The State educates its children. Why not also keep them well? Now some people are going to say this is socialistic. My answer to them is that it is ‘social’ not ‘socialistic’.” The demands of exercising real liberty meant the government had to intervene to provide its extensive preconditions.

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13 Freidel, Franklin D. Roosevelt, II, pp. 53, 164.
CENTRALIZATION OF POWER. Roosevelt favored the centralization of political power and found the separation of powers an impediment to democracy and effective government. He particularly favored the executive branch over the legislative branch, and as his presidency would show, the judicial branch as well. While not opposed to federalism per se, he often believed it outmoded for solving modern problems. Though he occasionally found it politically expedient to express devotion to the structural principles of American government, his policy concerns generally pointed him towards a greater concentration of power.

Roosevelt saw the fractured power of America’s constitutional structure as a major problem for expanding American liberty. The problem with American government, he opined in a 1928 memorandum, is that “we have today side by side an old political order fashioned by a pastoral civilization and a new social order fashioned by a technical civilization. The two are maladjusted.” The solution, he argued in a 1929 essay dubbed “The Age of Social Consciousness,” was to revise institutional forms and roles. Though admitting that the centralization of power carried dangers, Roosevelt argued that “we are married to it for better or for worse; we are a part of it, and whatever our doubts and fears we can do no good to our fellow men by sitting idly by or seeking to dam the current with a brick.”

Increasing the power of the executive would allow both for more efficient administration and increasing democratic responsibility. In opposing a law to reorganize the New York highway commission as a state senator, for example, Roosevelt argued that it fracture power instead of concentrating authority in a single authority. “I should be the first to favor any measure,” Roosevelt importuned, “looking to concentration of responsibility in one man who would be responsible to the governor, and through the governor to the people…. This, after all, is to my mind the best kind of democratic doctrine.” Indeed, the executive played a critical role in making democracy work, because “Leadership must educate the public, if it expects to get the public response necessary for effective action.” Power must be concentrated and made responsible, not divided and made unthreatening.

The inherent division of the legislative branch made Roosevelt skeptical that it could be useful for acting in the public interest. He believed legislatures used their powers mostly for political purposes, complaining that parliamentary investigations were not abiding by two “often-forgotten principles”: all investigations needed to be in the public interest, and “all persons, unless or until formally charged with crime, shall be shielded from suspicion or innuendo through publicity.” Put more bluntly, legislative oversight interfered with executive administration. As assistant secretary of the Navy, he complained bitterly that Congress did nothing more than bore people to sleep and gum up the works of administration. Roosevelt wanted to run the Navy efficiently, with minimal interference: “it would be a perfectly simple thing if they could forget prerogative, precedent, parliamentary law and Magna Charta, to put into effect—any businessman could do it—a system by which the legislative branch of the government would move along American lines.” He praised the British civil service, appointed by a unitary executive and not interfered with by representative bodies. “While the general British business methods are inferior to the American,” Roosevelt thought, “the business of the Government is on the whole a more efficient machine than our government.”

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Roosevelt was no friend to federalism and local control, either. Despite a feigned distrust of federalizing schemes, Roosevelt wrote a supporter of public utilities that “the complexities of modern civilization and the breaking down of state boundaries... seem in many cases to demand some form of government requisition to prevent abuses or extortion.” Like Woodrow Wilson, he supported a uniform national divorce law, even though there were strong states’ rights counter arguments made against his proposal that he had to parry. During the 1920’s, Roosevelt gave a wide variety of speeches on behalf different political causes and in the service of rebuilding the Democratic Party. Even James McGregor Burns, a skeptic of Roosevelt’s ideological coherency, admits that “certain threads ran through many of his speeches: nationalism... rather than localism or sectionalism, internationalism rather than nationalism, the use of the government to solve problems, [and] the improvement in government machinery to handle heavier burdens.” Roosevelt repeatedly associated federalism as an impediment to his larger vision, lumping it with other parts of the American tradition that needed modification for modern times.19

Certainly, Roosevelt had occasion to deploy the rhetoric of American constitutionalism on behalf of his political purposes. For instance, the typical way for early twentieth-century politicians to dodge the prohibition issue was to come out for “local option,” a political option of which Roosevelt quickly availed himself. In trying to reunite a fractious Democratic Party, he sometimes used states’ rights language to pull along reluctant southern powerbrokers. And of course, as Governor of New York, it was an outrage against federalism anytime the national government wanted to interfere with his plans, and a violation of separation of powers if the state courts and assembly protested his measures too vigorously. Still, these instances of traditional federalist rhetoric were fairly transparent in their aims, rare in their use, contradicted by Roosevelt’s other statements, and opposed to the thrust of his political and philosophical program. It is safe to say that Roosevelt supported the transformation of American institutional forms in the service of a more activist government.20

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL VIEWS. The heart of Roosevelt’s positive liberal program was government intervention in the economy, through business regulation economic planning. Roosevelt had a mixed set of statements on fiscal norms, but was clearly no fiscal conservative. He strongly favored labor unions and sought to strengthen them through government support, while often disdaining for business interests and alleging them to be at the heart of American economic dysfunction.

As early as 1912, Roosevelt’s mistrust of the market system was evident. He argued that “To state it plainly, competition has been shown to be useful up to a certain point, but cooperation, which is the thing we must strive for today, begins where competition leaves off.” This cooperation amounted to state coercion on behalf of economic goals, which is why the terminology was important: “If we call the method regulation, people hold up their hands in horror and say ‘unamerican’ or ‘dangerous,’ but if we call the identical process co-operation these same old fogies will cry ‘well done.’” Regulation should extend beyond the forests and waterways into all areas of economic life. For example, in a magazine article he authored in 1932, he called for government intervention in financial markets. “The government must protect its citizens against financial buccaneering. No Federal Administration can prevent individuals

20 For treatments of some of this opportunism, see Ibid., p. 128; Freidel, Franklin D. Roosevelt, II, p. 205; Greer, What Roosevelt Thought, Ch. 4.
from being suckers, but our government has the right as well as the positive duty to dissect, for
the benefit of the public, every new form of financial action.”21

In general, Roosevelt rejected the classical liberal appreciation of market society. At
Groton, Harvard, and Columbia he had studied economics under moderately reformist free-
market thinkers. As he later quipped, “I took economics courses in college for four years, and
everything I was taught was wrong.” In 1929, he made an argument that in the hands of Calvin
Coolidge might have been part of an impassioned defense of market institutions: “it is literally
true that the ‘self-supporting’ man or woman has become as extinct as the man of the stone
age….” Consider the bread on our table, the clothes upon our backs, the luxuries that make life
pleasant; how many men worked in sunlit fields, in dark mines, in the fierce heat of molten
metal, and among the looms and wheels of countless factories, in order to create them for our use
and enjoyment.” But instead of reflecting on this miracle of decentralized coordination,
Roosevelt used the example as a platform for proposing a series of active interventions into
business and private enterprise.22

Government economic planning was central to Roosevelt’s view of how liberal society
should be developed. In May 1932, Roosevelt spoke on the Great Depression at a
commencement address in Georgia. He remarked that “I have no doubt some of you have been
impressed with its chaos, its lack of a plan. Perhaps some of you have used stronger language.
And stronger language is justified.” Much of the waste “could have been prevented by greater
foresight and by a larger measure of social planning.” In 1931, Roosevelt backed the Swope’s
Plan for industrial management, the centerpiece of which was “the establishment of balance
between production and consumption through control of production” within government-backed
cartels. His private letters of the time considered proposals to restrict “abnormal consumption”
and “abnormal production,” including regulation of the manufacturing industry and restricting
credit to consumers. Roosevelt’s distrust of the market and advocacy of economic planning was
integrated with his positive liberal vision of freedom’s purpose. Government had to be
“something more than a necessary evil.” It was instead “an agency first to protect society and
then to promote and guide all the people into better ways of living.”23

Roosevelt’s fiscal views were mixed. Rhetorically he advocated a balanced budget, but
in practice he was a deficit spender as Governor of New York and as president of the United
States. He had no practical problem with increased taxation, often arguing that the under-
collection of tax revenues was close to criminal. He fulminated in a mid 1920s newspaper
column that “if all taxes, especially those on property, were enforced 100%, the average man’s
taxes could be cut.” And following the First World War, he admitted privately that the high
post-war costs of living were caused by “the inflation of currency for war purposes as well as the
relative scarcity of goods.” But this did not lead him to propose tighter money or balanced
budgets; instead he pushed for a host of government interventions and price-fixing laws for
“commodities like coal that the average citizen may be assured that the supply will be adequate
and the price reasonable.” At a minimum, the manner in which the government ran its finances

21 First and third quotes Greer, What Roosevelt Thought, pp. 60, 68; second quote Freidel, Franklin D. Roosevelt I,
p. 132.
22 Burns, Roosevelt I: 1882-1940, p. 20; Greer, What Roosevelt Thought, p. 60.
23 Brands, Traitor to His Class, p. 240; Fusfeld, The Economic Thought of Franklin D. Roosevelt, pp. 201, 200, 99.
was not a major item of concern for Roosevelt. More likely he found loose fiscal and monetary standards useful for pursuing policy goals.24

Roosevelt’s take on business and labor is much clearer. Following Hoover’s 1928 victory, Roosevelt wrote a colleague that “the business community is not much interested in good government... so long as the stock market soars and the new combinations of capital are left undisturbed.” But when good times came to an end the Democratic Party needed to be “sanely radical enough” to attract a disgruntled populace. Roosevelt had a friendlier view towards farmers and labor organizations. Farmers had not gotten “an even break,” and Roosevelt wanted “our agricultural population to be put on the same level of earning capacity as their fellow Americans.”25

As assistant secretary of the Navy, Roosevelt did what he could to bolster the cause of labor, including changing the methods by which pay scales were set and abolishing the institution of “Taylorist” methods of scientific labor management in naval yards. His support for labor is probably best shown in the words of the unions themselves. One union chief advised his subordinate when negotiating with the secretary of the Navy to “take what is offered and go after the rest when Mr. Roosevelt returns.” The chairman of the State Federation for Labor in New York wrote Roosevelt that “Your support on behalf of all labor legislation has been that of an earnest representative of the people and if our compensation bill is placed in your hands I have no fear of the result.” So close was their relationship that Roosevelt personally nominated Samuel Gompers for an honorary degree at Harvard. Labor was a major example of “the forgotten man” that Roosevelt would promise to help on the campaign trail, and whose liberty the government needed to guarantee.26

COMPOSITE CODE. Franklin Roosevelt was the transformational figure in American politics, raising to dominance the positive interpretation of liberal freedom. Heir to the ideological tradition started in earnest by Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt, his political philosophy was in place well before his presidency. He endorsed a vision of freedom as an action concept, a value that could not be fully realized unless individuals possessed the material preconditions to exercise their freedom and the community could act to guide society towards better ways of living. His focus on communal freedom naturally led him to view democratic participation as an intrinsically valuable part of the liberal heritage. He believed democratic and liberal norms needed to be vindicated by a strong, activist state that had a positive duty to support far-reaching rights.

As such, he was friendly to the centralization of political power, particularly in the executive branch and away from state and local authorities. That power was to be used to intervene directly in the economy, by regulating business and engaging in centralized planning. Using the government to strengthen labor unions against disreputable business was an important

24 Fusfeld, The Economic Thought of Franklin D. Roosevelt, pp. 92, 80. For Roosevelt’s intermittent rhetorical support for a balanced budget, see Greer, What Roosevelt Thought, pp. 51-52. The last quote in the paragraph is a particularly good summary of one of the proposals Roosevelt pushed in the early 1920s, but it does come from a campaign speech, which is an inherently suspect source.
26 Brands, Traitor to His Class, p. 78; Freidel, Franklin D. Roosevelt I, p. 122. On Roosevelt’s general support of labor and his recommendation for Gompers, see Freidel, Franklin D. Roosevelt I, pp. 198-202; Freidel, Franklin D. Roosevelt, II, p. 54.
part of advancing freedom’s reach. Although an astute political operator who occasionally drew on some negative liberal rhetoric for tactical purposes, Roosevelt’s positive liberalism comes through amply in private and non-instrumental settings. I thus code Roosevelt as PL: High, fully within the set of typical positive liberal ideals.

Table 5.1: Roosevelt Administration’s Concept of Liberty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explicit Philosophy</th>
<th>Centralization</th>
<th>Economic and Fiscal Views</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roosevelt</td>
<td>Skeptical of separation of powers; very supportive of executive over legislative power; anti-federalism and localism, though sometimes instrumentally supportive.</td>
<td>Government has a positive duty to regulate business and to plan the economy; market society is flawed; inflation and taxes are fine; labor is to be helped; business is suspect.</td>
<td>PL High: fully within the set.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

GEOPOLITICAL THREAT

I turn now to coding the geopolitical threat during the 1930s. To do so, I rely as before on two central concepts of power. Initially, I aim to assess the latent economic potential of the European great powers. I employ three different indicators to get a sense of whether there was any one power economically strong enough to potentially over-run the continent. First, I compare the European poles on the Correlates of War (COW) index of steel production and energy consumption; this measure provides a rough take on economic size and high-technology industrial potential. Second and third, I compare great powers at the same level of economic development using Angus Maddison’s series of historical GDPs and Paul Bairoch’s index of total industrial potential. Maddison’s series is conventionally regarded as the best measurement of raw economic size, while Bairoch’s index includes a series of high-technology industries beyond steel production.

Next, I seek to measure the basic military balance. I do so by looking at the size of European armies and historical assessments of their quality. The data on army sizes were compiled by John Mearsheimer. The idea is to determine whether a single power held a decided advantage in a short war before the combatants could mobilize. A pole that held such an advantage could be a potential hegemon.

These indicators show that, although German power was growing in the 1930s, Germany was not a potential hegemon until 1940. Depending on which indicators are given the most credence, English total economic strength closely approached that of Germany until at least 1938, and perhaps afterward. Combined French and British economic capacity was probably superior to Germany’s, or at least its equal. The same is true of readily mobilizeable military forces, where Germany did not attain superiority over France until 1938 and obtained equality with the Anglo-French coalition only in 1940. American decision-makers had plenteous support
for believing that the distribution of power in Europe was stable, as long as the British could get their Army to the continent.

After the shocking collapse of France and its subsequent economic exploitation by the Third Reich, however, Germany bestrode Europe like a colossus. It controlled more than half of all European industrial potential and was faced with militarily weak and politically isolated rivals. While the possibility of an Anglo-Soviet balancing coalition existed, such an alliance did not come into being until Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. In short, from the perspective of the United States, geopolitical threat skyrocketed in May 1940.

**LATENT ECONOMIC POWER.** Table 5.2 shows the COW steel and energy index from 1935-1940. Germany was already Europe’s leading industrial power by 1935, though its size relative to the British remained close until 1938, when Germany gained an advantage comparable to its earlier non-hegemonic superiority in 1913. The economic potential of a possible Anglo-French coalition exceeded Germany until 1938, after which the two sides sat at rough equality.27

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ger/Br</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ger/Br+Fr</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, even this modestly threatening German advantage is overstated by the German superiority on the steel production metric. As noted earlier, steel production is conventionally used in power calculations because it indicates capacity in the high-technology sectors necessary to build top-of-the-line military forces. An economy that produces a lot of steel therefore shows itself to have command of an essential element of national power. However, the actual amount of steel produced by any given country is determined by the peacetime requirements of domestic economies and by international comparative advantage in the location for steel plants. If a state needs to quickly produce large quantities of steel for wartime mobilization, it can channel its economy towards greater production. Furthermore, economies open to world trade can rely on imports from other steel producing nations. The size of the German power jump in 1938 is due in no small part to state-directed increases in steel production for the expansion of the Wehrmacht.

Table 5.3 presents economic comparisons of French, British, and German GDP from 1936-1940, as well as Bairoch’s industrial production index for the year 1938, which is his

observation year for the 1930s. The Soviet Union is excluded from the table because it is not clear that its command economy had yet approached the level of industrialization present in the western powers, and because most Soviet economic figures from the period are extremely dubious. As the table shows, both measures downscale the size of the German advantage and moderate the trend of Germany’s power increase. German’s industrial advantage over Britain was probably more on the order of 1.15 or 1.18 in 1938 and experienced a more gradual but real climb throughout the decade. On these measures, Germany never obtained economic equality with the allied coalition.28

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>Bairoch 1938</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>37.8</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ger/Br</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ger/Br+Fr</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compare these data with the situation after the fall of France. Table 5.4 shows the relative industrial strength of the European great powers from 1941-1944. Unfortunately, economic data during the war are difficult to accumulate and often unreliable. This table shows the basic COW index for energy consumption and steel production, but with data drawn from the more reliable sources. The power conclusions are very clear: Germany became a potential hegemon. It controlled more than half of European wealth and outstripped the remaining great powers by a factor of two to one or more. Only a coalition between Britain and the Soviet Union could rebalance the system, but Germany had succeeded in politically dividing the two states. From the point of view of the United States, the European balance of power disintegrated after the fall of France.29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1941</th>
<th>1942</th>
<th>1943</th>
<th>1944</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>51.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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29 This table is a reformatted version of the one found in John J. Mearsheimer, The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (New York: Norton, 2001), p. 73.
MILITARY POWER. The military balance tells much the same story. Table 5.5 presents the size of standing armies in Europe prior to the Second World War. The 1940 and 1941 figures are the actual forces mobilized by both sides for the operations in France and Russia; the British figure for 1941 is the total size of its mobilized Army, though most of it was deployed on the home islands. France had the largest Army in Europe for most of the period, and Germany did not gain a serious advantage until the year of decision itself. The combined Anglo-French forces exceeded their German counter-parts until 1940, when the Germans gained equality. Given that some advantage accrues to an unsurprised defender, and that the war had been going on since 1939, American leaders had no cause to believe the Germans would rapidly annihilate the Allied forces as they did.30

Table 5.5: Size of European Standing Armies, 1935-1940 (Mearsheimer)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1936</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940 (fighting army)</th>
<th>1941 (fighting army)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>480,000</td>
<td>520,000</td>
<td>550,000</td>
<td>720,000</td>
<td>730,000</td>
<td>2,760,000</td>
<td>3,050,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>196,137</td>
<td>192,325</td>
<td>190,830</td>
<td>212,300</td>
<td>237,736</td>
<td>402,000</td>
<td>2,292,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>642,875</td>
<td>642,875</td>
<td>692,860</td>
<td>698,101</td>
<td>900,000</td>
<td>2,224,000</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>1,300,000</td>
<td>1,300,000</td>
<td>1,433,000</td>
<td>1,513,000</td>
<td>1,520,000</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2,900,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ger/Fr or USSR (41)</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ger/Fr+Br</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessments of military quality show a patchwork of problems and successes. All European societies faced a terrific conflict between guns and butter during the 1930s, and the varying pace of rearmament created a series of deficiencies and bottlenecks in every country. But a general pattern is clear. The Red Army was a large but hollow force. Stalin had procured huge quantities of materiel, but much of it was obsolete—of the 24,000 tanks in service in 1941, only 967 were of the latest design, the rest being far inferior to German equipment. The Army was large, but largely composed of untrained and illiterate peasantry. The office corps had been liquidated by Stalin’s purges, with 90% of all General officers and 80% of all Colonels dead. Impressive on paper, the Red Army faced deep problems in practice.31

30 The data in the table are drawn from Ibid., pp. 317, 320.
The British Army was in better internal shape, but was not very useful for fighting a large land war. Britain had virtually no capability for continental intervention until 1939, having devoted most of its limited defense sums to the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. Early British experiments with mobile warfare doctrines had petered out by the 1930s, and the British Army was small and structured largely for imperial defense. It had fairly modern equipment, but very little of it: on John Mearsheimer’s estimate, Britain brought only 100 tanks to the fight in the Low Countries in 1940. The Royal Navy and Air Force were relatively powerful and well equipped, however, so Britain had a decent chance of executing its strategy for a long war of continental defense and economic attrition.32

The French Army was sizeable, and by the late 1930s quite competent, but oriented entirely for defensive operations. Economic scarcity had starved it of modern equipment and so it was in the midst of modernizing its force when war came. The French Navy was unreasonably well provided for, given its near strategic uselessness, which contributed to the starvation diet of the French air force—the Armée de l’Air had few planes, such equipment as they had possessed deficiencies, and there was little aerospace production capacity within the country. Still, by the time of the German attack, the French had organized the foundation of a reasonably adequate defense along the Maginot Line, with a powerful fighting force poised to defend in Belgium.33

The German military was in the best shape, though it by no means looked like the world-beater it swiftly became. Germany started its rearmament earlier than other powers and by 1938 was pumping nearly 20% of its GDP into its armed forces. The Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe had modern weaponry, excellent leadership, and innovative doctrines for ground warfare. But the German military machine was built for coercive diplomacy and quick aggression, not extended warfare. There were low stocks of ammunition, critical shortages of spare parts, and insufficient production capacity across the force. The professionalism of German cadres was also low due to the rapid expansion of the Army. The German air force was well suited for supporting the Army, but lacked the capacity for strategic bombing. The German Navy was of very modest size, though it possessed some submarine strength that would prove important. Overall, the German military had strength in breadth but not depth.34

Overall, the structure of power in Europe before May 1940 looked serious but stable. A Franco-British coalition appeared to have the military power and economic strength to contain Hitler. After the fall of France, however, the military situation imploded. The Wehrmacht was supreme in all of non-Russian Europe and was poised at the English Channel to potentially finish off Britain. In the east, Germany faced a large but potentially ineffective Soviet force, while British armed strength could not be brought to bear on the continent. This weakness might have been remedied if the British and Soviet poles could have joined forces, but Hitler had politically isolated them both. In American eyes, the situation was ominous.

**SUMMARY OF CODING**

Franklin Roosevelt embraced positive liberal views in their fullness. He saw rights as exercise concepts that required preconditions for action, supported the centralization of political

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power to vindicate those rights, and was especially concerned to intervene in the marketplace in order to ensure economic foundations for the exercise of liberal values. The European system was stable until 1940, as Britain and France had the economic and military strength to balance rising German power. After the fall of France, Germany emerged as a potential hegemon that no American statesman could have ignored.

TLFP therefore predicts that the Roosevelt administration should have pursued as much influence in Europe as it could get in order to promote and defend liberal values. Given the strength of Germany, a preponderance strategy was unlikely, so TLFP predicts early balancing. Furthermore, after the fall of France, Germany’s potential hegemony should have sparked even more intense balancing commitments and less emphasis on liberal goals abroad. All else equal, then, the Roosevelt administration before 1940 should have sought to make forward commitments in order to shape its preferred power constellation, and it should have moved to increase those commitments as the German danger grew, with a greater focus on forestalling German hegemony.

All Else Not Equal: the Role of Domestic Political Constraints

However, TLFP’s outcome predictions were impeded in the case by powerful domestic political constraints on Roosevelt’s freedom of action. These constraints represent a factor outside of the theoretical model, constituting an important subsidiary influence on the course of American foreign policy. I break with my previous expository structure and address this factor first, in order to situate the examination of American grand strategy within its domestic political context.

Simply put: public opinion and congressional opposition tied Roosevelt’s hands in directing foreign affairs. As the war in Europe gained intensity, these constraints loosened but did not disappear, particularly with regard to the deployment of ground forces abroad. The result was that Roosevelt’s plans consistently ran in front of his capability to act on them. American grand strategy developed more slowly than it otherwise would have, as Roosevelt maneuvered around political obstacles. In the end, Roosevelt was able to overcome those obstacles, vindicating TLFP’s balancing prediction. But the process was long and winding, impeded by a domestic political force that demands recognition.

Roosevelt’s political acumen led him to understand the limits within which his foreign policy had to operate. After the negative public reaction to his speech calling for the “quarantine” of international aggressors, he wrote his old headmaster at Groton that “I am fighting against a public psychology of long standing—a psychology which comes very close to saying “Peace at any price.”” He repeatedly complained that “The country as a whole does not yet have any deep sense of world crisis,” and worried that “public opinion over here is patting itself on the back every morning and thanking God for the Atlantic Ocean (and the Pacific Ocean).” Roosevelt wrote to an internationalist supporter that he was “pursued by catchcries in this country, and I am in the midst of a long process of education” in his attempts to lead the public. As late as September 1941, he explained to Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King that his options were limited because “I have to watch this Congress and public opinion like a hawk.”

Roosevelt’s methods of observation were many and sundry. He kept careful tabs of elite opinion by reading a half dozen of the most important newspapers every morning. As the war progressed, he had a digest of opinion in the three hundred dailies of widest circulation prepared for him, which soon used basic statistical techniques to analyze trends. Most of the President’s day was spent taking meeting and phone calls with important congressional and opinion leaders, which he likened to taking a “public opinion bath.” He also kept careful tabs on the White House mail, particularly after policy initiatives or major speeches.36

But most importantly, Roosevelt devoured public opinion polls, which had developed into their modern form during the 1930s. The results of these polls are telling, especially after the war began to heat up in Europe. To begin with, they showed that the public was going to be difficult to motivate to action. In December 1939, two-thirds of respondents agreed with the statement “the German people are essentially peace loving and kindly, but they have been unfortunate in being misled, too often, by ruthless and ambitious rulers” against only twenty percent who affirmed that “the German people have always had an irresponsible fondness for brute force and conquest which makes the country a menace to world peace so long as it is allowed to be strong enough to fight.” The same poll showed that half the public hoped that Britain would “crush Hitler but not the Germans” with only nineteen percent opting for German partition and just fourteen percent supporting permanent German disarmament.37

Polling also revealed that Americans felt secure. In January 1939, only forty-six percent of respondents thought that America should defend the Philippines if it were attacked, and only forty-three percent thought Mexico was worth American blood and treasure, both positions running slightly ahead their opposites. Only twenty-seven percent would consider defending Brazil. By January 1940, opinion was more worried, running two to one in favor of defending the Philippines, Mexico, and Hawaii if they were attacked. But these positions could still only garner around fifty-five percent support, hardly an overwhelming majority. Furthermore, the public generally confident that Britain would win the war. The United Kingdom was a seventy-five percent favorite when the war began in September 1939. This number plummeted during the spring offensives of 1940, but had risen back to seventy percent by December 1940. The public perception of Germany’s victory prospects peaked in June 1940, when thirty-five percent of respondents thought Hitler would win. This was the only month during the entire war that more people believed that Germany would win than Britain.38

With these views as a basis, it is not surprising that the public favored non-intervention. In November 1939, only twenty percent of respondents favored all aid to the European democracies short of war, against fifty-four percent who desired impartial neutrality and trade with all belligerents. By July 1940, pure neutrality was running even with entry into the war on the side of Britain at about a quarter of the population, but a forty percent plurality would only go as far as biased neutrality. From August 1940 onward, trends in support for the proposition that “the United States should risk war to help great Britain” ran opposite to those for the view

October 16, 1937; Roosevelt to White, December 14, 1939; Roosevelt to Murray, February 10, 1938; Roosevelt to King, September 27, 1941, all in Roosevelt, Elliot Roosevelt, and Lash, *F.D.R., His Personal Letters*, I: 716-717, II: 967-968, 757-758, 1216, respectively.
37 Ibid., p. 22. The polling cited here and in the paragraphs that follow are the polls known to have been read by Roosevelt. They were largely produced by *Fortune* magazine and pollster Hadley Cantril at Princeton. Roosevelt did not trust the Gallup Poll, as he saw George Gallup as a Republican who was in the tank for his opponents.
38 Ibid., pp. 25-26.
that “the United States will get into the war.” That is, as the public perceived direct participation in the war to be more likely, it was less willing to support Britain, though support for both positions ran over fifty-percent. After the fall of France, compulsory military service commanded the assent of only half of the public, despite the fact that eighty-eight percent believed that America should “arm to the teeth” in the event of German victory, rather than try to get along peacefully with Hitler. Finally, support for a declaration of war against Germany topped out at twenty-nine percent in June 1941, representing a hard cap against explicit balancing. 39

Certainly, though, there was room for Roosevelt to maneuver. In July 1940 two-thirds of Americans believed the war would affect them personally, and by September, sixty-one percent thought that Germany would attack the United States within the next decade. After the fall of France, substantial pluralities favored a host of measures supporting Britain. In September 1940, almost two-thirds of the public favored the “destroyers for bases” deal and fifty-six percent thought America should increase its production of aircraft for British purchase. Support for convoying ships bound for Britain hovered between fifty and sixty percent from May to August 1941. More generally, after December 1940, public opinion bounced between fifty and seventy percent in favor of supporting Britain at the risk of war, with the public more inclined to take risks when the situation looked less dangerous. Even the much reviled Soviet Union was supported by the American public, of whom seventy-three percent hoped for a communist victory. By July 1941, Americans rejected the idea of a negotiated peace in Europe by a margin of fifty to thirty-eight percent. 40

Congressional opposition to a forward foreign policy was as significant as public ambivalence. Roosevelt had been defeated in Congress over the neutrality acts during the 1930s, when strict legislation was passed in place of his proposals allowing for executive discretion in determining aggressors. In 1937, a bill requiring a national referendum in order to declare war was pushed back with narrow margins. In the spring of 1939, Roosevelt’s first attempt to amend the neutrality act to allow arms shipments to the Allies was defeated, despite a major political effort on the part of the administration in favor of revision. Even important victories in Congress were near things—the August 1941 bill to extend the draft passed by a single vote in the House of Representative, and the final repeal of the neutrality acts in the fall of 1941 was a bloody fight passed by only eighteen votes in the same chamber. Roosevelt’s most impressive political victory, the bipartisan passage of the Lend-Lease act, was secured only by three months of debate and a corresponding political offensive. The lesson that Roosevelt drew from these experiences was that it was preferable to act in ways that did not require Congressional approval, and that he could only hope to obtain such approval with considerable effort and substantial public support. 41

These factors impacted American grand strategy in two ways. First, Roosevelt recognized that ground forces were the most sensitive issue in the public mind. For example, he told diplomat Robert Murphy that “American mothers don’t want their boys to be soldiers” but they “don’t seem to mind their boys becoming sailors.” And in September 1941, he was worried

39 Ibid., pp. 23-30.
that strategic conclusions from military planning to “invade and crush Germany” would leak, eliciting “a very bad reaction from the public.” Other examples are legion, and noted in the analysis below. As Steven Casey, the leading expert on the impact of public opinion on Roosevelt’s foreign policy, puts it: Roosevelt “had no fundamental aversion either to war or to U.S. troops fighting in it.... [And] had FDR been able to work in a domestic vacuum” he would have adopted a more forward strategy “centering around the use of land troops.” This political constraint fundamentally restrained the positive liberal proclivity towards ground forces for several years.42

Second, American grand strategy developed more slowly than it would have otherwise. Roosevelt was forced into frequent political maneuvering in order to coax the public and Congress along, and had to pick his battles rather than make a frontal assault every time he wanted to act. As he wrote in the 1930s, “the public psychology and, for that matter, individual psychology, cannot, because of human weakness, be attuned for long periods of time to a constant repetition of the highest note on the scale.” Roosevelt understood that “people tire of seeing the same name day after day in the important headlines of the papers, and the same voice night after night over the radio” and was “full of dread” that his fireside chats “would lose their effectiveness.” A great deal of the delay and hesitation in Roosevelt’s foreign policy stemmed from the knowledge that he needed greater political support to move forward, and his careful attempts to raise such political capital.43

Roosevelt pithily summarized his dilemma to British ambassador Lord Halifax in October 1941, telling him “his perpetual problem was to steer a course between the two factors represented by (1) the wish of 70% of Americans to keep out of war; (2) The wish of 70% of Americans to do everything to break Hitler, even if it means war.” Domestic political opposition was therefore an important cause of American grand strategy before the Second World War, holding back Roosevelt’s attempts to make greater American commitments for several years. In the analysis below, I frequently note the impact of domestic opinion on the Roosevelt administration’s decision-making. However, geopolitical forces and positive liberal goals eventually overcame these restraints. While domestic impediments were important, TLFP’s expectations are ultimately vindicated in the process of American foreign policy formation and the outcome of American grand strategy.44

American Grand Strategy, 1937-1940: Buckpassing

Though domestic political constraints prevented Roosevelt from pursuing TLFP’s expected balancing strategy, the logic of positive liberty and geopolitical threat pushed American policy as far down the strategic continuum as it could go until 1940. Roosevelt implemented a buckpassing strategy as a second-best option. The premise of the administration’s strategy was to seek as much influence over the structure of European power as it could, while still free-riding on European policies. Roosevelt hoped that through limited diplomatic and military commitments, America could assist in forging a European settlement on liberal commercial

42 Mark A. Stoler, Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 36, 57; Casey, Cautious Crusade, p. 15.
43 Roosevelt to Baker, March 20, 1935, in Roosevelt, Elliot Roosevelt, and Lash, F.D.R., His Personal Letters, 1: 466-467; Casey, Cautious Crusade, p. 34.
44 Casey, Cautious Crusade, p. 30.
terms, or at least organize and support a balancing coalition able to contain Germany’s threatening autarkic project.

This strategy can be observed in its component policies. Roosevelt’s perception and response to the German security threat occurred very early, well before the European balance of power dramatically changed. Moreover, the military threat depended on the perception of ideological and economic vulnerabilities in the Western hemisphere. It was this extended field of vision for threats—Roosevelt administration’s perception of a German autarkic threat to American liberal values, and the autocratic regime that facilitated its self-defeating economic policy—that was the major motivation for American diplomacy during the period. American diplomatic and military initiatives took two forms. First, Roosevelt pushed peace plans that would result in a settlement that mitigated the ideological threat. Second, he sought military and diplomatic means to support the West European democracies against Germany. These included the application of economic coercion, access to raw materials and military equipment, the supply of combat aircraft, military coordination, and the assurance of diplomatic support if the coalition stood firm. He also initiated American rearmament through airpower, the only fashion in which he could influence the calculus of power in Europe.

The logic of TLFP drove these policies. For its part, the international environment provided a plausible threat to American security in the Western hemisphere. But the Roosevelt administration feared German expansion even into strategically insignificant areas, and responded to it before the balance of power changed. In the main, positive liberal concerns underlay America’s perception of the German threat: Hitler’s expanding zone of autarky threatened American free-trade rights throughout the world, and by extension, the positive liberal New Deal at home. The goal of economic openness and non-discrimination was therefore at the heart of Roosevelt’s vision for a European settlement. These liberal motivations caused Roosevelt to push out for as much diplomatic influence on the European power structure as possible within domestic constraints. Both geopolitical threat and liberal fears pushed America away from non-entanglement and towards more European commitment.

This section demonstrates the buckpassing character of American strategy and its geopolitical and liberal origins. I proceed in the usual manner, analyzing American grand strategy across three areas relevant to TLFP’s causal logic: America’s perception of European threats, its diplomatic policy towards allies, and its military posture at home and abroad.

RESPONSE TO EUROPEAN THREATS

Roosevelt perceived both material threats to American security and ideological threats to American values. First, without a doubt, the Roosevelt administration perceived a real threat to hemispheric security by 1937, fearing that economic and political penetration of Latin America would lead to an Axis military presence. However, the administration recognized that the military threat was minimal while the European balance held, and often deployed the argument instrumentally for other reasons. Second, the hemispheric threat was linked to a more general fear of Germany’s growing autarkic economic sphere, which threatened to strangle commercial liberalism in South America and throughout the world. Together, these fears made German power increasingly intolerable: even if the Nazis did not dominate Europe, the extension of their economic project would hold American values at risk. The European system had to be reordered, and America would need to exert influence in order to achieve this aim.

MATERIAL THREAT: POWER POLITICS IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE? As the European situation darkened in the late 1930s, the Roosevelt administration began to perceive a security
threat from Nazi Germany. On November 14th, 1938, President Roosevelt warned his cabinet that “the recrudescence of German power at Munich had completely re-oriented our own international relations; that for the first time since the Holy Alliance in 1818 the United States now faced the possibility of an attack on the Atlantic side in both the Northern and Southern hemispheres.” The United States must, Roosevelt argued, “have a sufficiently large air force to deter anyone from landing in either North or South America.” These fears had been building during the autumn crisis. In early October he told his hawkish Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes, that he feared “Germany will be wanting colonies and in the process of satisfying its appetite... England will offer her Trinidad and prevail upon France to offer her Martinique. This would give Germany strong outposts on our eastern coast as well as the coasts of Central and South America.”

On January 4th, 1939, Roosevelt told the American ambassador to Mexico stories of the German Luftwaffe’s strength, seeing it as a threat to American security because of its potential to produce a Nazi “foothold” in Brazil through support of revolutionary attacks on the state. Ambassador Daniels was surprised that Roosevelt sincerely “spoke as if that might actually be a real danger to the continent.” But the President believed the threat was real, particularly in light of advances in airpower. As he wrote to his Ambassador to Great Britain, Joseph Kennedy, “we over here, in spite of great strides toward national unity during the past six years, still have much to learn of the ‘relativity’ of world geography and the rapid annihilation of distance.” He similarly worried about the demise of the European bulwark after Munich: “Our British friends must begin to fish or cut bait. The dictator threat from Europe is a good deal closer to the United States and the American continent than before.”

Roosevelt was far from alone in worrying about a military threat to the Western hemisphere. His right hand man in the State Department, Undersecretary Sumner Welles, worried that there would be German-inspired rebellions in Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil, all “as part of a large Nazi movement to obtain control of those countries.” Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau interpreted (incorrectly, I argue below) Roosevelt’s rearmament program as an effort to make the United States “so strong that nobody can attack us.... We want enough planes to take care of the whole South American continent, too.” Morgenthau also joined with Roosevelt confidant Adolph Berle in urging the State Department to adopt a softer policy towards Mexican oil expropriations. “Mexico is already trading oil for German planes, which would undoubtedly mean German instructors,” he worried. In general, Berle represented an administration faction favoring non-entanglement and an emphasis on hemispheric security. “Both European contesting groups,” he thought, “would seek to establish footholds in this hemisphere.... Any such foothold, no matter by whom established, would be unfriendly to us.”

Such traditional realist fears were expressed with some frequency and undoubtedly influenced American grand strategy during the pre-belligerency period. Importantly, the growth

46 David G. Haglund, Latin America and the Transformation of U.S. Strategic Thought, 1936-1940 (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), pp. 111-112; Roosevelt to Kennedy and Roosevelt to Pell, November 12, 1938 and October 30, 1939, both in Roosevelt, Elliot Roosevelt, and Lash, F.D.R., His Personal Letters, II: 949-950, quote 950, 826.
of German power and aggressiveness attracted American concern well before Germany became a potential hegemon. There are three reasons to believe that other factors were at work besides the international environment in the Roosevelt administration’s perception of a threat to the Monroe doctrine.

First, Roosevelt understood quite well that military invasion of the Western hemisphere, or even its strategically meaningful political penetration, was an extremely unlikely proposition as long as the European balance of power remained intact. A confidential military report assured him in 1936 that a military threat to South America would require “the complete accord” of all four naval powers in Europe, and that “a challenge on the Pacific Coast... or on the Caribbean Coast seems impossible.” In response to the worries expressed above, Admiral Leahy told Sumner Welles, assistant secretary of state and Roosevelt henchman, that the Navy could stop any “filibustering” by Axis friendly groups in Brazil as long as the Navy could use Brazilian ports. Indeed, in 1939 military planners believed good hemispheric relations showed that the United States could “rely on the cooperation of nearly all Latin American states to oppose any German or Italian violation of the Monroe Doctrine.” The same report noted that without the removal of the British and French Fleets, any serious violation of the Monroe doctrine would come to nothing. Roosevelt acknowledged these facts privately by arguing that “the first act” of a victorious Germany would be “to seize the British Navy or put it out of action,” thereby leaving the hemisphere vulnerable. 48

Furthermore, the Roosevelt administration joined most observers in believing that a European war would be lengthy, and that the Allies would hold an advantage. On the eve of Munich, Roosevelt believed war was coming and that the Allied position was favorable: England and France “will control not only the Atlantic Ocean but the Mediterranean,” bottling the Axis up. The French would “speedily mop up” Axis colonies and “would promptly liquidate Franco in Spain.” The Allies had plenty of ready cash, more resources, and would win a long-defensive war, ultimately joined by almost every country in Europe. Even after the defeat of Poland, Roosevelt believed that “the French and English have more stamina than the Germans” and would win “if the war goes in normal course.” His military advisors reiterated in March 1940 that “the French possess the finest army in the world,” while Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Harold Stark personally advised Roosevelt that “a successful attack by either belligerent on the fortified Western Front is considered highly improbable.” Quite clearly, Roosevelt understood the conditions of a geopolitical threat to the United States required a dramatic shift in the European power structure and believed those conditions unlikely to obtain. 49

Second, purported threats to the integrity of the Western hemisphere were a politically convenient peg on which to hang policies motivated by other concerns. Roosevelt often publically used the threat to Latin America to defend his policy as one of non-entanglement and hemispheric defense, while privately admitting his primary intent was to aid the Allies. He was happy to tell the press about fifth column activity in Mexico, and to issue fantastic warnings that

48 Ibid., 53, 99, 125; Berle Diary, May 26, 1939, in Beatrice Berle and Travis Jacobs, eds., Navigating the Rapids: From the Papers of Adolph A. Berle (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973), pp. 223-224, quote 223. Even the ardent proponent of hemispheric defense, Adolph Berle, acknowledged that it would take a navally dominant Germany before “we shall be meeting imperialist schemes in South and Central America, not on a paper basis, as we do now, but backed up by an extremely strong naval and military force.” See Berle Diary, June 28, 1939, in Ibid., p. 230.

49 Ickes Diary, September 24, 30, 1938; October 14, 1939, all in Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, II: 474, 481, III: 37; Hearden, Roosevelt Confronts Hitler, pp. 140-141.
“it would take planes based in the Yucatan... about an hour and fifty minutes to smash up New Orleans.” But in a private session with the Senate Military Affairs Committee on January 1939, he asked rhetorically: “What is the first line of defense of the United States...? On the Atlantic, our first line is the continued independent existence of a very large group of nations.” He repeatedly cautioned the Senators to keep the meeting confidential and not to scare the American people by repeating his argument that “I will do everything I can to maintain the independence of these other nations.... that is the foreign policy of the United States.”

The President’s profligate use of the Latin American argument as a political tool cautions against treating it as the primary cause of American strategy. As Roosevelt put it to Ickes, “it would be absolutely impossible for him... to go on the air and talk to the world as we were talking. The people would simply not believe him.” By Roosevelt’s own admission and behavior, he faced a domestic political problem for which hemispheric security arguments proved very useful.

Third, consistent with TLFP, Roosevelt’s wider range of positive liberal threat perceptions extended to plausible military threats beyond potential hegemony in Europe. Moreover, the material threat to the Western hemisphere depended on Axis penetration through economic and ideological means. South America contained strong trade ties to Nazi Germany, was led by authoritarian leaders potentially sympathetic to European fascism, and contained millions of unassimilated immigrants from Axis countries. These were not simply a set of potential dominoes leading to military penetration of the hemisphere, but were part and parcel to a larger set of threats to American values that Roosevelt saw. It is to these ideological dangers that I now turn.

IDEOLOGICAL THREAT: AUTOCRACY AND AUTARKY. TLFP predicts that positive liberals will see ideological illiberalism abroad as threatening to American values at home and overseas. And indeed, the biggest threat perceived by the Roosevelt administration in the 1930s was not the rise of German power per se, but rather the autarkic and autocratic political project of the European dictatorships. Its primary worry was that Germany, Italy, and Japan would succeed in creating economically self-sufficient blocks based on illiberal trade practices. American trade would be shut out of most of the world, with disastrous consequences for American liberal values. This economic threat was linked to the regime type of the dictatorships. American statesmen believed that the autarkic project was ultimately a loser, not just for America, but for Europe and Asia as well. Unfortunately, autocratic political rule substituted this contradictory and self-defeating project for the will of the mass public. The only way for the dictatorships to resolve the domestic problems stemming from their economic stupidity was to pursue an aggressive foreign policy, which made them threatening to America whether or not the European system was stable.

The Roosevelt administration gave high priority to free-trade for a host of positive liberal reasons. First of all, Americans simply had a positive right to sell their wares abroad, one that the government had a duty to vindicate. Secretary of State Cordell Hull, leader of the free-

52 On the administration’s economic and ideological worries in Latin America, see Hearden, Roosevelt Confronts Hitler; Haglund, Latin America and the Transformation of U.S. Strategic Thought, 1936-1940; Lloyd C. Gardner, Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964).
traders in the administration, wrote Roosevelt in 1935 that “As our own population becomes more and more dense, as the struggle for existence in this country becomes more intense, as we feel increasingly the need of foreign markets, our definite concern for open markets will be more widely felt among our people and our desire for and insistence upon free opportunity to trade” will only increase. Roosevelt noted in the same year, in the context of East Asia, that “the American people would not go to war to preserve the integrity of China,” but they would in order to retain “their right to trade with China.”

During the private meeting with the Senate Military Affairs Committee described above, Roosevelt defended his policy of aiding the allies by invoking “our ability not only to defend ourselves against attack on our own continental limits but also our right to treat with the rest of the world and to avoid putting up a very high barbed wire fence all around us.” Others in the administration agreed with Roosevelt’s assessment. The military, in its new RAINBOW planning of 1939, defined American national security to include “not only freedom from invasion, but also freedom from external injury with our world trade.” Admiral Leahy wrote Roosevelt in 1938, apropos of the crisis in the Far East, “It is inconceivable to me that we as a nation are going to give up our rights of trading” or to “confine our activities to our own continental limits.” A large center of gravity in the Roosevelt administration was thinking about free trade in terms of positive rights to be defended by the policy of the American state.

Another positive liberal source of American free trade goals was a desire to protect the New Deal at home. As noted above, Roosevelt had strong proclivities towards economic planning, which had culminated in a set of programs designed to bring American production and consumption into equilibrium, thereby hopefully stopping the decline in the price level. But if American producers could not export their surpluses abroad, then the domestic economy would have to undergo painful production adjustments that Roosevelt’s internal programs were designed to mitigate. Roosevelt thus believed that expanded international trade was “a vital part of our recovery program.” He argued that “foreign markets must be regained... There is no other way to avoid painful economic dislocation, social readjustments, and unemployment.” Secretary Hull concurred, asserting in 1936 that “our domestic recovery can be neither complete nor durable unless our surplus-creating branches of production succeed in regaining at least a substantial portion of their lost foreign markets.” After all, as a State Department official explained, “Unsold surpluses, by glutting home markets, demoralize the prices received for that part of the of the output or crop sold at home, and thereby spread havoc and cause dislocation” throughout the economy.

Roosevelt had not engaged in massive state expansion designed to mitigate the “havoc” and “dislocation” that the Depression imposed on American liberty, just to turn the process of adjustment back over to the unfettered free market. Nor was he willing to contumence “a series of self-supporting, water-tight national units, with Socialistic control,” that American diplomats saw as the second alternative to the “old liberal idea of unrestricted trading.” Laissez-faire and totalitarian economic management were equally repellent to the middle way of the positive liberal state. Instead, Roosevelt sought to “correlate the two parts” of his recovery program: “the

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55 Hearden, *Roosevelt Confronts Hitler*, p. 47. As Hearden notes in his second chapter, early in his first term, Roosevelt adopted an economic nationalist posture, temporarily prioritizing domestic economic reconstruction over international economic cooperation. But he always saw the two as linked.
[New Deal] internal adjustments of production with such effective foreign purchasing power as may be developed” by free trade practices. The autarkic barriers to international commerce imposed a “growing cost both to the United States and to other nations [that] is becoming intolerable. World trade for the profit of all must be liberalized and freed from discriminatory trade practices.”

These positive liberal priorities quickly produced a designation of Germany as a principal threat to American rights. Germany was pursuing discriminatory trade practices designed to secure spheres of exclusive German economic influence in the raw material rich developing economies of Europe and the world. Sumner Welles noted in 1937 that Germany’s autarkic practices had “resulted in the displacement of American trade even in lines where American products have proven themselves able to hold the field against all ordinary competition.” “More than any other thing,” the State Department stressed, American trading rights depend “upon whether Germany can be brought back into a free economic system.” Otherwise, “important sections of the world—Central and Eastern Europe and many of the American Republics—will be unable to follow liberal policies,” and even more ominously, the other great powers may be drawn “constantly further away from the liberal commercial system.” As German foreign policy became more aggressive, American fears of German autarky increased. The Anschluss of Austria was worrisome not primarily because of its power political implications, but because “Germany’s restricted economic system has penetrated into Central and Southeastern Europe with almost unbelievable speed.” This system “is tending to elbow-out trade with those powers which practice a liberal trade policy.” A liberal system of free trade depended on containing and reversing the spread of autarky.

Unfortunately, German regime type indicated permanent hostility to American liberal priorities. Hitler had juiced the German economy with rearmament and autarky in a way that was unsustainable but impossible for him to back away from politically. Influential State Department analyst George Messersmith argued in 1934 that “the only hope for our markets in Germany lies in the return of reasonable government to Germany.” In 1936 he reiterated that “the relief Germany needs in the way of markets is real, but it cannot come with safety or be facilitated by anyone until the menace of the present government is removed.” Failing that, rearmament would just continue, and economic cooperation “could only result in feeding the monster that is about to devour Europe.” Roosevelt himself worried about this problem, noting somewhat wistfully that “there is no one unemployed in Germany, they are all working on war orders.” “If Germany visualized a peaceful working out of the political and economic problems,” he later wrote, “common sense would require the starting of conversations as soon as possible in order to avoid an even worse financial situation.”

But the Nazi dictatorship evidently lacked common sense. Writing to his Italian ambassador, Roosevelt fretted that “the more I study the situation, the more I am convinced that an economic approach to peace is a pretty weak reed for Europe to lean on…. The answer [Europeans] all give to any plea for reduction in armaments is that millions of workers would be thrown on the street. How do we make progress if England and France say we cannot help Germany and Italy to achieve economic security if they continue to arm and threaten, while

56 Ibid., pp. 27, 35, 47.
57 Ibid., pp. 89, 100.
simultaneously Germany and Italy say we must continue to arm and threaten because they will not give us economic security?” Given autocratic resistance, Roosevelt came increasingly to hope that the internal contradictions of the autarkic program would lead to its demise if Germany could be stymied internationally. He held out the “the hope... that this type of government represented by these three [axis] countries is being severely tested from the inside, especially in Germany, and that there may be a break in the logjam.” Messersmith had justified the brief American trade war against Germany in the early 1930s as an attempt to foment just such domestic revolution—the Nazis “must have credits, they must have trade, or they cannot pull through.”

The abuse of their own people indicated that the dictatorships were likely to be very threatening to American liberal values, regardless of their geopolitical position. Roosevelt saw Germany, Italy, and Japan as “the three bandit nations” in the grips of a dangerous “Junker crowd.” Roosevelt thought that Hitler himself was “a madman” and “his counselors, some of whom I personally know, are even madder than he is.” His view of Chamberlain’s appeasement policy amusingly epitomized the administration’s understanding of the European fascists: “If a Chief of Police makes a deal with the leading gangsters and the deal results in no more hold-ups, that Chief of Police will be called a great man—but if the gangsters do not live up to their word the Chief of Police will go to jail.” Germany was likely to permanently threaten the American free trade program, since “eventually, of course, they will have to pay” for their suboptimal economic policies, and gangster regimes would probably try to solve their problems through conquest. As Roosevelt jotted on one document about economic conditions in Germany, “Hitler—bad shape—war way out.” Such states might even rouse the notoriously quiescent American people: “if we get the idea that the future of our form of government is threatened by a coalition of European dictators, we might wade in with everything we have to give.”

The failure to secure an open trading system through internal pressure on Germany reinforced Roosevelt’s positive liberal threat perceptions. He believed that dictatorships could only rule by deceiving their people. He mocked the German ambassador on the subject of Hitler’s trumpeted four-year economic plan, asking whether it would “give Germany more to eat or merely keep her from having less.” The mass of European people themselves were more trustworthy in Roosevelt’s eyes: “I still believe that in every country the people themselves are more peaceably and liberally inclined than their governments.” The Germans were “unfortunate” for having to suffer under its “type of government,” and their national culture was similar to America’s, emphasizing strong families and private property. “I don’t know that the United States can save civilization,” Roosevelt remarked at one point, but “we can make people think and give them the opportunity of saving themselves. The trouble is that the people of Germany, Italy, and Japan are not given the privilege of thinking.”


61 Ickes Diary, August 8, 1937, in Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, II: 187; Casey, Cautious Crusade, p. 6; Roosevelt to Dodd, December 2, 1935; and on benign German culture, Roosevelt to Kennedy, October 30, 1939;
ROOSEVELT’S VISION FOR EUROPE. The Roosevelt administration’s concern for German autarky and autocracy led it to seek a revision of Germany’s power position in the international order. As the European crisis advanced, Roosevelt became more and more dissatisfied with the existing distribution of power: even if the Allies held in the west, Germany would still pose a major threat to the liberal values embodied in an open world trading system as it expanded its system elsewhere. Moreover, the autocratic regimes of the fascist states would make it very difficult to strike a bargain on liberal terms. To vindicate America’s right to free trade, the existing balance of power would have to be reordered. Totalitarian regimes simply could not be the first-ranking states in Europe, and America would have to make some kind of commitment to forestall this eventuality.

In 1937 and 1938, Messersmith wrote a series of memos on the European situation that resonated in the State Department and the White House. Worried about an ultimate threat to the Monroe Doctrine, Messersmith was part of a faction within the State Department unusually cognizant of importance of the balance of power. But even he framed the European problem as ideological at its core: “It is very simple and perhaps convenient for some in the democracies to state that they are not interested in ideologies but the most vital and basic factor in the present situation is this conflict of ideologies.” The diplomatic and military conquests of the fascist states were creating a new international order with security, economic, and political ramifications. “It is becoming increasingly clear,” he argued “that if the democracies, including the United States, are not willing to defend their political, social and economic views now by all peaceful methods at their command, it is only a question of time when they shall have to defend them with force.”

Messersmith saw open trading systems in Europe and Latin America as some of the principle American values threatened by the growth of German power. “The externals of the whole movement in the Far East and in Europe give the picture of a reversion to the worst stages of feudalism,” he argued, and criticized those who failed to see “that Germany needs today economic relief which will enable her to continue her program toward mastery in Europe.” Part and parcel of her autarkic project required economic domination of Southeast Europe and probably the Scandinavian states and the Low Countries. Such domination would in turn freeze out the American trade program and close most of the continent to transatlantic exchange. Messersmith emphasized that it was “not only territory which is in play—as too many observers are inclined to think. In some ways territory is the least at stake.” What “is in play fundamentally are new ideas and new forces…. directly opposed to our concepts, basic ideals and principles of action.” The ideology that underlay the Reich’s autarkic drive was incompatible with American liberal values and a direct threat to them.

Importantly, this threat existed independent of a balance of power on the continent. Germany’s astonishing success was linked to her ability to expand even though “the balance in the way of actual power is against them.” Germany did not need to win a decisive victory to pose a dire threat, she only needed to avoid a major loss: “Through the fortification of the Western frontier, which has made rapid progress, she will soon be able to hold England and France there, and any blockade of the North coast by the English and French fleets will not be so

both in Roosevelt, Elliot Roosevelt, and Lash, *F.D.R., His Personal Letters*, I: 530-531, quote 531, and II: 949-950, respectively. The experience of the war would lead Roosevelt to change his mind about the German people.


Ibid., first and third quotes, 143, 142; Messersmith to Hull, February 18, in *FRUS, 1938* I: 17-24, quote 19.
serious for Germany as she will have most of the things which she needs in the areas in
Southeastern Europe over which her control is extending. If Germany gets economic or
political control, or both, of Southeastern Europe she will be in a position to put England and
France into a secondary place in Europe and practically immobilize them.” In such a state, “I am
confident that in the end we would have our troubles in South America where Germany, Italy
and Japan are already so active and where they have their definite objectives” of access to raw
materials and domination of trade. Germany could not threaten American security without
destroying the Allies, but “With England and France in a purely secondary position,” she could
complete her autarkic project.64

It was this commercially illiberal program, and the egregious regime type that drove it,
which made Germany such a threat. As Berle told the Roosevelt, Germany’s European
ambitions would not necessarily “recreate a power which will invariably attack Western
Europe.” Hitler sought the traditional German objective of a “reconstituted great Germany, plus
the old Austro-Hungarian region…. Were the actor anyone other than Hitler… we should regard
this as merely reconstituting the old system, undoing the obviously unsound work of Versailles
and generally following the line of historical logic.” But, as Messersmith later argued, “the
Germany with which certain arrangements could have been made under Stresemann and Bruning
is a different Germany from the one we have to deal with under Hitler. And arrangements which
were then possible, and which would have been constructive, are today impossible until there is a
regime of law and order in Germany.”65

Roosevelt basically accepted this analysis, fearing that continued Nazi rule and any
extension of German autarky boded poorly for American access to many world markets. At a
cabinet meeting in late January 1939, Roosevelt argued that if Hitler attacked in the west instead
of the east, “this country is going to suffer tremendously…. Hitler will not have to control all of
Europe and South America in order to make it difficult for us economically…. If Hitler can
dominate the major part of Europe, he can serve notice to [South America] that unless it accepts
fascist principles and yields to fascistic economic domination, all of her exports will be cut off.”
Meeting with Ickes a few days later he “developed the theory that our first line of defense is
really the small countries of Europe…. He seriously thinks that if Hitler extends his power over
these small countries and then uses the economic weapon that will be his, he will be striking a
serious blow at us without even a thought of trying to land a soldier on our shores.”66

Writing to his Irish ambassador in March, Roosevelt noted that “there are fifteen or
sixteen independent nations in Europe whose continued independent political and economic
existence is of actual moment to the eventual defense of the United States.” His examples
included such political and military powerhouses as “the Baltic States… Romania, Bulgaria, and
Yugoslavia,” and a host of other small nations who if they “were to lose their present political
and economic independence, again the position of the United States would be weakened.” Given
that the German absorption of these states would not affect much change in the balance of
power, but would help cement the Reich’s autarkic project, the emphasis should be laid on the
economic part of Roosevelt’s analysis. In this regard, it was the Nazi-Soviet entente that made
his fears skyrocket. Although allowing that the Pact might temporary, Roosevelt wrote a friend

64 Messersmith to Hull, October 11, 1937, in FRUS, 1937, I: 140-145, quote 144; Messersmith to Hull, February 18,
in FRUS, 1938 I: 17-24, quotes 20, 21
65 Farnham, Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis, pp. 99, n. 29, 166.
that if “Germany and Russia win the war or force a peace favorable to them, the situation of your civilization and mine is indeed in peril. Our world trade would be at the mercy of the combine and our increasingly better relations with our twenty neighbors to the South would end—unless we were willing to go to war on their behalf against a German-Russian dominated Europe.”

The State Department was making much the same argument about the coming collapse of free trade principles at the hands of European totalitarianism. Following the partition of Poland, Hull feared the Nazi-Soviet entente would “prevent any Europeans from trading with us except on conditions which Berlin lays down.” State Department hands like Herbert Feis warned that “Hitler has become so decisive a factor in determining what lies ahead of every producer in this country that the economist simply cannot think in terms of steady, ordinary development,” while Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long feared the two totalitarian powers would “exclude us from practically all of those [European] markets.”

Notably these liberal threats were seen without a corresponding fear of direct military penetration of the Western hemisphere. Long argued that even if the British Fleet were destroyed “we are not even then confronted with a military difficulty. It will take Germany a long time to mop up in Europe, and our Fleet would be able to take care of any two Fleets Germany could muster…. There would, however, be an immediate economic effect here. Our markets in Europe would fall off…. That this would make enormous changes in American political life must be taken for granted.” Obviously the remark about the British Fleet was an exaggeration, but it illustrates the distance of direct security fears from the European war. Similarly, Adolph Berle believed that Russo-German success would mean “our great test will be economic: can we maintain enough economic life for this hemisphere so that one country after another country in South America will not be forced by trade relations into the Berlin orbit?” If Latin America became part of the closed German economic block, American trade would be forever bottled up.

In short, as TLFP predicts, the mere existence of a European balance of power was not enough for the Roosevelt administration. European autarky had to be rigidly contained, or it would continue to expand at the expense of traditional American trading rights and the New Deal political economy. European autocracy meant such expansion was likely. If liberal values were to gain needed international breathing space, the German economic project would have to be stopped, and/or the German power position would have to be reduced.

DIPLOMATIC POLICY

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68 Hearden, *Roosevelt Confronts Hitler*, p. 137.
70 To be sure, the positive liberal rights were not the only source of the Roosevelt administration’s fears of autarky. As TLFP expects, the administration believed strongly in the peaceful effects of economic liberalism, especially Secretary Hull. There was also a certain amount of genuine belief that trade was the only way to promote domestic prosperity, though this was debated within the administration and is belied by the actual American trade figures. For a treatment of the administrations various motives, see Hearden, *Roosevelt Confronts Hitler*; Gardner, *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy*. 
Roosevelt therefore reached out for influence with which to affect European economic outcomes and the structure of power that determined them. Fenced in by domestic politics, the administration was limited to a buckpassing strategy: it aimed to shape Allied political strategy while essentially free riding on the actions of the West European democracies. Roosevelt's strategy had two principle strands. First, he tried to propel forward a European political settlement founded on liberal commercial principles. Though skeptical that the German regime would make the deal, he was willing to accept political appeasement as part of the bargain if it could truly be struck. Second, he maneuvered to organize a European balancing coalition and to assist it through those tools that were domestically available to him: economic coercion, naval assistance, material support, and diplomatic backing.

A LIBERAL COMMERCIAL SETTLEMENT. Roosevelt's first preference was to make limited diplomatic commitments in the hopes of negotiating a liberal European settlement. This choice reflects the administration's positive liberal values and its perception of a German threat as much ideological as it was martial. The administration made several intermittent efforts to find a permanent European peace between 1936 and 1940, although diplomats were cognizant of the increasingly long odds facing these attempts as perceptions of the German threat grew. The foundation of each peace overture was a multilateral commitment to free trade and disarmament in Europe, including the prospects of American mediation and access to American markets.

The basic positive liberal outlines of the American peace plan were established in a Sumner Welles proposal of October 1937, which was pushed forward by Roosevelt at various times thereafter. The central element was an international conference to reach agreements on "The methods through which all peoples may obtain the right to have access upon equal and effective terms to raw materials and other elements necessary for their economic life." As his collaborator Berle put it, "the intent" was to begin "discussing access to markets." In 1938, Welles agreed with the British ambassador that if Germany and Italy "decided to move outside of their present autarkic system as a result of satisfactory political adjustments, [they] would find themselves in a very difficult transitional state, both commercially and financially," and that America "would then consider how they individually might help in the restoration of normal commercial and financial relationships." This was why, Welles pointed out, Roosevelt was so interested in "devising of methods for the freeing of restrictions upon trade between nations and the most effective manner of promoting an opportunity for all nations to participate in the processes of world trade on a basis of equality of treatment."71

Though careful to avoid taking an American position on European political "adjustments," the clear counterpart to the proposal was appeasement in Central Europe. Welles noted that "every kind of adjustment, if undertaken, might perhaps be more readily arrived at if all nations come to a common agreement" on international economic and political principles. In addition to free trade, Berle envisioned a principle of "international equity... defined in the old Latin sense of the appeal to justice which can be used to revise legal obligations and be relieved of them if they failed to meet the facts." Welles told the British that "the President frankly recognized that certain political appeasements in Europe" were "evidently an indispensable factor in the finding of bases for world peace." Trusting that such "political appeasements would prove completely successful," he agreed that America would strive to "obtain some scheme of

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71 Welles to Roosevelt, October 26, 1937, in FRUS, 1937, I: 668-670, quote 669; Berle diary, October 28, 1937, in Berle and Jacobs, Navigating the Rapids, pp. 143-144, quote 143; Welles-Lindsay meeting, March 8, 1938, in FRUS, I: 126-130, quotes 129.
general cooperation in Europe not only political, but likewise economic.” Cognizant of buckpassing’s limited influence, the Roosevelt administration was not going to quibble about the fate of Central European territory if America could end European autarky. 72

In general, Roosevelt attempted to gain as much influence on behalf of liberal principles as he felt he could get away with domestically. Roosevelt strongly supported the Welles proposal, which was ultimately quashed by British hesitancy to interfere with appeasement and Hitler’s refusal to be appeased. Writing to his German ambassador in 1936, Roosevelt joked that escalating European troubles meant “As President I have to be ready just like the fire department!” He also urged, in the same letter, that if events “should get to the point where a gesture, an offer, or a formal statement by me would… make for peace, be sure to send me immediate word.” Following the outbreak of war in 1939, Roosevelt met with British ambassador Lord Lothian on December 13 to discuss war aims. Lothian wrote Whitehall that the President “evidently hopes that before his time is up he may be able to intervene as a kind of umpire.” 73

Prior to the conclusion of the Munich crisis, Roosevelt made several attempts to exert just this kind of influence. Despite fears of domestic backlash, he offered to attend an international conference to resolve territory, trade, and disarmament issues if the British and the French would call it, and sent diplomatic notes at the height of the crisis that essentially offered American mediation. Roosevelt also made repeated efforts to bluff Hitler into thinking America might be more committed than his domestic political constraints would allow. In August 1938 he warned publically that “We in the Americas are no longer a far away continent, to which the eddies of controversies beyond the seas could bring no interest or no harm,” and privately remarked that “the occasion seemed to fit in with the Hitler situation and had, I hope, some small effect in Berlin.” On September 4, he authorized American ambassador to France William Bullitt to warn that “if war should break out again in Europe, no human being could undertake to prophesy whether or not the United States would become involved in such a war.” And in his final peace note to Hitler, he suggested that negotiations should be expanded to include “all the nations directly interested in the present controversy” and noted that despite a lack of European interests, “The conscience and the impelling desire of the people of my country demand that the voice of their government be raised again and yet again to avert and to avoid war.” 74

Roosevelt’s activism was in pursuit of a personal diplomatic vision that shared the State Department’s focus on commercial openness. Temporarily relieved that war had been averted at

72 Welles to Roosevelt, October 26, 1937, in FRUS, 1937, 1: 668-670, quote 670; Berle diary, October 28, 1937, in Berle and Jacobs, Navigating the Rapids, pp. 143-144, quote 143; Welles-Lindsay meeting, March 8, 1938, in FRUS, 1: 126-130, quotes 127, 128.


74 Farnham, Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis: A Study of Political Decision-Making, pp. 95, 97; Roosevelt to Hitler, September 27, 1938, FRUS, 1938, 1: 684-685. On Roosevelt’s offers to attend a comprehensive peace conference see Roosevelt-Jouhaux meeting, September 18 or 19, 1938, in FRUS, 1938, 1: 625-26; Barbara Reardon Farnham, Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis: A Study of Political Decision-Making (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 106. Although explicit mediation offers were removed from Roosevelt’s notes in the final drafts for fear of “untoward domestic effects,” Roosevelt believed American “good offices” were implicit in the context of his appeal. As mentioned in the text, he said as much privately to the British. Roosevelt often worried about the domestic pressures on his diplomacy during the Czech crisis; as he and Bullitt agreed about the September 4 warning, America “had gone as far as our people would well understand.” See ibid., pp. 112, 97 n. 24.
Munich, he wrote Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King that “I am still concerned... when we consider prospects for the future.” Without “a lowering of trade barriers... a new crisis will come.” In the December 13 private meeting with Lord Lothian earlier described, Roosevelt outlined his peace aims in terms of the “four freedoms,” long before he had voiced these sentiments in public. Any peace settlement, Roosevelt felt, would have to be based on the liberal freedoms of religion and speech, as well as “freedom for trade and access to raw materials.”

Indeed, after Munich, the Roosevelt administration made a series of overtures for peace along exactly these lines. On April 14, 1939, Roosevelt again appealed to Hitler, asking him to promise not to invade a long series of European countries. In return, the United States would participate in a conference to find the most practical manner of opening up avenues of international trade to the end that every nation of the earth may be enabled to buy and sell on equal terms in the world market as well as to possess assurances of obtaining the materials and products of peaceful economic life.” As war approached in August 1939, he once again sent messages to Central European governments and to the King of Italy, implicitly offering an American mediation of territorial disputes and promising negotiations to “open avenues of international trade.” These efforts were bolstered by State Department planning for a commercial peace.

Roosevelt’s peace attempts culminated in a set of overtures during the winter of 1940. He asked James Mooney, president of General Motors, to discreetly contact Hitler to see if he would accept American mediation of the war on commercial liberal terms. He sent forty-two neutral nations a message that proposed a conference to discuss the post-war peace, emphasizing the importance of disarmament and free trade; he hoped that this conference might eventually find itself represented at the European peace-table. And he sent Sumner Welles on a peace mission to Europe to sound out the different great powers on the acceptability of liberal peace terms. None of these efforts were successful, but they represented the best hope of resolving the European conflict on terms consistent with American values, without decisive intervention that was politically impossible at home. Roosevelt’s goals and intentions were clear. As Mooney had put it earlier, “If Germany is not to move east politically, she must move west economically.”

ORGANIZING THE BUCK-CATCHERS. Given the threatening nature of Germany’s autarkic and autocratic project, Roosevelt was cognizant that free trade proposals had ever slimming chances. He therefore simultaneously pursued another diplomatic route: organizing a balancing coalition in Europe to which the United States could provide limited assistance. That is, Roosevelt sought to ensure there were European buck-catchers through whom American influence could be felt. Under even more severe domestic constraints than in his peace initiatives, he nonetheless worked hard to apply American power to the European situation through methods that were politically acceptable at home.

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75 Roosevelt to King, October 11, 1938, in Roosevelt, Elliot Roosevelt, and Lash, F.D.R., His Personal Letters, II: 816-817, quote 816; Rofe, Franklin Roosevelt’s Foreign Policy and the Welles Mission, p. 69.
76 Roosevelt to Hitler, Roosevelt to King Victor Emmanuel; April 14, and August 23, 1939, both in FRUS, 1939, I: 130-133, 351-352, quotes 133, 352; For Roosevelt’s other August peace offers see Roosevelt to Hitler, Roosevelt to Moscieki, both August 24, 1939; both in FRUS, 1939, I: 360-362. For State Department peace planning see also, Berle diary, December 27, 29, 1939, and January 4, 1940, in Berle and Jacobs, Navigating the Rapids, pp. 280-281. 77 Hearden, Roosevelt Confronts Hitler, p. 120. On the spring peace offensives, see Robert Dallek, Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945 (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 215-218; Rofe, Franklin Roosevelt’s Foreign Policy and the Welles Mission, Chs. 2-3.
As early as 1935, Roosevelt was pressing for “methods by which the weight of America could be thrown into the scale” in support of European balancers. His first suggestion was that the Allies should establish a complete economic embargo on Germany, under the terminology of a “blockade.” America would then “recognize” the “blockade” as “effective,” and refuse to trade with Germany or invoke neutral rights. After all, “A boycott or sanction could not be recognized by us without Congressional action but a blockade would fall under the Executive’s power after the establishment of the fact.” Roosevelt was soon marrying this kind of stick to the carrot of his peace proposals. In 1937 he suggested “the possibility of evolving a comprehensive international program” that would feature “far-reaching economic measures, drastic disarmament, and a renovation of the existing peace machinery,” to be backed by an embargo on dissenters denying them “the economic benefits of the more nearly just international society.”

These proposals eventually developed, in the context of Japanese aggression, into FDR’s famous “quarantine speech” of early October 1937, which proposed the complete economic isolation of aggressors. Again, the central premise of quarantine diplomacy was to bring American pressure to bear with those instruments that might be domestically acceptable. As Roosevelt put it during a 1937 cabinet meeting, “if Italy and Japan have developed a technique of fighting without declaring war, why can’t we develop one.... We don’t call them economic sanctions, we call them quarantines.” Ickes’ record of a similar discussion notes that “As [Secretary of the Navy] Swanson continued to shout for war in his feeble old voice, the President remarked that he wanted the same result as Swanson, but that he didn’t want to have to go to war to get it.” Major public blowback from the quarantine speech and utter Allied disinterest in such concepts meant that the administration’s plans never got very far internationally. But they were indicative of the direction Roosevelt was trying to move.

This direction can be seen most clearly during the Czech crisis, when Roosevelt’s principal strategy was to stiffen the Allied spine in containing German power. Roosevelt referred contemptuously to appeasement when it was not embedded in his larger plans for revived world trade. Of one particularly frank State Department memo on the topic he wrote: “this written by junior underling in State Department... is half baked and certainly not our current policy.” As the Czech crisis proceeded and it appeared the Allies would not fight over the Sudetenland, Roosevelt privately anticipated a short and brutal German-Czech war, after which Britain and France will “wash the blood from their Judas Iscariot hands.” He continued to outline to his cabinet a picture of defense-dominant world where “France could [not] penetrate the German frontier. It would cost France a million men to do this. Neither could Germany

78 Roosevelt to House, April 10, 1935, in Roosevelt, Elliot Roosevelt, and Lash, F.D.R. His Personal Letters, 1: 472-473; Farnham, Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis, p. 65. Roosevelt developed plans for organizing and covertly participating in an embargo of European aggressors on a host of occasions. If Germany refused to accede to disarmament plans, the rest of Europe “would then establish a two-way blockade around Germany, not permitting anything at all to enter or leave Germany.... We would send an Admiral abroad who would assist in seeing that our ships did not run this blockade.” He also instructed his British ambassador that in the event of a European boycott of German goods, it might be necessary for European balancers “to have troops at the frontiers in order to prevent smuggling,” which would allow him to recognize the action as a military blockade without Congressional approval. Roosevelt further authorized a message to the British that America would be willing “to join with other nations in enforcing such a boycott.” See Dallek, Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, pp. 102-103; Hearden, Roosevelt Confronts Hitler, pp. 76-77.

79 Blum, From the Morgenthau Diaries, 1: 489, see also 457-459; Ickes diary, December 18, 1937, in Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, II: 275, 274. On the quarantine speech, see Farnham, Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis, pp. 65-68.
overcome the Maginot line... Russia cannot strike effectively at Germany across Romania. Neither could England be effective” on land. If the Allies would fight, this was the kind of war that would not require American troops and could be supported with substantial but tacit American aid. 80

Roosevelt did his best to impress this point on the European Allies, assuring them of American support if they would hem in German expansion. British ambassador Lindsay reported on September 12 that Roosevelt was willing to offer the Allies “everything but troops and loans” if they stood firm, as his actions were constrained by domestic political factors. On the 19th, Morgenthau recorded that Roosevelt was “ready to go pretty far in demonstrating United States sympathy for “a defensive war fought from the air and with an economic blockade, and that night the President met secretly with ambassador Lindsay. Roosevelt told him of his willingness to support a British blockade if the Allies could avoid a technical declaration of war, so that he “could find that we were not at war, and that the [Neutrality Act] prohibition of export on arms need not be applied to us.” Even if the Neutrality Act had to be invoked, Roosevelt proposed ways around it by shipping war materials to Canada where they could be assembled and re-exported. During the meeting, Roosevelt was “quite alive to the possibility that somehow or other in indefinable circumstances the United States might again find themselves involved in a European war,” but thought it was “almost inconceivable that it would be possible for him to send any troops across the Atlantic” unless England itself was invaded. All the more reason to wage the kind of war to which America could give immediate tacit aid and perhaps someday its full public support. 81

Roosevelt followed through on his policy of organizing and strengthening a European balancing coalition after it became clear to him in early October how much had been given up at Munich. He had remarked at several points before and during the crisis that “in carrying out our neutrality laws we would resolve all doubts in favor of the democratic countries.” Roosevelt aggressively sought the ability to decide when a state of war existed and to distinguish between aggressors and victims, which was a(n illegal) reality by the autumn of 1938, when the President planned the export of restricted materials to Canada. He also assured British Prime Minister Chamberlin that in the event of war he would “help all I can” and that “the industrial resources of the American nation [were] behind [Britain] in the event of war with the dictatorships.” As Roosevelt moved to put as much American weight behind the containment of Germany as was feasible, plans for implementing the “Arsenal of Democracy” concept were being made well before the outbreak of war. 82

80 Ibid., p. 62, n. 56. Ickes diary, September 18, 1938, in Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, II: 469, 468, see also 474.
81 David Reynolds, The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937-41: A Study in Competitive Cooperation (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 34, 35; Farnham, Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis, pp. 106-108, quotes 107. The seriousness of Roosevelt’s domestic situation can be seen in that only Morgenthau and Bullitt within the administration knew the President was meeting with Lindsay, and that he told the ambassador that “it must not be known to anyone that he has even breathed a suggestion” along the lines of his proposals. “If it transpired he would almost [certainly] be impeached and the suggestion would be hopelessly prejudiced.” See Ibid., p. 106.
82 Ickes diary, September 24, 1938, in Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, II: 474; Roosevelt to Dodd, December 2, 1935, in Mark M. Lowenthal, Leadership and Indecision: American War Planning and Policy Process, 1937-1942 (New York: Garland, 1988), I: 89. Roosevelt is sometimes incorrectly accused of supporting the Munich agreement. In fact, though he was briefly relieved that war had been avoided, his attempts to mediate the conflict had been based on the belief that the Czech government had agreed in principle with Hitler’s mid-September
In order to implement his diplomatic concepts for buckpassing to a European coalition, Roosevelt made efforts both to stiffen British and French resolve in 1939. He repeatedly urged Britain and France to speed up their rearmament and told them that America could only help those who helped themselves. He told Lord Lothian that “he would do nothing if Great Britain cringed like a coward” and that the British needed to drop their “We who are about to die, salute thee’ attitude…. What the British need today is a good stiff grog…” At the same time, the President worked hard to repeal the neutrality acts and formalize American support for Britain. Roosevelt met repeatedly with House and Senate leaders throughout the spring of 1939, telling them that “every possible effort should be made” to repeal the arms embargo, which “would make less likely a victory for the powers unfriendly to the United States.” After fighting opposition every step of the way, repeal was defeated, and Roosevelt indicated to congressional leaders that he would take the issue to the people. When war broke out in the fall he kept his promise, successfully repealing the arms embargo. And in fulfillment of his earlier concepts, the State Department raised hardly a protest at the imposition of the British blockade. 83

MILITARY POLICY

Roosevelt’s military policy was a compromise between domestic pressure for hemispheric unilateralism and his own desire to influence the structure of European power. Rather than push for a large, balanced rearmament program designed to secure the Western hemisphere, which held wide political support, he aimed at an ambitious program of air rearmament intended to facilitate British and French strength. This program would allow American resources to make a rapid impact in Europe, while still free-riding on the Allied coalition. Additionally, he took several other steps to prepare for limited American participation in the European war: he intervened to restructure American war plans, reorganized the defense bureaucracy, increased naval procurement, and coordinated military planning with the British.

AIR REARMAMENT AND BUCKPASSING. Following the Munich agreement, Roosevelt moved America’s buckpassing strategy into high gear by pushing for an ambitious program of airpower production. The goal of the program was to produce thousands of combat aircraft that could be sold to the Allies as well as to build the industrial facilities capable of producing many thousand additional planes. The program would also facilitate American rearmament, though that was not its primary goal. Instead, Roosevelt hoped to reinforce his diplomatic efforts in Europe by strengthening the European balancing coalition. Moreover, he rejected the politically easier path of proposing massive American rearmament in defense of the Western hemisphere, thereby rejecting the non-entanglement strategy. He did so not out of concern for its fiscal costs, about which he displayed a lack of concern often found among positive liberals, but because he was determined halt Germany in Europe.

83 Ickes diary, January 29, 1939, in Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, II: 571; Lowenthal, Leadership and Indecision, I: 101; Farnham, Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis, p. 206. On the President’s activism in the first neutrality fight of 1939, see Farnham, Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis, pp. 205-211. On the lack of action against the British embargo and the ultimate repeal of the arms embargo, see Hearden, Roosevelt Confronts Hitler, pp. 138-140.
The essence of Roosevelt’s program was the creation of a large industrial base for the construction of airplanes and the immediate production of as many combat top-line aircraft as possible. The plan was put together at a secret retreat at the President’s home in Hyde Park, New York in mid-October, 1938. Presidential “fixer” Harry Hopkins and Treasury Secretary Morgenthau were the only high American officials present, with representatives from the State, War, and Navy departments conspicuously absent. French and British representatives, though, were in attendance. According to Morgenthau’s description, the purpose of the meeting was to work out the logistics and finance of “our producing 15,000 airplanes a year for this country... he is thinking in terms of three shifts.... [and] eight plants located around the United States.”

The President had no problem with the associated costs, initially suggesting a $3 billion figure—nearly half of all federal spending combined—to be paid for with $2.5 billion in deficit spending. Morgenthau noted that “When I talked to the President about taxes, he didn’t seem interested.”

Roosevelt wasn’t much interested in building an American air force either, as it turned out. The primary purpose of the program was gain what leverage he could by supplying the British and the French. At a November 14 cabinet meeting designed to propel his plans through the bureaucracy, Roosevelt explained that “When I write to foreign countries I must have something to back up my words. Had we this summer 5,000 planes and the capacity to immediately produce 10,000 per year, even though I might have to ask Congress for authority to sell or lend them to the countries in Europe, Hitler would not have dared to take the stand he did.” Moreover, he thought that “our only important need was... an abundance of aeroplanes. He said there was little need of more battleships, forts, military posts and ammunitions.”

Army Air Corps General Hap Arnold concluded that “the President did not seem to want an American air force at all, feeling that new barracks in Wyoming ‘would not scare Hitler’; what he wanted was ‘airplanes—now—lots of them.’” Another military officer present believed Roosevelt’s purpose was to help the Allies “to build up aerial fleets that might overawe Hitler or..., if war should come,... even help to defeat Hitler without American armed intervention” on the ground.

After dictating his policy to a surprised cabinet and an opposed military bureaucracy, Roosevelt worked hard to press his policy to fruition. He continued planning “to do his best to provide partly-finished basic materials, which did not come within the Neutrality law, for an extra 20,000 to 30,000 planes.” As part of a broader study of “how the American aircraft industry could best serve France’s need,” Roosevelt appointed a liaison officer to exchange design and manufacturing information with the Allies, thus circumventing “existing official channels.” He promised to get around the congressional prohibition on foreign loans, claiming that money could be made “to seep through” if necessary. And, over the vitriolic opposition of the Army, Roosevelt authorized the French to inspect and buy secret experimental American aircraft not yet in production. Morgenthau shoved the decision down the War Department’s

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84 Farnham, Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis, pp. 177, 178. On original cost and deficit estimates, see Ibid., pp. 176, n. 12, 178. Both the cost amounts and the number of planes diminished as policy moved forward and Roosevelt was forced to confront the realities of plane production. “Every time I have talked to the President the number of planes he has in mind has become less,” Morgenthau noted. “In about the month or so that the President has been discussing this thing, he is getting more and more practical about it... he has gone from 40,000 planes a year down to 10,000 planes in two years. So I think we have made some progress.” See Blum, From the Morgenthau Diaries, II: 47; Farnham, Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis, p. 182, n. 33.

85 Farnham, Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis, pp. 184, 185.
throat with typical aplomb: “The President of the United States says that we consider the Maginot line our first line of defense.... Those are my orders.”

Roosevelt obviously expected his policy of buckpassing to the Allies to complement American rearmament. As he put it in a January 10 meeting assaulting the Army bureaucracy, “the only check to a world war, which would be understood in Germany, would be the creation of a great [French] air force and a powerful force in this country.” But the Allies would have clear priority; the needs of hemispheric defense were slighted. For instance, while naval aviation would be a critical part of defending South America, the Navy was given only a couple of hundred planes. Morgenthau recorded that “As far as the Navy is concerned, [Roosevelt] said they’ve got enough.” Roosevelt also slighted the Army as an insufficient influence on Hitler, arguing that even if “a 400,000 manned army were in being and were well equipped” it would have nowhere near the deterrent influence of “a heavy striking force of aircraft.” Finally, he explicitly ordered that priority be given to Allied orders “even if this meant the postponement of our own buying program.” This priority persisted even after the war had begun: “up to a certain number, at any rate, we would let England and France have first call.”

Most critically, Roosevelt made these decisions in the face of a domestically superior alternative policy: extensive rearmament for defending the Western hemisphere. That there was large congressional support for rearmament was well known at the time; every major defense bill or military appropriation between 1937 and 1940 passed with large margins, including a majority of isolationist votes. One isolationist senator justified Congress’ refusal to repeal the neutrality acts to Roosevelt by arguing that “Congress had just passed a two billion dollar national defense bill” which was all the “ammunition” America needed against the dictators.

Moreover, the military bureaucracy was unremittingly hostile to the President’s program, demanding a “balanced rearmament” among the services, and one that took the priority of hemispheric defense seriously. It was military opposition to his program before Congress that forced Roosevelt to meet with the Senate Military Affairs committee. But instead of accepting a large, balanced rearmament program, he privately defended his commitment to aid the Allies while publically casting his policy as hemispheric defense. In so doing he willingly chose to

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86 Ibid., pp. 179, 176, 191; Reynolds, The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, pp. 42-43, quote 43; Blum, From the Morgenthau Diaries, II: 68. Roosevelt had to jam his measures through the military bureaucracy at several points, especially when he ordered that the French be given access to classified American planes under development. Roosevelt stated “that he desired that every effort be made to give [the French] all available planes, equipment and motors to assist in building up their air forces.” As a Treasury Department memo summarized, Roosevelt had “an evident wish and desire that every effort be made to expedite the procurement of any type of plane desired by the French government.” See, Farnham, Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis, p. 192.

87 Ibid., pp. 191-192, 177, n.15 (see also 185, n. 41), 149; Ickes Diary, December 24, 1938 and December 10, 1939, in Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, II: 531-532, III: 84-85. Undoubtedly, Roosevelt’s interest in aircraft production was influenced by some of the general airpower lunacy that was in the water throughout the 1930s. See, e.g., Herbert S. Dinerstein, “The Impact of Air Power on the International Scene, 1933-1940,” Military Affairs 19, no. 2 (July 1, 1955): 65-71. But, even granting that he held some false beliefs, his program represented a coherent way for him to press for international influence and to buttress the European balancers.

absorb a great deal of political punishment, calculating that in the end his strategy would be acceptable to the American people. ORGANIZING, PLANNING, AND COORDINATING FOR WAR. Roosevelt also took a series of other military steps to facilitate his buckpassing strategy. The thrust of these steps was to ensure his personal control of American military policy and to prepare the country's defenses for the possibility of being drawn into a European war.

Roosevelt began to express dissatisfaction with existing military options in 1937, when he ordered the military to scrap its ultra-aggressive war plan ORANGE for a unilateral offensive in the Western Pacific and to replace it with a plan that envisioned a two-ocean war fought with Great Britain as an ally. These orders ultimately resulted in the five RAINBOW war plans, three of which were premised on an explicit alliance with the European Allies. At the same time, Roosevelt worked to make sure his strategic priorities would be followed within the bureaucracy. He personally handpicked Admiral Harold Stark to be the Chief of Naval operations and General George Marshall to be the Army Chief of Staff, going well down the seniority lists in order to promote them. In July 1939, Roosevelt further provided his chosen chiefs with a direct link to him by transferring the Army-Navy Joint Board to the executive office of the President and by requiring all major military decisions to have his approval.

In naval matters, Roosevelt actually began his rearmament push before Munich. He authorized a 20% increase in force levels in 1937, adding significantly to what was already a $500 million dollar expansion effort. He also approved a series of naval talks with the British in order to coordinate planning in case of war. During these talks, the United States agreed to concentrate its fleet in the Pacific to relieve the British Fleet for war in European waters, while providing patrolling and limited cruiser assistance in the Atlantic. When war occurred, these patrols were instituted under the guise of a "neutrality zone" for the Western hemisphere. Roosevelt himself expected to be very aggressive with these patrols in order to limit the liabilities of the British fleet to the Eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean.

SUMMARY OF AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY, 1937-1941

Contrary to TLFP's ceterus paribus expectations, the Roosevelt administration did not pursue a balancing strategy before the fall of France. All other things were not equal—Roosevelt faced strict domestic constraints that limited his ability to make commitments abroad. Instead, he opted for a buckpassing strategy as a second-best option, reaching for as much international influence over the balance of power as could be obtained while still free-riding on the efforts of

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91 On these naval issues, see Brune, Origins of American National Security Policy, pp. 106-114; Hearden, Roosevelt Confronts Hitler, pp. 73-75; Reynolds, The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, p. 61. Roosevelt hoped American neutrality patrols could help keep the Germans at bay in the Atlantic. As he told King George VI, America would "have a patrol from Newfoundland down to South America and if some submarines are laying there and try to interrupt an American flag and our Navy sinks them, it’s just too bad. What are they going to do? In other words, he is going to play the game the way they are doing it now. If we fire and sink an Italian or German, well...we will say the way the Japs do, ‘So sorry.’ ‘Never happen again.’ Tomorrow we sink two." Farnham, Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis, p. 213, n. 153.
other poles. The process of American strategy formation bears out the predictions of TLFP’s geopolitical and liberal variables. The systemic pressure of rising German power raised real fears within the administration about the integrity of the Western hemisphere. These fears also were intimately tied to a positive liberal worldview: German autarky threatened to restrict American trading rights in Latin America and throughout the world. To shape a more suitable balance of power, the Roosevelt administration sought greater international control through its military and diplomatic policy, attempting to negotiate a liberal commercial peace and to organize and support a European balancing coalition within domestic constraints.

Several pieces of evidence confirm TLFP’s causal process predictions in especially persuasive fashion. First, as German power expanded, the Roosevelt administration became concerned about the military penetration of the Western hemisphere, but largely because it was linked to other positive liberal worries. The set of dominoes that had to fall in Latin America were ideological and economic in origin, and were part of a larger fear of the German autocratic and autarkic project. Roosevelt worried that if Germany kept expanding, liberal values would be sacrificed: American trading rights would be curtailed and the New Deal political order would be threatened. This led the administration to decide that Germany simply could not be allowed to remain the first ranked power in Europe, even before it became a potential hegemon.

Second, achieving this demanding configuration of power meant Roosevelt required more international leverage. He reached out with diplomatic and military tools in order to get it. He did his best to organize a European balancing coalition during and after Munich, promising all aid short of war to help the Allies contain Hitler. Roosevelt tried solution after solution to help America throw its weight on the scales, making proposals for “quarantines” and end runs around the neutrality acts. Most notably, Roosevelt fought to arm the Allies with American aircraft, hoping to turn American factories into a kind of aerospace arsenal for European democracy, two years before his famous speech of that name. He did so while seeking an unbalanced rearmament at home, trying to prepare America for war with the only weapons he believed could be used to influence the European balance of power: air and naval power.

Third, Roosevelt’s diplomacy was motivated by positive liberal aims. He made several attempts to negotiate a settlement in Europe based on open trade and non-discrimination. The end of German autarky was the key element in these plans; if Germany could be brought back into peaceful world commerce he was willing to tolerate the appeasement of German territorial ambitions. As the war progressed and the prospects for peace dropped, Roosevelt thought about the post-war world in terms of commercial openness and the “four freedoms,” ordering peace planning begun on this liberal basis well before he had announced these goals publically.

Finally, the impact of domestic political constraints is readily apparent in the Roosevelt administration’s diplomacy. Before Munich, Roosevelt found naval blockade and economic support for the European balancers attractive because they could be employed without Congressional approval. After Munich, air and naval rearmament were chosen because such weapons could be produced under the guise of defending the Western hemisphere—Congress might permit a balanced rearmament to buttress a non-entanglement posture, but Roosevelt understood he could never deploy ground troops to Europe. Roosevelt therefore deployed arguments about the military threat to the Western hemisphere publically and instrumentally, even as he privately believed the European Allies would block Hitler and admitted his strategy was to help them in Europe. If America were going to exert the kind of control over the European balance of power needed to see Hitler defeated, Roosevelt had to use politically acceptable tools.
Roosevelt's strategy failed because his expansive goals for the balance of power outran his buckpassing tools. Peace strategies had little hope of coming to fruition when neither the Allies or the Axis would listen to them, and Roosevelt's lack of diplomatic leverage meant the Europeans controlled the relationship. Military support from the air and sea could buttress allied power, but it could not stop the German onslaught on land when it came. Broad liberal goals required more extensive balancing commitments—commitments Roosevelt could not make politically. But as security pressures rose, those constraints would loosen, allowing TLFP's variables to push American posture towards balancing.

American Grand Strategy, 1940-1941: Transition to Balancing

On May 10, 1940, the Wehrmacht invaded France and essentially defeated the French Army within a few days. This victory radically changed the balance of power, making Germany a potential hegemon in Europe and causing America to change grand strategies. Over the course of 1940 and 1941, Roosevelt transitioned to a balancing strategy: he sought to make a forward commitment of American power to the continent, preparing for a ground force intervention to destroy the German power position. But still constrained by domestic political aversion to a European land war, the move to balancing was halting and gradual, as Roosevelt probed for ways to overcome opposition and lead the country into full participation in the war. America's strategic shift was nevertheless clear from the response to the increased threat of German power, military preparations for future American security, and diplomatic maneuvering to involve America in the conflict.

Fears for American security rose dramatically in May 1940, and after a brief delay, resulted in the decisive rejection of a non-entanglement strategy in favor of increased aid to Britain. American statesmen clearly decided that Germany's military machine had to be smashed and its political position devastated. The Lend-Lease program committed America to a costly program of supporting a British victory that American leaders knew London could not win alone. Roosevelt's increasingly aggressive naval posture in the Atlantic secured Britain's lifeline and sought to provoke Germany into open hostilities. Roosevelt further adopted a confrontational policy towards Japan, virtually ensuring the Pacific conflict that eventually eroded the domestic hurdles to an American invasion of Europe.

TLFP's logic drove this strategic shift from buckpassing to balancing. The emergence of a European potential hegemon was unquestionably the strongest force driving policy during the period, informing military planning, defense decisions, and the firm commitment to British survival. But it is crucial to recognize that a buckpassing strategy founded on the continued survival of Britain through naval and economic support was plausible and had high-level advocates in the administration. Indeed, the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union made this strategy especially promising, since Stalin would be a powerful buck-catcher if he could survive the initial onslaught. No doubt, the concern that Germany might win a quick victory or consolidate an overwhelming position in Western Russia was a powerful geopolitical incentive to balance, and increased the aggressiveness of American policy. But the Eastern front also presented an enticing opportunity for further buckpassing. Geopolitical threat did not, therefore, completely determine American strategy.

The Roosevelt administration's positive liberal fear of a closed world economic system also influenced the decision to balance rather than buckpass. Military planning documents advocating balancing reveal that American interests in Europe were defined in terms of
American trade and its rights to equal commercial opportunity. An expanded zone of German autarky in Europe was unacceptable, even if Britain survived. Furthermore, two of the major moves towards intervention had been decided before the invasion of the Soviet Union: Lend-Lease and escalation in the Atlantic. The positive liberal impetus of the balancing decision can also be observed in the administration’s vision for the post-war order.

All of these factors thus continue to show the influence of positive liberal values on American strategic choices during the period. This logic is especially evident upon closer examination of three strategic areas: American perception and response to European threats, military policy, and diplomatic policy.

RESPONSE TO EUROPEAN THREATS

With the fall of France, administration perception of geopolitical threats rose sharply and determined the immediate policy responses to shore up the defenses of the Western hemisphere. After a short delay, these same geopolitical forces also propelled Roosevelt to decisively reject non-entanglement in favor of continued buckpassing to Britain, increasing America’s level of commitment and support. At the same time, positive liberal threat perceptions were still present in administration discourse, indicating that the perceived problem of German autarky had only increased with Germany’s potential hegemony.

MATERIAL THREAT: THE EMERGENCE OF A POTENTIAL HEGEMON. On April 29th, 1940, Roosevelt wrote Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, urging him to stay out of European war. “I see no reason,” Roosevelt argued, “to anticipate that any one nation, or any one combination of nations, can successfully undertake to dominate either the continent of Europe or much less a greater part of the world.” Within three weeks, this sentiment and the strategy that overlay it were in ruins. Hitler had routed France and Britain, destroying the European balance of power and establishing the Third Reich as a potential hegemon. Germany’s new position was a threat to the Western hemisphere. Though balancing did not come immediately, systemic pressures quickly came to dominate American grand strategy, exactly as TLFP, and indeed any geopolitical theory, predicts.92

Geopolitical pressures had been growing in administration thinking as the war heated up. An early 1940 version of RAINBOW 5, the war plan that would later become the basis of American strategy as the world crisis progressed, was premised on the defeat of Britain or France “with a resultant threat to the security of the United States and to the letter or the spirit of the Monroe Doctrine.” Assistant Secretary of State and presidential confidante Adolph Berle reflected the common administration belief that America had “a very real and solid interest in having the British, not the Germans, dominate the Atlantic.” Roosevelt himself worried that the American people were too confident in keeping out of the war, reflecting privately that he was “not going around thanking God for allowing us physical safety within our continental limits.” In fact, he argued the oceans were not the “reasonably adequate defensive barriers [of] the past.” The United States could not afford to “wage a last-ditch battle for American independence” against a European hegemon; it would be “suicide” to “wait until they are in our front yard.”93

92 Roosevelt to Mussolini, April 29, 1940, FRUS, 1940, II: 691-692, quote 692.
By the middle of May 1940, Germany was, if not in the front yard, then busy ripping up the neighbor’s garden. The physical and political integrity of the Western hemisphere was no longer a rhetorical convenience, but the target of imminent danger. The Latin America bureau of the State Department reported that “It is daily clearer that the situation in Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil is deteriorating in the sense that a successful revolution backed by the Nazis is becoming a more likely possibility.” Political change could easily become militarily significant; Marshall worried about “the possibility of a sudden seizure of airfields and ports in Northeast Brazil by forces already in the country and acting in collusion with small German forces.” “In view of... the rapidity with which Germany develops operations once her preparations are complete,” Marshall wrote, “we now face the distinct possibility of a lodgment by small German forces in Northeast Brazil which would require a very strong effort on our part to dislodge.” These widespread worries led Roosevelt to demand crash military plans for an expeditionary force of 100,000 men to Brazil, code-named POT OF GOLD. Though far beyond existing military capabilities, the plan reflected the level of security fear permeating the administration. 94

German military successes meant these fears persisted throughout 1941. On the eve of Hitler’s invasion of Russia, Assistant Secretary of State and Roosevelt’s close friend Sumner Wells expressed a common concern: “The situation is changing with great rapidity and the possibility of German aggression against the Western hemisphere is becoming more imminent. In the considered judgment of the President and of the service heads of the War and Navy Departments, the most vulnerable points from the standpoint of the security of the Western hemisphere” were in Iceland and Brazil. These fears seem surreal in light of large streams of intelligence that suggested Hitler was preparing for war, or at least coercive diplomacy, with Stalin. That they were taken seriously, and acted upon, shows the increased significance of hemispheric vulnerability after the fall of France. The economic and ideological possibilities in Latin American societies took on ominous military significance in the geopolitically threatening world of 1940-1941.95

A closely related geopolitical concern was the survival of the Allied fleets. After the invasion of France, Roosevelt hastily prioritized RAINBOW 4, the military plan for unilateral defense of the Western hemisphere. The plan noted that the surrender of the Allied fleets to Germany would rapidly create “naval equality or superiority with respect to the United States Fleet” and that “Even the destruction of the British and French Fleets will afford Germany and Italy naval freedom of action in the Atlantic.” Therefore, the plan emphasized, “the date of the loss of the British or French Fleets automatically sets the date of our mobilization.” Much of Roosevelt’s frenzied diplomacy in May-June of 1940 was centered on preserving the European navies, without which he saw “nothing between the Americas and those new forces in Europe.” Desperately trying to keep the French in the war, Roosevelt warned them that “we regard the


retention of the French fleet as a force in being as vital to the reconstitution of France and of French colonies and to the ultimate control of the Atlantic.... The same thought is being conveyed in the strictest confidence to the British regarding the British fleet.”

Even after summer 1940, these geopolitical concerns remained the foundation of American strategy. Following Roosevelt’s reelection in November 1940, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Harold Stark submitted the famous “Plan Dog” memorandum to the President. The memo outlined a grand strategy that regarded the “the balance of power existing in Europe” as a “strong pillar of the defense structure of the Americas.” Stark argued that “The collapse of Great Britain or the destruction or surrender of the British Fleet will destroy this balance and will free European military power for possible encroachment on this hemisphere.” Roosevelt’s tacit approval of Plan Dog led to talks with the British that produced a joint war plan known as ABC-1. As that document argued, America “must maintain such dispositions as will prevent the extension in the Western Hemisphere of European or Asiatic political or military power.” Roosevelt himself also continued to express fears of a hemispheric threat in 1941.

In short, evidence from the policy-making process and Roosevelt’s own views strongly support the logic of TLFP. The surprise emergence of Germany as a potential European hegemon was the overwhelmingly dominant driver of American strategy. The administration’s threat perceptions are aptly summarized in the diary of Colonel Paul Robinett, an important military planner, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union: “Germany and Russia are fighting for world domination, [and] which ever wins will be a long way on the road to domination…; finally, if any one power dominates Asia. Europe, and Africa, our country will ultimately become a second class power even if we gain South America and the whole of North America.”

ROOSEVELT REJECTS NON-ENTANGLEMENT. Once the balance of power had shifted, the first important decision facing the administration was whether it could continue its buckpassing strategy, or whether German success had reduced the efforts of 1937-1939 to a shambles. Though the decision seems obvious now, it was not at the time. The United States military and many within the administration were advocating a grand strategy of non-entanglement: abandoning Britain and preparing to defend the Western hemisphere alone. But after a period of indecision, Roosevelt continued his buckpassing strategy and increased American commitments to Britain—essentially laying the ground for the balancing strategy he preferred.

In a May 22 memorandum entitled “National Strategic Decisions,” Army Chief of Staff George Marshall listed several “Further imminently probable complications of today’s situation,” including: “Nazi-inspired revolution in Brazil”; “Widespread disorders with attacks on U.S. citizens in Mexico and raids along our southern border”; “Decisive Allied defeat, followed by German aggression in the Western Hemisphere”; and “all combined.” American

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98 Quoted in Stoler, Allies and Adversaries, p. 50.
unpreparedness meant that only the Western hemisphere could be protected adequately, and this implied decisions “as to what we are not going to do.” Marshall’s memo set the agenda for a meeting with Roosevelt, Stark, and Welles, and its implications were clear. As Marshall later put it to Secretary of the Treasury Morgenthau, “we have got to weigh the hazards in this hemisphere of one thing or another.” Sending all immediate aid to Britain, as requested by Churchill, would be “a drop in the bucket on the other side [of the Atlantic], and it is a very vital necessity on this side.... Tragic as it is, that is that.” One officer would argue in June that if America sent aid to Britain and she fell, “every one who was a party to the deal might hope to be found hanging from a lamp post.” At the meeting on the 22nd, all parties agreed that avoid confrontations in the Pacific and “that we must concentrate on the South American situation.”99

These fears for the Western hemisphere and the threat of British defeat delayed serious aid to Britain for several months. But both before and after the meeting on the 22nd, Roosevelt was pushing for ways to maintain his buckpassing strategy and increase American resistance to Germany. On May 16, he instructed Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau to swap existing American aircraft for the future orders the French had placed, justifying the risk by suggesting that “after all, we will not be in the war for 60 or 90 days.” Welles argued only two weeks later that “our influence would probably be the decisive factor if we could send our fleet and air force to Europe” and complained bitterly that by the time “the American people are ready to act it might be to late to save the allies.” But Roosevelt’s electoral constraints notwithstanding, Sumner Welles recommended building up a military force “for other purposes, if advisable, than the strict defense of the Western hemisphere.”100

On June 13, Roosevelt instructed the military to plan on the assumption that Britain and France would remain in the war, fighting from their empires if necessary, and that American air and naval units would be actively involved in the war. He fought against Marshall’s dogged insistence on holding back American materiel from Britain, and achieved a compromise that “overruled the military” on the matter of “continued aid to Britain”: Britain could be sent such equipment as would help her stay in the war until the end of the year. Sales to Britain in June of heavy guns, rifles, and ammunition reduced American stocks by twenty-five percent. In late June, the Roosevelt approved naval staff talks with the British to coordinate cooperation and contingency planning.101

These efforts culminated in the destroyers-for-bases deal, approved on August 2. Immediately upon becoming Prime Minister, Churchill had requested extensive American aid, including a number of World War I era destroyers to assist with naval patrols while new construction was coming on line. At first, the administration resisted, worried about American needs and pointing to the restriction Congress had put on the sale of surplus material without approval by the service chiefs that it was unnecessary for national defense. But by the middle of July, Roosevelt was changing his mind. Ultimately, the administration exchanged fifty old

101 On Roosevelt’s efforts to secure more support for Britain, see Stoler, Allies and Adversaries, pp. 25-29; Lowenthal, Leadership and Indecision, I: 297-301, 307-311; Reynolds, The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, pp. 109-113. As noted in the next, by no means was American policy decisive in this period. The entire administration worried Britain would fall, including Roosevelt. But the direction of the President’s thinking is clear.
destroyers for the rights to lease naval and air bases on British possessions in the Caribbean and Churchill’s private pledge never to surrender the British Fleet. 102

To make the deal, Roosevelt employed dubious legal arguments cooked up by Benjamin Cohen and Dean Acheson arguing that he could, by executive order, act directly contrary to the relevant Congressional legislation. He also worked assiduously to secure the support of Wendell Willkie, his internationalist Republican opponent in the 1940 election. On some accounts, he threatened Admiral Stark with relief as CNO if he would not publically approve the deal, which the Navy hated. It was an extraordinary effort for a momentous strategic decision. As Mark Lowenthal argues, the decision, after months of stalling, “now represented a definite commitment to Britain’s resistance and survival.” 103

Roosevelt’s decision to continue and increase American commitment was the logical implication of his acceptance of the geopolitical problem. As Churchill cabled him, if a battle for Britain went poorly, his government might fall and be replaced with a collaborationist government. If “others came in to parlay amid the ruins,” Churchill wrote, “you must not be blind to the fact that the sole remaining bargaining counter would be the fleet.” Once joined with “the great resources of German industry, overwhelming sea power would be in Hitler’s hands.” Moreover, as British Ambassador Lord Lothian, any successful attack on Britain “would automatically imply the loss of a large proportion of our fleet.” The hawkish members of the cabinet pushed this same syllogism throughout the summer; protecting the Western hemisphere meant protecting the British fleet, and protecting the fleet meant sending the destroyers. Roosevelt himself summarized his strategic rationale in a rare personal account of the August 2 cabinet meeting: “It was the general opinion, without any dissenting voice, that the survival of the British Isles under German attack might very possibly depend on their getting these destroyers.” 104 The strategic decision had been made: America would cast its lot with Great Britain.

IDEOLOGICAL THREATS: GERMAN AUTARKY DOMINANT. Despite the powerful influence of geopolitical threats during the chaotic summer of 1940, the Roosevelt administration’s positive liberal fears of German autarky had not disappeared. Indeed, they strongly shaped diplomatic and military policy as the American posture developed prior to Pearl Harbor.

On May 17, 1940, as the extent of German victories became more apparent, Roosevelt worried to Vice President Henry Wallace about American trading rights “if England and France were completely wiped out and we lost the entire European market.” Morgenthau openly worried that “The Germans will form some sort of over-all trading corporation” after the war that would discriminate or exclude American products. Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long bleakly recorded in his diary on May 28 that “if Germany wins this war and subordinates

102 On the destroyers for bases deal, which is generally regarded as a pivotal decision in American policy, see Kershaw, Fateful Choices, pp. 208-220; Lowenthal, Leadership and Indecision, I: 311-346; Reynolds, The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, pp. 121-132.
Europe, every commercial order will be routed to Berlin and filled under its orders somewhere in Europe rather than the United States.” In markets to which American merchants still had access, they would “have to compete against [the] slave labor of Europe,” which would cause a return to the “falling prices” and “declining profits” of the Depression, “with the consequent social and political disturbances.” Either the New Deal would have to be abandoned, or even stricter controls on the economy put in place.

A regnant German economy in Europe would rapidly erode America trading rights in the rest of the world. Berle warned the President on May 25 that once Berlin was the purchasing agent for three hundred million Europeans, it would come to dominate markets in the Western hemisphere. As Sumner Welles put it on May 31, “If there were a German customs and monetary union throughout Europe and the Argentine were notified that it could only export its goods to Europe under the terms dictated by Germany the Argentine would quickly acquiesce.” The administration quickly began planning to protect a free-trade zone in the Western hemisphere by investigating the possibility of a giant monetary and customs union. State Department official Will Clayton grimly summarized that “If the rest of the world adopts totalitarian methods of trade we will be compelled to conform.” Roosevelt ordered planning for the project to proceed quickly, since “it was necessary to move forward at once in as much as if England blew up Germany would begin making effective trade agreements in Latin America and we would be on the scene too late.”

These plans were abandoned because of technical difficulties and the growing belief that Britain could hold out. But positive liberal fears of German autarky continued to seep into the Roosevelt administration’s plans. Admiral Stark’s November 1940 Plan Dog memorandum defined “the possession of a profitable foreign trade, both in raw material and in finished goods” as a critical national interest and a foundation of military strength. This interest justified Stark’s interventionist stance, since “The restoration of foreign trade, particularly with Europe, may depend on the continued integrity of the British Empire.” The September 1941 Victory Program went even further, establishing as one of American war aims “the establishment of regimes favorable to economic freedom and individual liberty” at least “as far as practicable.”

For their part, Army planners nearly revolted. Colonel Paul Robinett described the document as “the imposition of our own ideology upon the world.” Marshall wrote to Stark that the liberal war aims “seem purely political and therefore somewhat out of place in this paper.” But the paper was a political document ordered by the politician-in-chief on behalf of his political aims. The liberal language stayed in the Victory Program and demonstrates the continued impact of positive liberal threat perceptions as the administration thought about the future European situation.

MILITARY POLICY

The Roosevelt administration’s military policy opens another window into the evolution of American grand strategy after Germany emerged as a potential hegemon. The need to plan and procure for America’s future security in the midst of the world crisis forced the administration to make a choice. Should it continue buckpassing, aiming to keep Britain alive

and the Atlantic secure, but not otherwise commit to the eventual defeat of Germany? Or should it prepare for an eventual offensive to break German power and remake the European order? The buckpassing strategy was quite plausible and had influential advocates within the administration. But overwhelmingly, American statesmen chose to prepare for balancing. Military planning, civilian opinion, and defense preparations all revealed the administration’s concept of the future balance of power. German ownership of continental Western Europe was intolerable; there could be no negotiated peace. The United States would require a large army to annihilate Hitler’s regime.

THE BUCKPASSING ALTERNATIVE. The case for continued buckpassing to Britain, rather than adopting a balancing policy of full belligerency, remained viable until December 7, 1941. The strength of the buckpassing argument was especially potent after Hitler attacked Russia in June 1941, as it brought to the fore a second and even more powerful buck-catcher than Britain. Indeed, some historians believe Roosevelt aimed at a buckpassing strategy until Pearl Harbor, arguing like David Reynolds that he sought to make the American contribution in “arms not armies—acting as the arsenal of democracy and guardian of the oceans, but not involved in another major land war in Europe.” These judgments, the existence of viable buck-catchers, and the presence of vocal buckpassing arguments within the administration all suggest that the strategic choice between balancing and buckpassing was not fully determined by the pressures of the international system.108

There was a strong continentalist and isolationist strain of thinking in the United States military, particularly in the Army, which made its presence felt from 1940-41. Led by Lt. General Stanley Embick, these officers felt that the Western hemisphere was eminently defensible so long as Britain survived, which did not mean either the Churchill government or the British Empire had to survive. Embick warned that America should not let itself be “duped” into voluntarily entering the war, as it had in 1917. Embick was pulled out of retirement by Marshall to be his strategic advisor and to serve “in a confidential capacity at the White House” as a personal military advisor to the President. His advice was taken very seriously: he briefed Stimson and Roosevelt on his opposition to armed convoys for goods bound to Britain and his disapproval of the British Mediterranean strategy. Apparently, he was influential in delaying the use of convoys and squashing Roosevelt’s plans for intervention in North Africa in spring 1941. Even Stimson, whose views were 180 degrees opposite of Embick’s, saw him as “one of our best strategists—a Retired General whom we all rely on, including the President.”109

As Mark Stoler points out, “Embick was far from alone in such beliefs.” Important Army planners and advisors to Marshall like Colonel Paul Robinett complained that “U.S. policy now follows British policy.” America was little more than a slave to British imperial policy and its “false leader” Churchill. According to this view, American strategy should focus instead on securing island outposts in the Western hemisphere behind which “a vast fleet could range from

continental bases.” Such dissent became so frequent from Army planners that in April 1941 Stimson had to order Marshall to muzzle and reassign buckpassing advocates. But even Marshall himself was willing to make the buckpassing argument in high places. He reflected in May 1941 that “we will not need a 4,000,000 man Army unless England collapses,” and he urged a focus on defending Latin America “beyond a shadow of a doubt.” Marshall agreed with the consensus that “collapse in the Atlantic would be fatal” but sometimes served as a voice for the elements in the administration who saw the prevention of such a collapse as a maximum goal. 110

The persistence of buckpassing arguments shows that despite the disaster caused by the fall of France, the United States still had a viable geopolitical position. If Britain could hold, Hitler would be hemmed in by the British Fleet in the Mediterranean and the combined Anglo-American Fleets in the Atlantic. A wary and powerful Soviet Union would be on his eastern border. As even the highly interventionist Victory Program noted, Hitler’s invasion of Russia presented “by far the best opportunity for a successful land offensive against Germany, because only Russia possesses adequate manpower situated in favorable proximity to the center of the German citadel.” Given the time, difficulties, and costs required to deploy American ground forces, bleeding Hitler in Russia through a program of military and economic aid to the Allies and its naval protection was a live option. 111

PLANNING FOR BALANCING. Despite the appeal of alternatives, American military policy ran towards balancing, not buckpassing. From the summer of 1940 on, strategic planning, material production, and military and civilian opinion in the administration all trended towards a large ground force intervention in the European war.

Stark’s Plan Dog memorandum argued a buckpassing approach of “purely naval assistance” could not bring victory. The key to protecting the Western hemisphere would be “to effect the complete, or at least, the partial collapse of the German Reich.” American interests also existed in East Asia, but there geopolitical factors cut a different way. Stark argued that it was of doubtful utility “to reduce Japan to the status of an inferior military and economic power. A balance of power in the Far East is to our interest as much as is a balance of power in Europe.” In the view of Stark and other military planners, once Germany was defeated, Japan could be dealt with swiftly. As the Victory Plan argued, “If Germany were defeated... it is probable that Japan could be forced to give up much of her territorial gains.” Japan’s autarkic project was considered manageable under normal circumstances, but by 1940 Germany’s was not. 112

110 Stoler, Allies and Adversaries, pp. 43-44.
111 Ibid., p. 51. Given outrageous evil of the German regime, this argument is not much made today, although a version of this rationale has been advanced in Stephen G. Bunch, “FDR and Limited War in Europe: A Plausible Middle Course?,” in Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Formation of the Modern World, ed. Thomas C. Howard and William D. Pederson (New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc, 2003), 59-77. The buckpassing view was much more common at the time of the war, even among eastern elites in high places. Though resolutely internationalist, the Council of Foreign Relations, serving as an unofficial adjunct to State Department planners from 1940-41, produced several papers defending the possibility of co-existence with a German dominated Europe, provided that the British and Soviets survived. See, Carlo Maria Santoro, Diffidence and Ambition: The Intellectual Sources of U.S. Foreign Policy (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), Chs. 5-6. And even arch-interventionist Nicholas Spykman admitted that if the British and Soviet’s could hold on, Europe would “remain balanced.” See Nicholas Spykman, America’s Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1942), pp. 11-40, 194, 450.
112 Stark Memorandum, November 12, 1940 and The Victory Program, September 11, 1941, both in Ross, U.S. War Plans, pp. 55-66, 103-134, quotes 56 and 104, respectively.
Stark’s major premise was that “Alone, the British Empire lacks the manpower and material means to master Germany,” and was threatened in Egypt with the loss of “intact geographical positions from which a successful land invasion can later be launched.” To ensure victory, Stark felt that “the United States, in addition to sending naval assistance, would also need to send large air and land forces to Europe or Africa, and to participate strongly in this land offensive.” The memorandum ended by recommending balancing: “an eventual strong offensive in the Atlantic as an ally of the British, and a defensive in the Pacific.” This strategy would be the “most fruitful” of available options, “particularly if we enter the war at an early date” and “obtain full equality in the political and military direction of the war.”

Roosevelt agreed with Stark’s arguments, though he swore him to secrecy. He ordered the government to plan and prepare based on Plan Dog’s assumptions, and to use it to coordinate with Britain. He explicitly expressed his views on January 16, 1941, at a meeting outlining the American position for the upcoming staff talks with the British. Roosevelt was not ready “at this particular time” to be drawn into war, since he believed that was Hitler’s objective and because “the Army should not be committed to any aggressive action until it was fully prepared to undertake it.” But Roosevelt accepted the primacy of the Atlantic and the need to be on the defensive in the Pacific. He also ordered the Navy to prepare to convoy shipping to Britain and to extend the American “neutrality zone” to 300 miles off the East Coast.

Roosevelt’s fear of imminent war and his acceptance of Plan Dog’s strategic premises led to further balancing plans. The Anglo-American staff talks resulted by March 1941 in ABC-1, the joint war plan quoted above that assumed full American belligerency and embodied the assumptions of Plan Dog, including the creation of a large Army for “the eventual offensive against Germany.” Around the same time, a revamped Rainbow 5 called for “the decisive defeat of Germany” and stipulated that “The building up of large land and air forces for major offensive operations against the Axis Powers will be the primary immediate effort of the United States Army.”

Despite the renewed opportunity for buckpassing created by the German invasion of Russia, the administration only intensified its plans for balancing. Roosevelt’s response to the invasion was to a review of “the overall production requirements required to defeat our potential enemies.” This was the origin of the Victory Program, which was gauged towards the “complete military defeat of Germany” such that “her entire European system would collapse.” The alternative of “an inconclusive peace” would “give Germany an opportunity to reorganize continental Europe and replenish her strength.” The Victory Program emphasized that “naval and air forces seldom, if ever, win important wars. It should be recognized as an almost invariable rule that only land armies can finally win wars.” The plan thus called for a 215-division Army, nine million men strong, which by 1943 would have as its “principal theater of war” a “sustained and successful land offensive against the center of German power.” Roosevelt ordered and at
least tacitly approved all of this military planning. American military policy in 1941 was based on, in the words of the Victory Program, “active participation in the war by the United States.”

Outside of explicit military plans, highly placed military and civilian opinion in the administration coalesced quickly around full intervention. Stark told his staff that the question was “when, not whether” the United States would become involved in the fighting. He also reminded the more cautious Marshall that “If the United States is to succeed in defeating the axis forces it must act on the offensive, instead of solely on the defensive.” Marshall more or less agreed, and argued to the president in September that “Germany cannot be defeated by supply of munitions to friendly powers, and air and naval operations alone. Large ground forces will be required” in order to “come to grips with and annihilate the German military machine.” In June 1940, Roosevelt fired his Secretaries of War and Navy and replaced them with interventionist Republicans Henry Stimson and Frank Knox. They joined influential hardliners like Roosevelt’s personal lieutenants Harry Hopkins and Sumner Welles, as well as cabinet hawks Henry Morgenthau and Harold Ickes, in making the case for war.

Given the increasing concentration of hawkish opinion in the administration, it is not surprising that rearmament was designed to support a balancing strategy. Over the summer of 1940 defense spending increased by a factor of five, an increment of $10.5 billion. Moreover, the unbalanced rearmament of 1938-39 was replaced with an equal priority on building a massive land army. Over the course of 1940 the administration took steps to mobilize, train, and equip an army of four million men by the end of 1942. This ambitious endeavor required the immediate mobilization of the National Guard and the institution of the first peacetime draft—politically risky choices that Roosevelt was willing to make. Indeed, one of the fiercest political fights of the entire New Deal era was the debate over renewal of the draft in 1941, which passed by a single vote in the House of Representatives. By the time of American entry into the war, the Army had grown to nearly two million strong, only somewhat behind the planned breakneck pace of expansion.

DIPLOMATIC POLICY

The Roosevelt administration’s balancing strategy was consummated in three major policy initiatives following the election of 1940. First, the decision to pursue all-out aid to Britain, culminating in the “Lend-Lease” program, was intended to ensure British victory in a war that policy-makers did not think the British could win on their own, and was undertaken with the knowledge it would inexorably lead to greater involvement on the part of the United

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116 The Victory Program, September 11, 1941, in Ibid., quotes p. 104. Roosevelt’s continued concern with domestic political constraint was also evident in his instructions that Victory Program planners decide for themselves “appropriate assumptions as to the probable friends and enemies and to the conceivable theaters of operation.” As noted earlier, Roosevelt was extremely concerned both with protecting his domestic flank from leaked policy decisions and protecting his place in history. Roosevelt’s order in the text and that just quoted appear in Lowenthal, Leadership and Indecision, II: 627, 628.
States. Second, though still very cautious with public opinion, Roosevelt gradually brought the United States deeper into the conflict in the Atlantic in 1941, hoping both to secure the British lend-lease lifeline and to provoke an incident with Germany that would result in full hostilities. Though unable to fully remove domestic constraints, aggressive naval action ultimately led to an undeclared war against Germany in the Atlantic. Finally, and importantly, Roosevelt adopted a radically more confrontational policy towards Japan, imposing an oil embargo that was slowly strangling the Japanese imperial project. He did so in the knowledge that he had put America on a collision course with Japan. There is good reason to believe this policy was deliberately adopted to force a conflict that would remove his domestic constraints for good and allow the United States to enter the ground war against Germany.

LEND-LEASE. The diplomatic beginning of the American balancing strategy was the fall 1940 decision to support all-out aid to Britain in pursuit of decisive victory over the Axis. This commitment reached its pinnacle in the “Lend-Lease” program authorizing Roosevelt to supply defense material to any country he deemed essential to American national security, in return for unspecified “considerations” after the war. Though publically sold as a buckpassing measure—one that would substitute for direct American involvement—the tremendous level of aid envisioned strongly implied a balancing commitment and the ultimate use of American ground forces. The administration was well aware of this truth, which most of the President’s advisors saw as an attractive feature of the program. Roosevelt’s personal views as to whether Lend-Lease meant balancing are less clear during late 1940, but his positive liberal inclinations certainly made him willing to acquiesce to the large fiscal costs and economic interventionism required by the pursuit of Hitler’s decisive defeat.

Lend-Lease was predicated on assumptions incompatible with a free-riding posture. The first reason for the connection between Lend-Lease and balancing was obvious: American aid would do no good at the bottom of the sea. In the fall of 1940, Britain appeared to be losing the battle of the Atlantic, as shipping losses out ran new construction by a ratio of 5:1 between July 1940 and June 1941. Admiral Stark believed that Britain would survive no more than six months if current trends continued, that American escorts for Lend-Lease goods were necessary, and that these convoys would lead to eventual American entrance into the war. Churchill wrote the President a letter on December 7, 1940, outlining British prospects in 1941, which Roosevelt studied carefully while on vacation and which is widely considered to have been the genesis for Lend-Lease. The letter argued that “the decision for 1941 lies upon the seas; unless we can establish our ability to feed this Island, [and] to import munitions of all kinds which we need... we may fall by the way.” Churchill went on to urge American convoying of Atlantic trade, or failing that, a large grant of American ships with which the British could increase convoys. The administration’s top military and civilian policymakers all concurred, agreeing with Stimson’s December 13, 1940 argument that “the eventual big act will have to be to save the life line of Great Britain in the North Atlantic.”

Even more important were the kinds of orders the British were placing, and what these meant for American grand strategy. Churchill’s strategy was, in Gleason and Langer’s words, “a

grand staying operation.” As he observed to Roosevelt, circumstances do “not enable us to
match the immense armies of Germany in any theatre where their main power can be brought to
bear.” Instead, Britain would bleed Germany in peripheral theaters, starve her with the blockade,
and punish her with strategic bombing, while Britain grew strong and fully mobilized her
economy—much the same strategy advocated by Roosevelt from 1937-1940. But even
Churchill acknowledged that an expeditionary force would have to deliver the coup de grace to a
weakened Germany. So, in addition to thousands of airplanes and hundreds of ships, the British
wanted to buy materiel for a large Army, with American resources to arm and equip ten divisions
in 1941 alone.120

However, the deficiencies of this strategy are precisely what had led Stark to argue in
Plan Dog that American entry would be essential. Stark doubted that decisive victory could “be
accomplished by bombing and by economic starvation…. It surely can be accomplished only by
military successes on-shore.” And Britain simply lacked the resources, particularly in
manpower, to annihilate Germany: “Assistance by powerful allies is necessary both with respect
to men and with respect to munitions and supplies.” Secretary Knox summed up the issue
bluntly before a high level meeting to discuss the proposed ground force purchases. He declared
that “I should like to say in this crowd before the English get here… that the English are not
going to win this war without our help, I mean our military help…. they cannot win alone…. We
needn’t talk of it outdoors, but I think it is true.” Stimson concurred, arguing in December that
“We could not permanently be in the position of toolmakers for other nations which fight.” As
shown earlier, Roosevelt had read and approved action based on Plan Dog, and been advised
by Stimson, Knox, and other hawks for months. All-out aid to Britain was a commitment to the
destruction of Germany—a commitment to American balancing.121

Furthermore, supplying massive quantities of equipment to Britain would have large
fiscal and economic costs. The American economy, even with slack capacity coming on line
from the Depression, was having a difficult time producing enough materiel for American
rearmament without cutting into civilian production—Army and Navy plans were behind
schedule and appropriated funds were going unspent. The British proposed to add an additional
$7 billion in orders for 1941, roughly two-thirds of the American defense budget. “The
difficulty,” Stimson argued, “is simply that we haven’t got capacity enough in this country at this
stage of the game.”

In order to produce enough to arms for both Britain and the United States, Roosevelt
would have to put the American economy on a war footing. Such a move would involve deep
government intervention in the civilian economy, mandating, for instance, more shifts and longer
hours in defense plants; severe restrictions on the production of automobiles, commercial
airplanes, and machine tools; and conscripting other industrial facilities that could be used for
defense production. The administration hawks conceded that this intervention was the price of
victory.122

120 Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, p. 231; Churchill to Roosevelt, December 7, 1940, C-43x, in Kimball,
Churchill and Roosevelt, the Complete Correspondence, I: 103. On British purchases and strategy see Langer and
121 Stark Memorandum, November 12, 1940, in Ross, U.S. War Plans, p. 57; Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared
War, p. 187; Kershaw, Fateful Choices, p. 233.
122 Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, pp. 185-186, 183, and more generally, 180-190. Stimson was a vocal
support of the need for a balancing strategy and its corresponding economic interventionism. He argued in
December 1940 that American production could not be raised to the necessary levels to support both Britain and
Finally, British resupply was increasingly beyond the means of the British people. As British Ambassador Lord Lothian, in a calculated indiscretion, told the American press: "Well boys, Britain's broke; it's your money we want." Churchill more diplomatically warned that "the moment approaches when we shall no longer be able to pay cash" for purchases in America. Although the Roosevelt administration rated British divestible assets more highly, it was rapidly coming to the same conclusion. After studying British finances in detail, Knox reluctantly remarked, "We are going to pay for the war from now on, are we?" When Morgenthau replied, "Well, what are we going to do, are we going to let them place more orders or not?" Knox was definitive: "Got to. No choice about it."

Not only would the civilian economy be rearranged, but the proceeds would also go to Britain free of charge. The strategic consequences of aid to Britain were clear. As Stimson put it, "Can we take measures that are going to put us into a position where eventually we will be committed to going to war just to save our investment, or to save the purpose for which we made the investment, unless [we] have the consent of Congress?" Roosevelt was willing to absorb these costs, both economic and political, in return for greater influence over the course of the conflict. Thus were Lend-Lease and the American balancing strategy born.

Though Roosevelt's personal views on balancing versus buckpassing are hard to pin down in 1940, there can be no doubt that he understood the basic outlines of the balancing strategy embodied in Lend-Lease. He had been ruminating on how to solve British financial difficulties for some time and cooked up the basic public relations sophistry behind the program himself after reading Churchill's letter: "We will give you the guns and ships you need, provided that when the war is over you will return to us in kind the guns and ships we have loaned you."

He also quickly abandoned his earlier opposition to rationalizing defense production, putting economic decisions under the authority of a small board led by Knox and Stimson. Roosevelt made the basic argument to the public: "We must have more ships, more guns, more planes—more of everything. This can only be accomplished if we discard the notion of 'business as usual.' This job cannot be done merely by superimposing on the existing productive facilities the added requirements for defense. Our defense efforts must not be blocked by those who fear the future consequences of surplus plant capacity."

And though, regarding convoys, he "hadn't quite reached that yet," he was familiar with the military thinking dictating intervention.

American rearmament "until we got into the war ourselves." After the entrance of Russia into the war, he urged Roosevelt towards intervention in order to take advantage of the "war psychosis" that could increase production. See Kershaw, Fateful Choices, p. 226; Lowenthal, Leadership and Indecision, II: 632. It is also worth noting that Lend-Lease and the corresponding reorganization of American industry required a tremendous grant of executive power that was fiercely contested in Congress. While executives are seldom much troubled by such grants of power, this feature of American strategy dovetailed with Roosevelt's positive liberal ideology. See Kimball, The Most Unsordid Act.

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123 Kershaw, Fateful Choices, p. 222; Churchill to Roosevelt, December 7, 1940, C-43x, in Kimball, Churchill and Roosevelt, the Complete Correspondence, I: 108; Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, p. 229.
124 Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, pp. 238, 243 and more generally, 237-251; "Arsenal of Democracy" Radio Address Delivered by President Roosevelt, December 29, 1940, in Franklin D. Roosevelt, The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt: War And Aid To Democracies, 1940, ed. Samuel I. Rosenman (New York: Random House, 1941), pp. 633-650. Note also Roosevelt's rejection of a negotiated peace in Europe in the speech, which despite its public character, is informative of probable balancing intentions: "no nation can appease the Nazis. No man can tame a tiger into a kitten by stroking it. There can be no appeasement with ruthlessness. There can be no reasoning with an incendiary bomb. We know now that a nation can have peace with the Nazis only at the price of total surrender." American appeasers argue "that the United States might just as well throw its influence into the
AGGRESSIVE ACTIVITY IN THE ATLANTIC. Slowly and haltingly, ever cognizant of congressional and public resistance, Roosevelt moved American policy towards entrance into the war over the course of 1941. Probably by spring of 1941, and almost certainly by July, Roosevelt was seeking an incident in the Atlantic that could clear the hurdles of domestic constraint and allow America to balance against Germany. A welter of Roosevelt’s personal statements confirms the intent behind an increasingly aggressive naval policy.

Following the passage of Lend-Lease, for example, Roosevelt began to express his desire to provoke Hitler into an “incident” that would justify full hostilities. On a fishing trip with Harold Ickes and other members of his inner circle, Roosevelt remarked that “things are coming to a head; Germany will be making a blunder soon.” Ickes believed “There could be no doubt of the President’s scarcely concealed desire that there might be an incident that would justify our declaring a state of war against Germany or at least providing convoys to merchantmen carrying supplies to Great Britain.” A month later, in a meeting with William Bullitt, “The President added that the problem which was troubling him most was that of public opinion. He had just had an argument with Stimson on the subject. Stimson thought that we ought to go to war now. He, the President, felt that we must await an incident and was confident that the Germans would give us an incident.”

Similarly, as American naval policy began to intensify in May, Roosevelt told his Secretary of the Treasury that “I am waiting to be pushed into this situation.” Morgenthau noted in his diary that “He had previously said that he thought something might happen at any time, and I gathered that he wanted to be pushed into the war rather than lead us into it.” Roosevelt put the point bluntly at a cabinet meeting on May 23, 1941. Though seeking to take a strong anti-German line in the Atlantic, and to prod public opinion in an upcoming speech, Roosevelt averred that “I am not willing to fire the first shot.” All of the cabinet hawks complained bitterly about his hesitancy in their diaries, with Stimson providing the best summary: Roosevelt was “waiting for the accidental shot of some irresponsible captain on either side to be the occasion for going to war.”

By October 1941, Roosevelt was openly praising Admiral Stark’s paper calling for America “to enter the war against Germany as soon as possible.” In November, Roosevelt’s right-hand man Henry Hopkins wrote him a note criticizing an Army general for “doing a great deal of harm” in speaking publically about American military unpreparedness. This kind of agitation made the American public disinclined “to go all the way,” a criticism reflecting Hopkins’ assumptions about their mutual preference to enter the war. Hopkins was not alone in this assumption, as practically everyone who talked to Roosevelt in the summer of 1941 came away with the same impression. One British aristocrat, Lord Beaverbrook, visited Roosevelt before the Argentia Conference of 1941 and found that “the whole administration were in favor

scale of a dictated peace, and get the best out of it that we can. They call it a ‘negotiated peace.’ Nonsense! Is it a negotiated peace if a gang of outlaws surrounds your community and on threat of extermination makes you pay tribute to save your own skins? Such a dictated peace would be no peace at all. It would be only another armistice, leading to the most gigantic armament race and the most devastating trade wars in history.” Clearly, Roosevelt is not trying to stir the public up into a limited defense of Britain.


of going to war.” Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King spoke with Roosevelt on August 22 after Argentia and believed he wanted, in Frederick Marks’ words, “immediate entry into the war.” The German charge in Washington cabled to Berlin in July that reliable American and foreign sources reported Roosevelt was determined to provoke war with Germany.127

These common interpretations of Roosevelt’s strategy were due as much to the development of American naval policy in the Atlantic as they were about his bellicose comments to all and sundry. Though extremely hesitant about the political costs of pursuing convoying, Roosevelt understood that Lend-Lease would be worthless if the Germans won the battle of the Atlantic. He began to push as for American involvement as quickly as he thought possible.

Roosevelt’s Atlantic policy can be thought of having roughly three parts. First, from April to June 1941, he began a series of escalating naval moves short of convoys aimed at helping the British, and probably intended to provoke an incident. Several came close to meeting the bar but for various reasons fell short, including a chase after a German battle cruiser following the sinking of the Bismarck, and several instances of American ships dropping depth charges on real or suspected submarines.128

Second, during the same period, Roosevelt ordered the occupation of key points in the Western hemisphere astride the convoy route, most prominently in the garrison of Iceland. These positions were of little use for defending the continental United States but put America at prime risk of encountering Germany on the high seas and would also be useful in the event of a future land war against the Germans in Europe. Admiral Stark thought the move to Iceland was “practically an act of war.” Roosevelt told Halifax that the occupation meant “the whole thing would boil up very quickly and that there would very soon be shooting.”129

Third, from July to October 1941 he moved towards the policy of “undeclared war”: convoying the British, repealing the remaining neutrality laws, and ordering the Navy to shoot German vessels on sight. Churchill described Roosevelt’s policy best, after Roosevelt confirmed the adoption of convoys at the Argentia meeting:

The Prime Minister gave his impression of the President’s attitude towards the entry of the United States into the war. He was obviously determined that they should come in. On the other hand, the President had been extremely anxious about the Bill [for renewing the Draft], which had only passed with a very narrow majority. Clearly he was skating on pretty thin ice with Congress…. If he were to put the issue of war and peace to Congress, they would debate it for three months. The President said he would wage war and not declare it, and that he would become more and more provocative. If the Germans did not like it, they could attack American forces…. The President’s orders to these escorts were to attack any U-boat that showed itself, even if it were 200 or 300 miles away from the convoy. Admiral Stark intended to carry out this order literally, and any Commander who sank a U-boat would have his action approved. Everything was to be done to force an incident.130

127 Trachtenberg, The Craft of International History, pp. 82, 84, ns. 15, 11; Marks, Wind over Sand, pp. 164-165, esp. n. 107.
128 Lowenthal, Leadership and Indecision, I: 528-539; Heinrichs, Threshold of War, Ch. 3 and esp. 46, 48, 80-81, 109; Trachtenberg, The Craft of International History, p. 86; Reynolds, The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, p. 347 n. 38.
129 Marks, Wind over Sand, p. 164; Reynolds, The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, p. 208. On the Army’s view that Iceland was useless for hemispheric defense, and on its naval strategic significance, see, respectively, Stoler, Allies and Adversaries, p. 45; Heinrichs, Threshold of War, pp. 82-88.
130 Quoted in Reynolds, The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, pp. 214-215. On the decisions of July and August, see Heinrichs, Threshold of War, pp. 113-117; Dallek, Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, p. 286.
Ultimately these measures were able to ensure victory for the British in the Battle of the Atlantic, but they did not succeed in clearing the domestic hurdles to a balancing strategy, for two reasons. First, Hitler sought to appease the Americans in the Atlantic: “under no circumstances,” the commanding German Admiral wrote on May 22, “does he wish to provoke incidents which may cause U.S. entry into the war.” On July 19, Hitler gave specific orders against attacking, “in the extended zone of operations, U.S. merchant ships, whether single or sailing in English or American convoys.” Second, the naval war had brought Congressional isolationists into high dudgeon. Neutrality repeal had passed by extremely narrow margins and Roosevelt’s opponents were openly accusing him—quite correctly—of trying to bring America into the war. As Roosevelt had to admit to Halifax on October 10, “if he asked for a declaration of war, he wouldn’t get it, and opinion would swing against him.” In order to play the role of a fully committed balancer, Roosevelt ultimately needed the help of the Japanese. And, as we shall see, the attack on Pearl Harbor was no Deus Ex Machina in this regard.

PROVOCATIVE POLICY IN THE PACIFIC. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor and precipitated American entrance into the war as a fully committed balancer in Europe. Japan took this aggressive gamble because the United States had pushed its back against the wall in the preceding four months. At the same time Roosevelt was ramping up the undeclared war in the Atlantic, he had also changed course to a hard-line policy in the Pacific: America placed an economic stranglehold on Japan through a complete oil embargo, escalated its diplomatic demands to include Japanese withdrawal from China, and deliberately stymied the ensuing peace negotiations. In effect, Roosevelt declared that Japan would abandon its empire in Asia or would be starved out of it through lack of resources. Though anxious to delay hostilities until American defenses in the Pacific could be improved, Roosevelt chose his policy with the full knowledge that he was placing America on a collision course with Japan. Given his desire to enter the European war, and his knowledge of the domestic political window a Japanese attack would give him, it is likely Roosevelt chose his policy with exactly these ends in mind.

Briefly summarized, American policy towards Japan prior to July 1941 was one of deterrence and containment, in line with the defensive posture in the Pacific advocated by all the major military planning discussed above. America had long been opposed to Japan’s imperial project for ideological reasons. But, as Paul Schroeder puts it, America “did not intend to go to war for the sake of China.” Instead, the Roosevelt administration sought to deter Japan from its expected “southern advance” into the resource rich British and Dutch colonies in the South Pacific and to wean Japan away from its alliance with Germany. In pursuit of these goals, Roosevelt employed both carrots and sticks. The fleet was stationed at Pearl Harbor, where it could supposedly menace a Japanese military advance, and economic restrictions on the sale of scrap iron and other war materials to Japan were put in place. At the same time, in spring 1941 Secretary of State Cordell Hull embarked on a set of comprehensive negotiations with Japanese ambassador Nomura, aimed at improving Japanese-American relations and forging a settlement in the Pacific. American diplomats hoped to reach a Pacific settlement on liberal terms, or at to freeze the status quo in the region while the European conflict developed.

131 Hearden, Roosevelt Confronts Hitler, pp. 203, 206; Kershaw, Fateful Choices, pp. 324-327.
The key problem was to deter Japan without provoking her into Pacific conquests that would draw America into an Asian war. As Roosevelt wrote Ickes after Hitler’s invasion of the Soviet Union, referring to MAGIC decryptions of Japanese communications, “I think it will interest you to know that the Japs are having a real drag-down knock-out fight among themselves and have been for the past week—trying to decide which way they are going to jump—attack Russia, attack the South Seas (thus throwing their lot with Germany), or whether they will sit on the fence and be more friendly with us. No one knows what the decision will be but, as you know, it is terribly important for the control of the Atlantic for us to keep peace in the Pacific. I simply have not got enough Navy to go round—and every little episode in the Pacific means fewer ships in the Atlantic.” The administration’s biggest worry was a potential Japanese invasion of the Dutch East Indies, which contained substantial oil reserves. A major fear among American policy makers was that a move to cut off Japanese oil supplies would precipitate just such an attack. In light of American support for the British Empire, and the presence of American forces in the Philippines that would likely be attacked, a Japanese attack could bring the United States to war in the wrong theater.133

Roosevelt thus specifically warned Nomura on July 24, 1941 “that if Japan attempted to seize oil supplies by force in the Netherlands East Indies, the Dutch would, without the shadow of a doubt, resist, the British would immediately come to their assistance, war would then result between Japan, the British and the Dutch, and, in view of our own policy of assisting Great Britain, an exceedingly serious situation would immediately result.” He then told the ambassador that earlier American forbearance on embargoing oil shipments had been in the service of encouraging Japanese restraint in the East Indies. A week earlier he had told his cabinet that he was opposed to an oil embargo if Japan moved into southern Indochina, as MAGIC intelligence was suggesting it would, because an embargo “would simply drive the Japanese down into the Dutch East Indies, and it would mean war in the Pacific.” In late June, Roosevelt had fended off requests from Ickes to place an oil embargo on Japan by derisively questioning whether he would still recommend action “if this were to tip the delicate scales and cause Japan to decide either to attack Russia or to attack the Dutch East Indies.” For fear of these outcomes, Roosevelt sought to keep tight control over the oil issue, warning Ickes that “exports of oil at this time are so much a part of our current foreign policy that this policy must not be affected in any shape, manner or form by anyone except the Secretary of State or the President.”134

However, American policy was changing in July. The invasion of Russia had triggered two corresponding policy debates: one in Japan concerning which opportunities to seize and another in the United States about how to respond to potential Japanese moves. Roosevelt’s man in the State Department, Sumner Welles, had been advising him to switch to a coercive strategy

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134 Roosevelt-Nomura meeting, July 24, 1941, in FRUS, Japan, II: 527-530, quotes 527; John Morton Blum, From the Morgenthau Diaries (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), II: 377; Roosevelt to Ickes, June 23 and June, 1941, both in Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, III: 558, 553. See also Roosevelt to Ickes, June 25, 1941 in Ibid., III: 559.
with Japan. Welles believed that tough economic sanctions would “provoke Japan to war” with America “before long.” He told British ambassador Halifax on July 9 that he had advised Roosevelt to put “a complete economic embargo on Japan as soon as the Japanese committed any overt act” but that Welles “was not in favor of telling the Japanese in advance that this would be the United States’ attitude.” Halifax further reported on July 18, probably after the cabinet meeting of that day, that “The president personally definitely contemplates a full embargo on all oil products.”

In fact, despite having given his cabinet “quite a lecture” on the risks of an oil embargo at the July 18 meeting, Roosevelt also noted that “if Japan went overboard, we would ship no more oil.” Though holding back from a full embargo, he approved a very tight set of licensing controls on oil products and the freezing of Japanese financial assets. A further “understanding was that… we ought to get the English to make certain moves at the same time.” The policy was to be coordinated with similar embargoes by the Dutch, the British, and the Free French in South Asia. Japan was to be squeezed, though not yet strangled. Clearly aware of the risks of using oil as a coercive tool, the President was nonetheless of two minds about it.

In the weeks following the Japanese occupation of Indochina, Roosevelt ceased his hesitation and reversed course. At a cabinet meeting on July 24, he went ahead with the system of export licensing to Japan and the unfreezing of Japanese funds to pay for exports. All trade with Japan other than cotton would be banned, and low quality oil and gasoline would be cleared for export only in the much-reduced quantities of 1935-1936. The President was inclined to initially grant the licenses for petroleum export, but warned that “this policy… might change any day and from there on we would refuse any and all licenses.” Roosevelt sought a flexible system under which “we can follow any policy we desire in its administration and then that policy can be changed from day to day without issuing any further orders.”

Ickes wrote that Roosevelt “thought it better to slip the noose around Japan’s neck and give it a jerk now and then,” rather than simply drawing it tight. But in the short term, at least, he ordered it drawn very tight indeed. Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Dean Acheson reported to the bureaucracy in charge of unfreezing assets that Welles told him “for the next week or so the happiest solution” would be “to take no action on Japanese applications.” In fact, documents draw up “to embody the suggestions [Acheson] made following the meeting” where he had announced Welles’ instructions suggest the period envisioned was two weeks. Welles was in charge of designing the policy to implement Roosevelt’s July 24 concepts, reporting to Roosevelt on July 31, that “For the time being, the Foreign Funds Control Committee is holding these applications without action.” In the intervening two weeks, Welles and Roosevelt would be traveling to Argentia to confer with the British.

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At Argentia, the British voiced their desire that “the economic measures [be] kept up and screwed up.” Churchill argued that “It would be essential to maintain the full pressure of economic measures which the U.S. Government had already adopted in regard to Japan.” Roosevelt agreed, and “declared that he had every intention of maintaining economic measures in full force.” Welles discussed “the subject of the application of the American freezing orders against Japan” in great detail. “The application was very strict,” Welles assured his British counterpart. On oil, “no licenses were being granted except for crude oil up to an amount corresponding with that exported in 1935. This quantity had already been reached and therefore no more crude oil would be allowed except sufficient to take Japanese ships from American ports home to Japan. No licenses were being given for the export of aviation gasoline, ordinary gasoline or lubricating oil.” The noose was now drawn tight.139

American diplomats coupled this economic warfare with political intransigence. Over the next four months, Japan offered the United States virtually every diplomatic concession it had ever asked for, in a frantic attempt to restart the flow of oil. At various different points, Japanese diplomats offered promises not to attack the Soviet Union, to cease the southern advance, to neutralize Thailand, and to withdraw from Southern Indochina. But American diplomats now demanded that Japan settle the war in China and completely withdraw, recognizing Chiang Kai-shek’s government as the only legitimate authority. Though anxious to find a way out of their disastrous engagement in China, Japanese leaders could not just simply surrender every term of importance relating to a conflict that had cost them four years, two hundred thousand lives, and enormous resources. As Welles put it to Australian diplomats on November 14, Japanese leaders had to “provide some justification to their own people after four years of national effort and sacrifice” in China. He “could not believe” that the Japanese would “agree to evacuate China completely.” But “nothing less” would “satisfy [the] United States.”140

The sudden change to an incredibly tough negotiating position on China was likely intended to make diplomacy fruitless, rather than representing a new valuation of national interests in China heretofore absent in the previous four years of American diplomacy. Indeed, American leaders were much more interested in planning for war than negotiating peace. Stimson summarized a cabinet meeting on October 16, the day the Konoe government fell, as facing “the delicate question of the diplomatic fencing to be done so as to be sure that Japan was put into the wrong or made the first bad move—overt move.” In early November, Roosevelt accepted the military’s recommendation to keep talks open but to accept war in case of a direct attack on British, Dutch, or American possession in the Pacific. Throughout the summer and fall of 1941, Roosevelt implied that the purpose of talks was to “keep the Japanese in play” for

139 Trachtenberg, The Craft of International History, p. 100.
140 Ibid., p. 90. For an example of Japanese concessions, including the explicit promise of no further aggression and a pledge not to interfere in the Nazi-Soviet war, see Nomura-Roosevelt meeting, August 28, 1941, FRUS, Japan, II: 572-574. On the shift in American negotiating posture to a focus on China see Schroeder, The Axis Alliance and Japanese-American Relations, pp. 66-67, 90, 173-182. It is an open question whether any Japanese government could have carried the military along with the virtual surrender America was demanding, but Trachtenberg presents some evidence that a civilian triumph was at least plausible due to the position of the emperor and the widely acknowledged risks of war among high-ranking officers; See Trachtenberg, The Craft of International History, pp. 104-114.
“babying the Japanese along” so as to “play for time” in negotiations while the European situation developed.\(^\text{141}\)

At a November 25 meeting with Roosevelt, the major policy-makers all considered war inevitable in light of MAGIC intercepts showing the Japanese nearing their deadline for action. “The question,” recorded Stimson, “was how we maneuver them into the position of firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves.” Various political rationales for war were discussed, and Hull was assigned to write a memorandum justifying war to the public if Japan attacked Thailand.\(^\text{142}\)

In early December, Roosevelt told the British that if Thailand were attacked, it would take “a few days to get things into political shape” but that if Japan hit anywhere else “we should obviously all be together.” He confirmed on December 3 that this meant military support and authorized the start of military cooperation with the British in the Southwest Pacific. War messages were prepared for Congress, and a last-minute appeal to the Japanese emperor was drafted in order to prepare public opinion in the United States: it would be sent and announced publically only after reconnaissance had confirmed the coming of the Japanese attack. The Japanese choice of Pearl Harbor made these preparations academic.\(^\text{143}\)

Although certainly open to debate, the bafflingly provocative character of American policy in the Pacific is best understood as part of Roosevelt’s European balancing strategy. The President probably intended to use conflict with Japan as a way to overcome domestic opposition to entering the European war. The scenario had been contemplated in American military planning which Roosevelt had approved and even edited: “if forced into a war with Japan, the United States should, at the same time, enter the war in the Atlantic.” The American military, in its myriad debates with the British planners, reassured its counterparts that if America entered into war with Japan it would “at once engage in war with Germany and Italy.” And, as noted earlier, Roosevelt expressed agreement with Stark’s argument that “the United States should enter the war against Germany as soon as possible, even if hostilities with Japan must be accepted.” The scenario envisioned by Stark was one of Japan invoking the tripartite pact if the United States declared war on Germany, but it is further evidence that the Roosevelt administration had no intention of abandoning its Atlantic-first strategy if a Pacific War broke out.\(^\text{144}\)

Furthermore, Roosevelt had intelligence indicating Hitler might well declare war on America if it entered a conflict with Japan. In August 1941, a British decrypt showed Hitler promising the Japanese ambassador in Berlin, Oshima, that “in the event of a collision between Japan and the United States Germany would at once open hostilities with the United States.” In early November, the German acting ambassador in Washington, who was working as an American agent, confirmed that Germany would declare war on the United States if it fought Japan. The Americans also received MAGIC decrypts of a very specific promise of German belligerence from Nazi foreign minister Ribbentrop to Oshima, as well as other comments by a high-ranking official in the German Foreign Ministry that reflected his understanding of Nazi


\(^{142}\) Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History*, p. 128; Langer and Gleason, *The Undeclared War*, p. 886 and see pp. 845-846 for a long excerpt of the military planning outlining the conditions for war in Asia.

\(^{143}\) Heinrichs, *Threshold of War*, p. 217.

participation in a Japanese-American war. These and other reports flowing in after Pearl Harbor convinced Roosevelt to wait before declaring war on Germany, correctly hoping that Hitler would do the job for him.\(^{145}\)

Roosevelt had good reason to conclude that a Japanese attack anywhere in the Pacific would have opened a domestic window for intervention against Germany, and indeed, he was preparing for such an eventuality. Paul Schroeder has persuasively demonstrated that the tripartite pact had “caused a profound hardening of American public opinion against Japan—a once-for-all identification of the Empire with the Axis, with Hitler and the whole program of world conquest and the menace of aggression which America was sure he represented.” It seems clear the link was generally accepted as a domestic political fact. As one academic noted at the time, “Japan’s alliance with the Axis has done more than anything else to convince Americans that the war in Europe and the war in Asia are the same war.”\(^{146}\)

The tightly perceived link between Germany and Japan was even more evident among opinion leaders and public officials. Even the usually dovish American ambassador to Japan, Joseph Grew, argued that “Japan has associated with herself with a team or system of predatory Powers, with similar aims and similar methods. It will be the better part of wisdom to regard her no longer as an individual nation... but as part and parcel of that system which,... will assuredly destroy everything America stands for.” Glaringly, during the brutal debates on neutrality revision of November 1941, Japan’s identification with Germany was accepted as established fact—by both sides. As one isolationist senator argued, “Hitler is trying to inveigle this country into war, trying to get us to commit some overt act which will bring Japan into war against us.” Another isolationist argued in the House that the appointment of Tojo was “due to the personal pressure of Mr. Hitler upon his Japanese allies.” All this occurred as the undeclared war was being fought in the Atlantic, with Japan studiously ignoring any obligations it might have under the tripartite pact. Congressional opinion had already made its assessment of Japan.\(^{147}\)

Public opinion after Pearl Harbor bears out these suppositions. On December 10, after the American declaration of war against Japan, but a day before Germany and America exchanged declarations of war, a Gallup poll asked “Should President Roosevelt have asked Congress to declare war on Germany, as well as Japan?” Ninety percent of respondents answered “yes,” slightly outdistancing support for Mom and Apple Pie. On that same day, the isolationist America First Committee voted to disband, before America had entered the European war. Between December 7 and December 11, isolationist newspapers commonly accepted that Hitler was the puppet master behind Japanese actions and interventionist newspapers trumpeted it as God’s truth. The isolationist Seattle Post-Intelligencer ran the headline “Hitler behind Jap strategy” on December 9, the same day the front page of the New York Times read “Ex-aide of Goebbels calls Japan ‘Stooge’; Nazis dictated attack, says Miss Knaust.”\(^{148}\)

Roosevelt was certainly aware of the basic political climate linking the Axis powers, and there is evidence the administration was preparing the ground to make the case for war on that basis. As noted earlier, while the final round of talks with Japan spiraled into oblivion, Hull raised the tripartite pact to prominence as an objection to reaching a settlement, even though

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\(^{147}\) Ibid., pp. 22, 186.

Japan had all but publicly disavowed any relationship with Germany. As he put it on November 20, “The American people believe that there was a partnership between Hitler and Japan aimed at enabling Hitler to take charge of one-half of the world and Japan of the other half.” Schroeder notes that “From November 17 on, it was common for conversations to be occupied almost entirely with the Pact, a fact which Nomura reported in bewilderment to his home office.”

Not coincidentally, this is the line Hull took on November 25 when discussing political strategy with Roosevelt his top foreign policy officials: war should be justified by “freedom of the seas and the fact that Japan was in alliance with Hitler and was carrying out his policy of world aggression.” In the context of major military preparations and the expectation of Roosevelt “that we were likely to be attacked, perhaps by next Monday,” Stimson reassured Chiang Kai-shek’s nervous ambassador “to have just a little more patience, and I think all things will be well.” Unless Stimson also possessed presently unknown reasons to believe that peace was in the offing, it appears that the administration did not find the prospect of a Pacific war unwelcome.149

Immediately following the Pearl Harbor attack, Roosevelt appeared to be preparing opinion in just this manner. Harry Hopkins recorded that the ensuing war conference “met in not too tense an atmosphere because I think that all of us believed that in the last analysis the enemy was Hitler and that he could never be defeated without force of arms; that sooner or later we were bound to be in the war and that Japan had given us an opportunity.” Although obviously hoping that Hitler would rashly declare war, Roosevelt assured Stimson on December 7 that, while the initial declaration of war would be against Japan, “he intended to present the whole matter” of the German connection “two days later.” And in fact, on December 9, Roosevelt gave his famous “Win the War” speech in which he accused the Japanese of acting under Nazi coercion and alleged that the government had (non-existent) intelligence showing “that German and Japan are conducting their military and naval operations in accordance with a joint plan.” Made easier by Pearl Harbor, the logic of these arguments could have applied with equal coherence to a Japanese attack elsewhere in the Pacific.150

POST-WAR PLANS. As American balancing attempts hastened after the invasion of the Soviet Union, so too did preparations for the post-war world. These plans bore the stamp of the Roosevelt administration’s positive liberal goals: the were based on establishing a liberal trading regime, the deconstruction of the British Imperial Preference system (or Ottawa agreements), and a commitment of American power to a concert system that would provide the political stability for a return to free trade.

Though the State Department had long been planning for a post-war world along liberal lines, the process was re-started and reinvigorated in late July on the orders of Welles, just as the new Japanese policy was forming. It was also prompted in part by fears that economic autarkists among the New Deal set might start to gain influence over the post-war world. Berle noted that “The State Department is going to have to do some strictly defensive work. About everyone in town suddenly yearns to run the economic foreign policy of the United States.” Hull feared that “if [the New Dealers] really get in the saddle they will adopt a closed economy” as the basis for

150 Trachtenberg, The Craft of International History, p. 129; Langer and Gleason, The Undeclared War, p. 938; Hill, Hitler Attacks Pearl Harbor, p. 44.
peace policy; the President himself was “determined that there shall be no depression of prices after the war.” Given that Roosevelt was not about to abandon New Deal economic controls to the tender mercies of laissez-faire adjustment, free trade was the only solution.151

State Department thus officials planned for “a world-wide open economy” based on international economic regimes emphasizing non-discrimination. Berle hoped to create some “financial sentiment for the only financial arrangements which will make possible something like open trade.” The anticipated need for European reconstruction was to be used as a lever in bringing Europe on board. One State Department memo suggested sending surplus American agricultural products to Europe after the war, free of charge. But “one quid pro quo for such a gift, however, might be an agreement not to produce these same surplus commodities under highly uneconomic conditions with the support of high tariffs, quotas, prohibitions, government subsidies, etc.” As another official noted, “the provision of food to the half-starved European population at the end of the war will prove to be a lever by means of which influence can be brought to bear upon the political and economic reconstruction of Europe.”152

Essential to the envisioned peace was integrating Britain into the post-war commercial system. Though Britain’s democratic regime and recent history of expanding trade with the United States led policy-makers to have some optimism about future British economic policy, the Americans despised the British system of Imperial Preference, which tightly discriminated against all trade from outside the Empire. The State Department worried that Britain would feel “strong postwar pressure for accentuated Empire self-sufficiency, couple with clearing arrangements of the Nazi type,” and would make attempts “to close the Empire further and further by means of increased imperial preferences.” Berle warned Roosevelt in July 1941 that British proposals to re-provision Europe were designed “to channelize the trade and economics of this area through London when the war is over.” He later acerbically commented that “a plan to regionalize the world (leaving us the Western Hemisphere) has already been turned down by our people.” The consensus fear of the administration was that it would see post-war “British control over their foreign trade and foreign payments equaling or exceeding the pre-war restraints of continental countries.”153

The summer of 1941 therefore saw concerted action to combat the threat of British closure. The Roosevelt administration used the negotiations over the promised Lend-Lease quid pro quo and the declaration of the war aims at the Argentia conference to ensure British non-discrimination after the war. Dean Acheson wanted to draft a Lend-Lease agreement right away, “in the hope that if we sat down right away before we got too deeply committed in this war with the British they would be willing to go quite a way toward either cracking now or laying the foundations for cracking the Ottawa agreements.” British negotiator John Maynard Keynes recognized the ideological character of American goals, complaining that the American ideas of commercial non-discrimination were just “all that old lumber” of nineteenth century trade theory, representing “the clutch of the dead, or at least moribund, hand.” For their part, American diplomats were apoplectic at Keynes’ pushback, grousing that “Despite the war the Hitlerian commercial policy will probably be adopted by Great Britain. If and when we do

become involved we shall give all and get nothing other than a good screwing to our trade by Great Britain.” Berle spluttered that “If this is worked out, the only economic effect of the war will be that we have moved a closed-economy center from Berlin to London.”

Roosevelt and Welles put personal pressure on Churchill to give up Imperial Preference in issuing the Atlantic Charter, a declaration of liberal war aims composed at the Argentia conference, in August 1941. One of the articles called for open and non-discriminatory trade. Roosevelt ultimately allowed Churchill to insert a caveat about “due respect for existing obligations” to the British dominions, but made American terms clear. He could only “accept temporary closed arrangements if Britain made it clear that on broad lines and as an objective it stood for non-discriminatory, free-for-all trade.” Indeed, though claiming that he was not asking Churchill to trade Imperial Preference for Lend-Lease, Roosevelt later forced the British to accept a key clause that pledged both parties “to the elimination of all forms of discriminatory treatment in international commerce and to the reduction of tariffs and other trade barriers.” As he wrote to Churchill in explanation, the idea was to construct “a free, fertile economic policy” and to “organize a different kind of world where men shall really be free economically as well as politically.”

Of course, the key foundation for the success of these liberal plans was American commitment. State Department planner Harley Notter summarized it well: “the most sweeping assumption which must of course be made in our work is that Germany will be defeated and that England with participation on the part of the United States will win the war by a clear and uncompromising victory, enabling us to disarm the enemy.” Roosevelt also understood that the liberal world economy would depend on some kind of American security presence. He told Keynes and Halifax on May 28, 1941 that “He refused to consider the possibility that America would not take her full share of responsibility for the post-war situation in Europe, political as well as economic. The Europeans,” on Roosevelt’s view, “were to be told just where they get off.” Furthermore, Keynes noted, Roosevelt “clearly contemplated that a British-American police force should take all the necessary responsibility for maintaining order for some time to come.”

Roosevelt reiterated these themes at the Argentia conference. He wanted to delay the creation of a new international organization “until after a period of time had transpired and during which an international police force composed of the United States and Great Britain had an opportunity of functioning.” Churchill reported back to his cabinet that “The President undoubtedly contemplates the disarmament of the guilty nations, coupled with the maintenance of strong united British and American armaments both by sea and air for a long indefinite period.” Like many of Roosevelt’s schemes, the details were to be worked out later, and it is unclear exactly what kind of ground force commitment he was willing to consider. But he repeatedly “spoke with emphasis about the importance of the United States and Great Britain retaining preponderance of sea and air power, in order to be in a position to enforce order on the world.” Roosevelt understood that vindicating liberal values abroad meant a balancing commitment, both in entering the war and enforcing the peace.

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154 Hearden, Roosevelt Confronts Hitler, p. 235; Reynolds, The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, p. 276; Berle diary, July 17, 1941, in Berle and Jacobs, Navigating the Rapids, p. 373.

155 Hearden, Roosevelt Confronts Hitler, pp. 237, 239; Roosevelt to Churchill, February 11, 1942, R-105, in Kimball, Churchill and Roosevelt, the Complete Correspondence, I: 357-358, quotes 357.

156 Hearden, Roosevelt Confronts Hitler, p. 231; Reynolds, The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, p. 263.

SUMMARY OF AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY, 1940-41

As TLFP expects, the United States seriously increased its level of commitment to Europe after the fall of France, gradually adopting an ever more forceful balancing strategy. Both the content of American foreign policy and the process evidence regarding its formation confirm the predictions of the theory. America planned and armed for a major ground force intervention in Europe; adopted increasingly costly and aggressive commitments through Lend-Lease, undeclared war in the Atlantic, and the strangulation of Japan; and rejected buckpassing alternatives even after the invasion of the Soviet Union made them especially plausible. Geopolitical and liberal pressures drove this strategy. The collapse of France made Germany a potential hegemon and sparked a drive to defend the Western hemisphere by increasing aid to Britain. At the same time, fears of autarky and hopes for a post-war regime of free trade shaped military planning, peace planning, and the relationship with the British.

It is worth highlighting three kinds of evidence discussed above. First, the disintegration of the European power configuration was the largest motive for American behavior during the period. The international system sent the Roosevelt administration a signal about threats that it could not ignore, driving American posture towards greater international commitments over and against voices pushing for non-entanglement.

Second, as TLFP expects, the Roosevelt administration evolved towards a balancing strategy over continued buckpassing. By the fall of 1940, Roosevelt had approved military planning that called for the complete destruction of German power by land assault. He had also approved aid to Britain that would be superfluous if the maintenance of British survival were all that was at stake, and which was likely to lead to war in the Atlantic. Roosevelt then slowly escalated just such a war, doing his best to provoke an incident that would spark full hostilities with Hitler, while defending the British lifeline. The balancing policy culminated with an about face in the Pacific, as the administration shifted from the deterrence and containment of Japan towards forcible coercion on behalf of goals America had never valued highly before. Though no smoking gun exists, it is likely that Roosevelt’s policy in Asia was intended to provoke a Japanese attack that could be used to clear the last domestic hurdles towards intervention in Europe.

Third, the balancing posture was influenced positive liberal goals. Geopolitical pressures were extremely important but did not by themselves determine the decision between buckpassing and balancing: Roosevelt was frequently advised by advocates of buckpassing who stressed that America’s strategic position would remain secure if Britain and Russia remained unconquered. At the same time, Roosevelt’s positive liberal understanding of American commercial interests continued to influence and military plans for war and diplomatic visions for peace. In order to obtain more international influence, the administration was willing to take on the fiscal burdens of Lend-Lease as well as the large-scale economic interventionism it required, another preference characteristic of positive liberalism. Moreover, three major elements of the balancing strategy—all-out aid to Britain, escalation in the Atlantic, and post-war plans for an open trade regime—were already in place well before the invasion of the Soviet Union, suggesting that this geopolitical signal only intensified a grand strategy that already commanded administration support.

In the final analysis, both of TLFP’s variables were pointed towards more international commitment, and both worked powerfully to bring about a balancing posture. Of the two, systemic forces were probably the more powerful, in the sense that they come through more
clearly in the documentary record. But they did not dictate American balancing by themselves: it is hard to explain that the timing and content of the major American policy decisions without reference to Roosevelt's liberal goals. In order to protect the Western hemisphere, German power did not have to be destroyed at great financial cost and with large American ground forces. But those means would be required to ensure the removal of economic autarky and the vindication of American trading rights. American balancing had both liberal and geopolitical roots.

Counter-Argument: Bureaucratic Politics

Against the argument made here, a prominent alterative explanation can be advanced. Some historians interpret Roosevelt's grand strategy in terms of bureaucratic politics. Roosevelt, it is sometimes maintained, was an undisciplined and impulsive decision-maker who frequently left major decisions of policy to his confused subordinates. The administration was therefore rent with intra- and inter-bureaucratic struggles, and America foreign policy was little more than the outcome of pushing and hauling within the executive branch. The result was an incoherent diplomatic and military policy, an over-extended posture in the Pacific, and finally, an accidental war with Japan caused by the triumph of a hawkish faction within the State Department.158

Variants of the bureaucratic politics argument all begin by assessing Roosevelt as a poor administrator with little real vision for American strategy. Fredrick Marks writes that "it is FDR's lack of any coherent strategy in the field of foreign policy that forms a prominent theme" when analyzing his diplomacy. Mark Lowenthal agrees, arguing that "President Roosevelt's foreign policy, for all the linearity later imposed on it, was actually a series of fits and starts whose interconnection the President himself denied at the time;" the President "regularly failed to define this for those subordinates responsible for executing this policy, leaving them to arrive at their own conclusions upon which to base and carry out their own plans." Into this strategic gulf stepped a welter of bureaucratic agencies and agendas whose competition was the driving force in determining American foreign policy. As Jonathan Utley has it, "the foreign policy establishment of the Roosevelt administration was a snake pit of influential leaders and faceless bureaucrats working at cross-purposes, striking deals, and not infrequently employing sleight of hand in order to move the nation in the direction each thought most appropriate."159

The resulting foreign policy posture was strategically incoherent and over-extended in the Pacific. Mark Stoler argues that Roosevelt's preference for "expedient and often illogical compromises that offered everyone some immediate satisfaction" meant that he failed to

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decisively shape American military policy. “World War II thus began in Europe with the U.S. armed forces disagreeing over appropriate strategy,” Stoler concludes. “As a result, U.S. war plans remained vague and unworkable,” and in some cases he gave “each service what it desired but worsen[ed] the mismatch between U.S. ends and means in Asia.” Along these lines, the State Department consistently took on a more aggressive diplomatic posture than the military’s Atlantic first grand strategy stipulated. Marshall was consistently frustrated, remarking that he had to “begin the education of the President as to the true situation… after a period of being influenced by the State Department” and that “the influence and accomplishments of the State Department have been unfortunate” in their impact on the Atlantic war.\footnote{Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, pp. 21, 17, 42.}

Most provocatively, Jonathan Utley and Irvine Anderson have argued that the Pacific war was essentially brought on by a State Department bureaucracy gone out of control. In this view, Roosevelt wanted to initiate only a partial embargo on Japanese oil purchases and assigned the planning to “Sumner Welles, a man Roosevelt could trust.” But the final responsibility for executing the release of funds for what oil the Japanese could buy fell to a committee led by Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson, who “had his own ideas about what should be done with Japan, and they did not include letting it get any oil.” With Secretary of State Hull sick and distracted, and Welles and Roosevelt meeting with the British, Acheson and his hawkish associates had only to steamroll several low-level bureaucrats to effectively institute a complete embargo. Acheson managed to temporarily obscure the truth of the situation by blaming the Treasury Department, and by the time Welles and Hull learned what was going on “it was too late. To have reopened the flow of oil after a month’s cut-off would have sent the wrong message to Tokyo and reinforced the position of the Japanese hard-liners, who claimed the United States would give in.”\footnote{Utley, *Going to War with Japan*, pp. 153, 156.}

The bureaucratic politics explanation points to some very real features of American foreign policy before World War II. Roosevelt definitely allowed, and indeed, cultivated, bureaucratic conflict, which allowed him to get multiple points of view and to employ different parts of the bureaucracy as he saw fit. It is also true that Roosevelt was not much for the details of planning, preferring to focus on the big picture and leave implementation to others. Finally, American strategy developed more slowly than many members of the administration preferred, and it is not hard to find examples of executive agents complaining about the timing and content of American foreign policy. Together these features of Roosevelt’s decision-making process probably contributed in some way to the disintegration of strategic ends and means in American foreign policy. One such example might be Roosevelt’s decision to appease the Army’s desire not to defend Asia and the Navy’s desire for a more forward presence by removing the Army garrison from China but not the Marine garrison.\footnote{Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, pp. 16-17.}

In the main, however, the bureaucratic politics argument is not persuasive, for two reasons. First, it is clear that Roosevelt went out of his way to ensure he controlled major policies and in fact made all the important decisions himself. He may have ceded some of the details of implementation to various agencies, but nothing of real substance. Second, most of the examples adduced by bureaucratic interpretations amount to little more than officials grousing that their organizations’ strategic preferences were not dominating policy. But the United States had a legitimately difficult strategic problem and had to deploy scarce resources broadly.
American posture was over-extended in the Pacific because Roosevelt could not afford to write off the British Empire in East Asia; America went to war in the Pacific because Roosevelt decided to provoke Japan.

Roosevelt deliberately divided and rearranged the executive branch in order to ensure his personal control, creating “a government within a government.” For instance, in 1939 Roosevelt put the Army-Navy joint planning board in the executive office of the President in order to keep watch on military planning, and he ordered the revision of the old “color” plans himself. He reached deep into the Army and Navy promotion lists in order to select Marshall and Stark as his Chief of Staff and Chief of Naval Operations, allowing him to bypass the service secretaries and become “the sole coordinating link” between military and diplomatic foreign policy. In policy matters, Roosevelt was more than willing to micromanage the bureaucracy when he thought it was important: during the Atlantic escalation “he maintained a direct wire to the Navy’s Ship Movements Division to keep track of vessels on neutrality patrol.”

Roosevelt was far from dilatory when he felt he had to act, even in the face of large political constraints. He showed with his response to the Munich crisis and plan for supplying Allied airpower that he was willing to go to the mattresses with the bureaucracy when it opposed him. As Farnham put it, “Roosevelt alone was the architect of those policies and the policy outcomes do not mirror the balance of bureaucratic forces but rather reflect the sort of subjective adjustment of values” unique to Roosevelt. He was also up to facing political challenges when they could not longer be avoided. The fight for the first revision of the neutrality acts after Munich and the battle over Lend-Lease, though ending in different outcomes, both demonstrate Roosevelt’s control over executive branch policy and his possession of coherent strategic rationales. In general, Roosevelt either designed or actively approved all of the major policy initiatives in American foreign policy discussed above.

However one assesses American posture in the Pacific and the final route to war, there should be little doubt that it was Roosevelt who set that policy. In October 1940, Roosevelt fired Admiral Richardson as commander-in-chief of the U.S. fleet after a series of disastrous meetings where Richardson expressed “the most scathing condemnation of the Orange plan, and of war planning itself, ever written by a high naval commander.” Roosevelt wanted officers who would carry out his policy, even if they felt that policy dangerously under-resourced. Similarly, while Marshall was right to understand that the State Department was delaying the redistribution of resources to the Atlantic, he was wrong believe that Roosevelt had been hood-winked by Pacific Hawks. Waldo Heinrich’s detailed account of the Atlantic escalation in spring 1941, on which the discussion above relies, shows that Roosevelt was carefully managing the gradual transfer of ships to the Atlantic in order to maintain deterrence in the Pacific. And although Stoler is correct to argue that in the fall of 1941 “from a military perspective the president and the State Department seemed to be insanely willing to provoke a second war in the Pacific,” he is wrong to treat the military perspective as normative. The President had political aims which could be served even with a militarily over-extended strategy.

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Indeed, the Utley-Anderson argument about the imposition of the arms embargo is implausible in part because the President was well aware of the military constraints he was facing across two vast oceans. As noted above, Roosevelt worried that “I simply have not got enough Navy to go round—and every little episode in the Pacific means fewer ships in the Atlantic.” He complained to Stimson “that he just did not have enough [naval] butter to cover the bread” of a two-ocean war. The bureaucratic politics argument relies on Roosevelt’s knowledge of this situation and his delay in deciding how aggressive the new Japan policy would be in order to argue that the embargo must have been the work of someone else. That, and the fact that low-level bureaucrats found Dean Acheson abrasive, is the heart of the bureaucratic politics case.\textsuperscript{166}

But as we have seen, the President was clearly of two minds in July about how far to push Japan, was running policy through the hawkish Sumner Welles, and had agreed to delay a full decision until after meeting Churchill. At the Argentia meeting, both Welles and Roosevelt expressed their desire to strangle Japan, sometimes in very explicit terms. Furthermore, it seems tremendously unlikely that Roosevelt, who assiduously consumed MAGIC intelligence, would have remained ignorant of Japan’s plight or hid his anger when he discovered the mix-up. He also had many opportunities during the ensuing three months of negotiations to reverse policy back to containment and deterrence, and it stretches credulity to believe that slightly withdrawing the knife from the throat of the obviously desperate Japanese would encourage rather than deter aggression. Roosevelt knew what he was doing.\textsuperscript{167}

In truth, the President faced a very difficult strategic situation. Having decided in the summer of 1940 that American strategy depended on the survival of the Britain, Roosevelt could not simply write off the British Empire in Asia (and with it the Philippines) to a Japanese government that was known to be looking for opportunities to expand. Plausibly, resources and raw materials from that area were of great importance to British survival, as many argued at the time. But even if they were not, the loss of British naval assets and political power in Asia at a very desperate time was going to be a major blow to the Churchill government, and perhaps to continued British participation in the war. A committed buckpasser might well have taken that risk, insisting with General Stanley Embick that the integrity of the British Isles and the survival of the Royal Navy were the only matters of importance. But as we have seen, Roosevelt accepted an opposite set of assumptions, emphasizing the priority of maintaining the whole British position, and he told the Japanese as much directly.

It may be true, as the Army and some Navy elements argued, that the presence of the fleet in the Pacific was militarily useless. But given that it had been put there before the war to deter Japan, its continued presence during the extended negotiations of 1941 sent a powerful signal about the American political commitment to containment in the Far East. Moving the fleet to the Atlantic in the numbers and rate suggested by Marshall and others would have seriously undermined the American attempts to keep the Pacific quiet. In short, a buckpasser might have focused on a narrow set of demands for the balance of power and chosen a mechanism that conserved costs and limited American influence. But Roosevelt had broader aims for the configuration of power in Europe, saw more numerous threats, and required more control. Roosevelt wanted to balance, and this temporarily required an over-extended posture in

\textsuperscript{166} Roosevelt to Ickes, July 1, 1941, in Ickes, \textit{The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes}, III: 567; Heinrichs, \textit{Threshold of War}, p. 56.

\textsuperscript{167} Forcefully arguing these points is Trachtenberg, \textit{The Craft of International History}, p. 98.
the Pacific. In fact, it was the essential element that allowed America to eventually achieve Roosevelt’s balancing strategy and enter the war in Europe.

Conclusion

The forces shaping American grand strategy before World War II were complex. Liberal and geopolitical forces alike pointed towards greater international commitments to shape the configuration of power in Europe, while domestic politics, a variable outside TLFP’s model, clearly restrained Roosevelt’s ability to make such commitments. Still, TLFP goes along way to explaining the underlying structure of American foreign policy and the forces driving it.

Before the fall of France, America pursued a buckpassing strategy, aiming to shape the configuration of power abroad while operating within domestic political limitations. This strategy was a second-best alternative to balancing: America sought not to primarily conserve costs but to secure as much influence as domestic political constraints would admit. The Roosevelt administration pursued this strategy through a range of diplomatic and military policies intended to bolster the European democracies through economic support, military aid, and an unbalanced rearmament program that held hope of influencing the European conflict. American strategy had both geopolitical and liberal origins. The Roosevelt administration had a genuine concern for the security of the Western hemisphere generated by rising German power. But these worries were part and parcel of a larger positive liberal nightmare: an economic sphere of German autarky that restricted American trading rights and threatened the New Deal at home.

After the fall of France, Roosevelt’s strategy evolved towards balancing, as the collapse of the European balance of power dramatically increased American security fears while loosening domestic constraints. By the autumn of 1940, military planning was calling for a ground force invasion of Europe to destroy German power. Over the course of the next year, Roosevelt adopted Lend-Lease, protected the British lifeline in the Atlantic while waging an undeclared naval war against Hitler, and strangled Japan through an oil embargo.

While the geopolitical incentives for this strategy are obvious, they did not determine American balancing posture alone. Positive liberal concerns remained a part of military planning, State Department visions of Peace, and diplomacy with Great Britain. The Roosevelt administration had buckpassing alternatives available and they were advocated within the administration. America did not need to destroy German power to ensure its security, but did require a massive commitment if it wanted to permanently secure an open-trading regime.
Chapter Six

Negative Liberty and Cold War: American Grand Strategy under Truman

The extenuating political circumstances initiated by the fall of France were instituted in the early Cold War as unexceptional: geopolitical concerns were the predominant influence on American foreign policy. However, America did not adjust gracefully to the era of realist pressures. Indeed, the Truman administration began what would be a fifteen-year period of fighting against the geopolitical tide. Though the international system became increasingly bipolar over the course of Truman’s two terms in office, his administration grasped at any policy that might undo this trend. Desperate to pass the buck of containing Russia to someone—anyone—else, the Truman administration discovered they would need to construct another pole to catch it. Rather than bow to systemic pressures, Washington accepted the challenge.

In truth, America opted for a road under Truman that it had rejected under Roosevelt. Both administrations faced a Europe of potentially balanced power centers undermined by political divisions. Roosevelt solved the problem by deciding to commit American forces to destroying German power, instead of supporting a Russo-British coalition that might have prevented German hegemony but left the Reich politically intact. The Truman administration discovered that it had to rebuild German power if the American commitment was ever to be removed. But Germany could only be rebuilt if it could be politically tied to the rest of Europe, lest West European resources be torn between fear of the Red Army and a reborn Wehrmacht. The central dilemma of American strategy in the early Cold War thus centered on crafting a policy that successfully consolidated a West European coalition against the USSR, without drawing the United States into that coalition’s permanent defense.

TLFP proves an insightful tool for analyzing the course of American grand strategy under Truman. America pursued a buckpassing approach that went through two phases, roughly coterminous with Truman’s two terms in office. Immediately following the war, American diplomats hoped that cooperation with the Soviet Union might yield a European power constellation consisting of two loose groups in the East and the West. America would be associated with the western group, but would quickly withdraw from Europe. America would thereby forestall the costly foreign policy commitments feared by an administration populated with negative liberals. However, as it became clear how powerful the Soviets might be and how weak the Europeans were, American policy shifted towards a more concentrated effort at building up the western power complex. American statesmen embraced the concept of a “third force,” whereby short-term American investments in Europe’s economic reconstruction and political federation would yield a Western pole of power capable of balancing the East.

During Truman’s second term, this strategy was undermined by a shifting military balance. The loss of the American nuclear monopoly in 1949 threw the defense of Europe into doubt during the critical period of integration and reconstruction. The Truman administration felt compelled to step up its level of military commitment to preventing Soviet hegemony, through extensive rearmament and a forward defense of Europe. Nevertheless, it did not abandon its vision of a third force upon which the United States could free-ride. Instead, the administration increased the pace and scope of its integrative efforts while emphasizing the temporary nature of an American contribution rooted in nuclear weapons.

The process surrounding these shifting commitments bears the marks of TLFP’s independent variables. On one level, the international system was extremely significant in
shaping American decisions. The threat of Soviet hegemony provided the primary motive behind all of America’s major commitments, and feedback from the international system repeatedly forced an adjustment of politico-military ends and means. But American foreign policy only needed such strategic integration because the Truman administration’s negative liberal biases were prone to downplaying threats and reducing costs. This ideological tint expressed itself in diplomacy that emphasized burden-sharing and a military policy based on projecting power from offshore. The international system demanded a commitment towards preserving the European system; negative liberal ideology pushed American strategy towards buckpassing rather than balancing.

In this chapter I use TLFP to explain the character of American grand strategy from 1945-1952, demonstrating the importance and interaction of the international system and negative liberal ideology. I begin by coding TLFP’s independent variables. I assess the Truman administration to be basically within the negative liberal camp and rate the Soviet Union as a potential hegemon throughout the period. For reasons explored below, both these judgments are subject to a certain amount of measurement error. I then chart American commitments over each of Truman’s two terms in office. I judge America to have pursued a buckpassing strategy during both timeframes, but divide the period in order to capture potentially important changes on both independent variables. Chapter Seven contains a set of counter-arguments to TLFP for the entire 1945-1963 period covered in this study.

Coding the Independent Variables

Harry Truman was a rarity among modern Presidents: he took a back seat to his State Department in running foreign policy. As his advisor George Easley put it, “to the President, the Secretary of State was number one. The State Department was the senior department.” Inexperienced and apprehensive about foreign affairs, Truman was inclined to rely upon close advisors who he trusted and felt were knowledgeable. Despite his later protests to the contrary, almost all Truman scholars agree that he was willing to cede to others both the day-to-day operation of American foreign policy and the development of the high concepts that drove it. Rather, his role consisted primarily vetoing proposals he did not support while being kept apprised of important developments.1

Truman’s policy abdication makes presenting data on his administration’s ideological valence somewhat problematic: a number of individuals might be coded, many of who have few readily available biographies or writings to consult. Below, I do the best with what is available, proceeding in a slightly different manner from before. In addition to surveying Truman’s ideological expressions, I add information on the kind of political appointments he made more generally. I then code Truman’s secretaries of state. Since data is scant, I often combine categories of expression. George Marshall presents a particularly difficult case, as I explain below. All of this is to say that the measurements that follow must be approached with a certain

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caution. Nevertheless, I believe there is still enough information to be useful and to facilitate reasonable judgments.

TRUMAN’S CONCEPT OF LIBERTY

Harry S. Truman is the most difficult figure to code in this study. That his rural background ended up in command of an urban political party underscores the ill fit between Truman and his times. He became the political leader of a rapidly modernizing America undergoing the birth of a truly national politics, but was steeped in an older milieu of early American values, with a very different understanding of the scope and role of political institutions. He had little in the way of a well-defined political philosophy; Truman’s politics were mostly a matter of inheritance. As a result he had a deeply mixed, and often incoherent, ideological outlook. On the one hand, he deeply distrusted modern bureaucracy, was a staunch fiscal conservative, and looked askance at the increasing size and scope of the New Deal State. On the other hand, he championed democracy, strong executive leadership, and economic regulation on behalf of the little guy. The resulting attitudes were as confusing as they were important for American foreign policy.  

EXPLICIT PHILOSOPHICAL STATEMENTS. Truman was not one for grand philosophic statements or making political claims founded on a well-developed worldview. Nevertheless, in those situations when he reached for liberal ideas to justify his approach, he often spoke in the language of negative liberty. He had a classical night watchmen justification for the state, believing that it ought to “act as a sort of umpire between producer and consumer, between bankers and their customers, and between railroads and their shippers.” By playing this kind of neutral role, Truman believed that moneyed special interests could be prevented from hijacking the government and turning it against the common man, another trope of negative liberty. 

Truman’s biographers generally note the poor fit between Truman’s worldview and his leadership role a Democratic Party dominated more by a Northern urban core than the Southern rural agrarian base of Truman’s upbringing. As Hamby puts it, Truman was a product of late nineteenth century liberal individualism, and a moral absolutist who believed deeply in the traditional values of the American middle class. He and other “insurgent progressives”… were cut from a similar cloth… usually small town and Protestant in background, they faced a world of big cities, giant corporations, large labor unions, organized pressure groups, and faintly alien collectivist social ideologies. They adjusted uneasily to the world of the 20th century and the New Deal. 

Like most Americans, Truman was convinced that the extraordinary circumstances of the Depression justified extraordinary and unprecedented measures to reverse them. But like many of the negative liberal politicians who acquiesced to the policies of Roosevelt’s first term, Truman considered these powers justified only by the state of emergency and limited to its duration. Unlike many New Deal liberals, he argued in favor of viewing relief measures as temporary expedients, saying that “I am against giving another nickel to those who can work, have the opportunity and won’t do so.” Despite being a Roosevelt ally, in the late 1930s he

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2 There are many good works on Truman’s life. For this summary and much of the coding below, I have relied on the most comprehensive, Hamby, Man of the People.
3 Ibid., pp. 217.
4 Ibid., pp. 216.
joined with the conservative opposition in Congress to oppose high relief spending. Also like the congressional conservatives, he blamed government interventions for many of the problems the New Deal was trying to solve, especially depressed agricultural prices. On the whole, when asked to talk about his ideology by his friends, he identified as just “a little left of center.” After receiving praise from a left-wing tabloid, he told his staff that “I may be on the wrong track after all.”

Truman could also justify himself in the language of positive liberty. His characteristic concern with efficiency in government was rooted in part in early twentieth century Progressivism. He despised big business, finance, and concentrated economic power, and hoped that efficient government could help make society more democratic. This positive liberal vision of democracy he often stated bluntly: “the human animal can’t be trusted for anything good except en masse. The combined thought and action of the whole people of any race, creed, or nationality will always point in the right direction.” In order to exercise collective good judgment, the state needed to unite people. It would also be necessary to provide for their most basic needs, and he defended his haphazard extension of New Deal measures in these terms.

Mostly, Truman did not speak or think in high concepts, more comfortable with the pulling and hauling of practical politics as he knew it. But when he did reach for ideas to order his intellectual universe, he drew on the resources of negative and positive liberty in roughly equal measure. In this sense, Truman was a genuinely mixed figure in the trajectory of American liberal ideas. In domestic politics, the result was Truman’s uneasy leadership of a modernizing political movement. In foreign affairs, events saw him apply his older ideas about liberty to a new international situation and defer on most judgments to his negative liberal advisors.

CENTRALIZATION OF POWER. Truman frequently expressed hostility towards centralizing political authority in the hands of the state. He was often against expanding the role and scope of government, and was unremittingly opposed to bureaucrats and bureaucracy in his personal rhetoric. Outlining his ideas for how Congress should respond to the recession of the late 1930’s—after the “emergency” had passed—Truman proclaimed that it should “ease taxes on the little corporation, make labor and business cooperate, pass as little new legislation as possible, adjourn Congress and let lawmakers go home... come back here and abolish the unnecessary boards, bureaus and commissions, and fashion an economical form of government.” Economic ills would not be solved by further state-building: “no one wants to see the government in business. My pet aversion is a bureaucrat—a Washington bureaucrat is the worst form of political parasite.”

Indeed, Truman’s private remarks about his hatred of bureaucracy bordered on the vitriolic. “The longer I am here, the more I hate the bureaucrats,” he remarked to a friend, as “they have neither common sense [n]or judgment.” He commonly referred to them as

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7 Ibid., quote p. 216.
"pinheads," "cookie-pushers," and "stripped-pants boys," expressing opposition to giving them more power or increasing their number. Truman did not always express this opposition with his vote, but neither was he unwilling to do so: he came to Washington prepared to vote against the National Recovery Administration—Roosevelt’s signature New Deal program—on the grounds that it empowered a byzantine administrative structure and cartelized the market. He was relieved when the Supreme Court struck down the measure down as unconstitutional. 8

The State Department, interestingly, came in for special abuse. Truman loved to tell anecdotes about their pompous attitude and aristocratic affectations. He once characteristically noted in his diary that “the smart boys in the State Department, as usual, are against the best interests of the U.S.” This may explain Truman’s propensity to entrust his foreign policy to close associates he felt shared his values, rather than the machinations of a professional bureaucracy he mistrusted. 9

Truman instead identified with small business entrepreneurs and had the small businessman’s decentralist instinct. As students of the period have noted, “small business is a state of mind—it is the state of mind of the average American rich or poor,” one that frequently expressed itself in a strong dislike for economic regulation and grants of economic authority. Truman was a former small businessman himself, having run several failed enterprises and accumulated a good deal of debt. Strikingly, he blamed the failure of his haberdashery on the Federal Reserve’s undue economic influence. Moreover, many of Truman’s friends, advisors, and political backers were from the Missouri business community, including several self-described conservatives. He apparently took their advice quite seriously, which caused internecine warfare between those in his administration who favored labor, regulation, and New Deal economics, and those who resisted centralized economic controls. 10

These negative liberal instincts were equally prevalent in Truman’s career in Jackson County, Missouri politics. He repeatedly stressed his desire to run the County Court like a business, claiming he would “be the county’s servant just the same as if I were president of a corporation.” He largely fulfilled his promises to bring a new efficiency and business sense to county dealings, turning a crippling deficit into a surplus. He actually managed to squeeze a great deal of waste, fraud, and abuse out of the administration formerly run by the Pendergast machine, even defying his political bosses to do so. His administration was focused on providing genuine public goods, including a major bond issue to improve and build new county roads that ended up being far cheaper than the alternative piecemeal approach. The Court under Truman mostly ignored issues of relief and services for the poor, which did not fall within the business-minded ambit of his vision. 11

However, Truman’s distrust of centralization was not consistent. Especially when concentration of power could be cast as a gain in efficiency, and placed in the hands of a dedicated public servant rather than a Byzantine bureaucracy, Truman could be found favoring such proposals. In Jackson County he proposed a new sewer system that aroused “Jeffersonian opposition” from those who resented the intrusion into an area conventionally dealt with on an individual basis. He also hoped to reorganize, streamline, and cut costs in County government by concentrating most power in the hands of the Chief Judge, a position that he did not hold but

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9 Ibid., quote p. 327.
11 Ibid., pp. 115-131, 149-153, quote p. 117.
that his administration had returned to respectability. Truman had a principled belief in the importance of executive power, which he was able to cognitively differentiate from his hatred of bureaucracy, despite the obvious relationship of the two concepts.12

Truman took this principle to Washington, where he defended large grants of power to Roosevelt on the grounds that a powerful President could produce efficiencies necessary to combat the emergency. He went so far as to defend Roosevelt’s court packing plan, the most bitterly contested and least popular measure of the entire New Deal era. It should also be noted that though his views on issues were mostly expressed in terms of patronage and politics, his voting record in the senate was reliably New Deal. Consistent with his views on the centralization of power, he was most reliable on issues of executive authority, labor, and foreign policy; least reliable on business regulation, the expansion of public power, and welfare relief. Operationally a New Deal supporter, he aided the centralization of power in some areas and opposed it in others.13

ECONOMIC AND FISCAL VIEWS. Harry Truman was staunchly fiscally conservative. Though willing to raise some taxes in order to fund government programs, he was a dyed-in-the-wool budget balancer. Referring to the fiscal crunch of the late New Deal, Truman asserted that “the money has been spent and the bill must be paid... I am ready to vote to cut down expenses and for any tax bill that will raise sufficient revenue to pay what we owe.” As noted above, in Truman’s Jackson County days his fiscal conservatism dovetailed with his sometime opposition to political centralization and love of efficiency. His tight-fisted approach to budgeting and revenues resulted in a fiscal renaissance for Eastern Missouri, adding a new and modern system of roads to boot. In a machine dominated jurisdiction this kind of turnaround was truly remarkable, and owed much to Truman’s sense of fiscal discipline.14

In Washington, Truman made his political name by creating and overseeing the “Truman Committee,” a congressional body that investigated waste, fraud, and abuse during World War II. This committee hounded business, labor, and government bureaucracy in an effort to prevent the abuse of taxpayer money. Indeed, it was in terms of the taxpayer rights that Truman constantly defended the enterprise, saying that “you and I are going to pay for the cost, the waste and the inefficiency in the form of increased taxation for years to come.” He was able to gain political leverage out of the enterprise, but it appears that his work was driven by genuinely felt fiscal views. Indeed, Truman was so successful in bringing to light uncomfortable information on wartime spending that his efforts generated several attempts to squash the committee. Willing to go against Roosevelt in time of war if the committee was politically hamstring, Truman got the President to back down the committee’s enemies. His commitment to fiscal rectitude drove the bulk of his politics during the war years.15

Truman continued his balanced budget commitments once he was president. He wanted to keep the post-war deficit as small as possible and insisted on a surplus for 1947. Truman’s tax and monetary policies were designed to control inflation as much as possible during the post-war economic conversion. Very skeptical of Keynesian doctrines, Truman ensured that the newly

12 Ibid., pp. 153-160.
14 Hamby, Man of the People, pp. 113-131, 149-153, quote p. 216.
15 Ibid., pp. 248-260, quote pp. 251-252. So deep did his investigations go that at one point Truman had to be stopped by Secretary of War Henry Stimson from investigating the Manhattan project.
formed Council of Economic Advisors was dominated by conservatives, appointing no New Deal economists, and only one social reformer in Leon Keyserling. Even when events or politics dictated higher government spending, Truman maintained his balanced budget views and did his best to impose them on the state. On this dimension, Truman was firmly in the negative liberal camp.\textsuperscript{16}

Still, on the relation of the state to the economy, Truman was more often in the positive liberal camp. He admired and identified with “Brandeisian” economic thought of the Progressive Era that castigated corporate power and sought to use the coercive leverage of the central state to bring large producers down to size. Truman was a leading attack dog of the railroads on grounds of economic concentration, even though the railroads had basically been bankrupted by government regulation after the First World War. More generally, he argued that “Wall Street brought about Government regulation and the depression. If Wall Street had produced the necessary statesmen” the economic interference of the government would have been unnecessary. In truth, his early forays into economic regulation from Washington were rooted in his early Jackson County views, where he had attacked concentrated wealth, financial power, and corporations.\textsuperscript{17}

As President and leader of the new model Democratic Party, continued these themes with enthusiasm. He appeased the urban base of the Democrats by taking up full employment and expansion of the welfare state as his platform after the war. His economic reconversion policies maintained price controls while allowing wages to rise. The result was a widespread round of strikes, inflation, and rationing, with the black market taking off in popularity. In part, these policies were chosen because of Truman’s ideological and political sympathy with the labor movement. Truman identified Labor with the economic “little guy.” He often ranted about the duplicity of John Lewis and other labor leaders, but mostly backed their cause. As Hamby avers, “Truman made a clear distinction between established big business, which he reflexively disliked, and big labor, which he usually supported... in his heart, he found it hard to envision men who worked with their hands as a threat to American values.” Economic reconversion was such a disaster because Truman’s constant zigzagging and patches on failing policy were animated by a desire to do right by labor.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{POLITICAL APPOINTMENTS.} What can we learn about Truman’s conflicting philosophical preferences from the way he staffed his administration? They seem to reveal that, in the crunch, he fell back on the older negative liberty leanings of rural Missouri in deciding who would make important decisions and give him counsel. His administration did include East Coast elites such as Clark Clifford and Dean Acheson, who had adopted the positive liberal proclivities emerging in the Democratic Party. Yet, “he also maintained an additional group of top staff advisors, such as Matthew Connelly and Military Aide Harry Vaughan, from social backgrounds more like his own who tended to be politically conservative... they maintained ties with conservative political elites and bureaucracies like the FBI.”

Connelly, in particular, was a very powerful figure as the keeper of the Truman’s appointment book—it was impossible to see the President without going through Connelly. He was also the only person who was allowed to sit in on the weekly meetings of Truman and the Democratic Congressional Leadership, and was the last person to talk to Truman at the end of

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., pp. 364-386.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., pp. 154, 219-223.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp. 154, 219-223, 363-380, quote p. 272.
each day. In oral history interviews, Connelly dripped with contempt for some of the positive liberals in the administration, contempt reminiscent of the way Truman talked about bureaucrats. Characteristic are his remarks about Dean Acheson: "Mr. Acheson, in my vernacular, would be considered an egghead, not a practical administrator, and not a man who represented the opinion of America, or of the people of America. Mr. Acheson, for some reason, was more or less beholden to the operations of the British Government. In my opinion, these things conflicted with the viewpoint of Mr. Truman, who was all American." This kind of influence was bound to be important in Truman’s decision making.\

In terms of policy appointments, Truman’s instincts pushed him away from the left wing of the Democratic Party. He threw out almost the whole of Roosevelt’s domestic staff, distrusting anyone who smelled of the New Deal ideology. Those he lacked the political cover to simply fire, like Henry Wallace and Harold Ickes, he forced out within a year. He would later demonize Wallace and his associates as communists during the 1948 campaign. The lack of New Deal veterans in his administration, combined with Truman’s personal indifference, is often used to explain the political failure of most of the liberal Fair Deal legislative agenda. As Connelly later put it of the Party’s left wing, Truman “suffered them but he did not believe in their movement.” The result was that “all the so-called liberals were backing Eisenhower [to be drafted in the 1948 election]. Whatever liberals are, I don’t know.”

In foreign policy positions, Truman was more willing to keep Roosevelt’s team. Positive liberals such as Dean Acheson held important positions in Truman’s first term, as did Averell Harriman and Paul Nitze, both of whom might be put in this category. Still, even leaving aside the major principals examined below, the group of foreign policy experts employed by Truman featured several clear exponents of negative liberty, many self-identified “conservatives,” and a wealth of Republicans and anti-New Dealers. The aristocratic reactionary George Kennan is probably the most famous of this group, and justly deserves his renown as the primary thinker behind the early Truman foreign policy. But Robert Lovett, Lewis Douglas, and John McCloy were also members of the Foreign Policy establishment who leaned anywhere from right to hard right on domestic politics, and played prominent roles in the administration. It is also worth remembering that John Foster Dulles and Dwight Eisenhower, whose negative liberal leanings are analyzed in Chapter Seven, made contributions to the Truman foreign policy that were not inconsiderable: Dulles as the Republican representative consulting for a bipartisan foreign policy, and Eisenhower as the first general in charge of NATO. Truman’s appointments, especially on foreign policy, reveal a tendency to trust men with the older set of negative liberal values.

COMPOSITE CODE. All in all, Truman’s background and political role were discordant, producing an ideological cacophony that is difficult to interpret. Given his distrust of the state, the bureaucracy, and his fiscal conservatism, it would be inappropriate to group him with

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19 Fordham, Building the Cold War Consensus, pp. 50-51, quote p. 50. Connelly quote in Connelly Oral History Interview, August 21, 1968, pp. 331. See also the interviews of November 27 and 30, 1967, which are sprinkled liberally with the same kind of invective. All are accessible on the Truman Library’s website, http://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/connly.htm.


21 Fordham, Building the Cold War Consensus, pp. 99-100. For assessments of the views of the upper rungs of the "establishment" in the Truman administration, see Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986).
positive liberal figures like Wilson, Roosevelt, Kennedy, or Acheson. His openness to executive power, economic regulation, and some positive liberal rhetoric, however, seem incommensurate with the politics of Harding, Coolidge, Hoover, or Eisenhower. As such, I rate him as a genuinely mixed figure. However, for the purposes of coding his entire administration, his political appointments, particularly in foreign policy, seem to have tended towards the older set of negative liberal values. Since Truman himself did not take a very strong role in commanding American strategy, I believe this justifies adding a negative liberal thumb on the scales. The obvious potential for measurement error, though, should encourage a cautious appraisal of the results, and suggests areas for future research.

BYRNES' CONCEPT OF LIBERTY

Another practical politician who found success by hitching himself to the New Deal, James Byrnes came from a considerably different background than the president he served as Secretary of State. Like Truman, his Democratic Party affiliation was part of his southern heritage rather than a vehicle for ideological expression. Unlike Truman, the South Carolinian Byrnes had more social resources for shaping such an ideology: he hailed from the wealth Democratic elite who ran South Carolina politics from Charleston. This background gave him an inclination for incremental reform combined with a temperament ill suited to radical change, later pronounced in his role as a decentralist and anti-desegregation Governor. Ideologically, his fits solidly, though not completely within the negative liberal camp. In spite of his New Deal associations, he held a limited vision of government power, was opposed to its further centralization, and endorsed fiscally conservative and economically non-interventionist views.22

EXPLICIT PHILOSOPHICAL STATEMENTS AND CENTRALIZATION. Byrnes initially came to Washington as an ally of Woodrow Wilson committed to progressive but incremental government reform. Ideologically, however, this entailed very little deviation from the anti-statist and decentralist tendencies of the post-bellum South. Indeed, even into the first part of the Great Depression, Byrnes was resistant to the intervention of the federal government, going so far as to support Herbert Hoover's opposition to direct federal aid to municipalities, which “presumed an activism between the federal government and the states unenvisioned by [the progressive] New Freedom.” As Byrnes' biographer David Robertson puts it of Byrnes and other conservative Southern Democrats, “in their adherence to a strict fiscal conservatism and a limited federal activism, none of these senators showed a disposition to construct a Democratic Party liberal ideology beyond what had sufficed [for Southern Democrats] during the lifetime of Woodrow Wilson.”23

Like most politicians, the “interregnum of despair” between Roosevelt’s election and inauguration, replete with bank failures and sharp economic contraction, made Byrnes much more ideologically pliable. He became one of Roosevelt’s organizers in the Senate during the early New Deal and provided many votes and much political cover for Roosevelt’s policies. Even then, though, Byrnes thought of these changes as temporary measures only. In 1933, after the famous “hundred days” of New Deal legislation he argued that whether the New Deal policies were “idealistic or revolutionary, you have the knowledge that most of them were

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22 On Byrnes background and career, see David Robertson, Sly and Able: A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), pp. xi-34.
23 Ibid., both quotes by Robertson on p. 132. To be sure, Byrnes also had political motivations for his support for Hoover.
authorized by Congress only for the period of the Emergency. When the emergency passes they must pass.” In short, he was still a firm believer “in the rights of sovereign states” even if these rights had to temporarily “adjust to changing conditions.”

After his 1936 re-election, Byrnes followed through on his rhetoric. In the teeth of the recession of 1937, he declared before a national radio audience that “I voted for every recovery measure. If today the same conditions existed, I would vote for the same appropriations. But the same conditions do not exist. The recovery program of this administration has accomplished its purpose. The emergency has passed.” In place of supporting new measures, Byrnes became one of the de-facto leaders of the congressional “conservative coalition” opposing the Roosevelt administration: although he did not sign a conservative manifesto popular among the group, in 1938 he was identified as one of the top three leaders by the New York Times. In this role, he organized a “hold back the New Deal movement” that stymied Roosevelt’s proposals in the name of federalism and anti-statism. He went so far as to oppose Roosevelt’s attempted purge of the Democratic Party in the South, once referring to President as “a little Sherman marching through the South.” Had the purge been successful, the move would have eliminated many opponents of federal expansion and government activism. Ultimately, his ideological vision would cost him, as Roosevelt mollified the liberal wing of the party by refusing Byrnes as vice-president in 1944, on the grounds that he was too conservative and too Southern.

**FISCAL AND ECONOMIC VIEWS.** The platform of Byrnes’ conservative coalition was simple: less government spending and less regulation of the economy. Like many negative liberty minded elites, Byrnes saw relief measures as “excessive government spending,” and led opposition to direct welfare payments and federal job-creation programs like the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Byrnes also took up anti-labor agitation, opposed housing legislation, and impeded numerous other proposals the Congressional conservatives felt would contribute to the deficit. The conservative coalition counted among its many victories the defeat of maximum hours, minimum wage proposals; a Byrnes resolution condemning sit-down strikes; cuts to the relief and WPA budgets; and several urban redistribution measures. On all these issues, Byrnes was a leading opponent.

On issues of economic regulation, Byrnes and his allies applied pressure against many New Deal programs they felt impinged on economic opportunity and smacked of collectivism. As early as 1935, Byrnes led the charge against the “death penalty” provision in a major utilities bill, which dissolved any utility firm that did not meet the open-ended standards of federal regulators. A firm ally of Bernard Baruch, the wealthy Democratic financier, Byrnes opposed these and other regulations as fundamentally anti-capitalist. He orchestrated Baruch’s devastating testimony against an “undistributed profits tax” that Roosevelt had instituted as a populist re-distribution measure. Both men regarded the labor sit-down strikes already mentioned as the theft of private property, pure and simple. Later in his role as head of the War

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24 Ibid., Byrnes quotes on p. 155. On the interregnum of despair and the hundred days, see Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan*, pp. 167-180.
25 Robertson, *Sly and Able*, pp. 246-266, quotes on 248, 249, and 278. Emphasis is Byrnes’.
26 Patterson, *Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal*, pp. 129-163, esp. pp. 142-154, 152-155. See also Robertson, *Sly and Able*, p. 248. As both Patterson and Robertson note, Byrnes was not a completely principled opponent of statist measures, as he still relied on Roosevelt for some measure of political power. For instance, he supported both Roosevelt’s court packing plan (like Truman) and his executive reorganization bill, both of which drew heavy fire from anti-statists. He was nonetheless one of the most influential leaders of the conservative coalition.
Production Board, Byrnes plans for reconversion to a civilian economy were focused on getting the government out of business as soon as possible, ignored liberal goals on employment and industrial policy. In sum, on issues of federal involvement in the economy, Byrnes was much more comfortable with the pre-New Deal regulatory environment than with many New Deal economic measures. 27

COMPOSITE CODE. Though an erstwhile New Deal ally, James Byrnes was more in the set of negative liberal beliefs than out of it. His “emergency” justification for the New Deal and his strong federalist tendencies mark him as a negative liberal on issues of decentralization and the role of the state. His fiscal conservatism and concern with government spending on areas it was not authorized were typical of negative liberal rhetoric, and his opposition to economic regulation was rooted in the older tradition of American values. While not within this study’s ambit, it is worth noting that Byrnes spent the 1940s and 1950s attacking Truman’s Fair Deal domestic agenda and waging a decentralist battle against federal power as Governor of South Carolina. All in all, I rate Byrnes NL: Medium, solidly within the set of typical negative liberal views. 28

MARSHALL’S CONCEPT OF LIBERTY

George C. Marshall served as Truman’s special envoy to China, his Secretary of State, and his Secretary of Defense. Annoyingly, he said very little about politics. Like many military officers of his day, he did not vote as a matter of principle, believing that it would interfere with his ability to serve the civilian chain of command. As he wrote to an officer who suggested he run for public office, “putting such an idea into a man’s head is the first step towards destroying his usefulness… as soon as an ulterior purpose or motive creeps in, then the trouble starts and will gather momentum like a snowball… I ask you not even to tell your wife what you thought.” Marshall thought of himself as a servant of the public and would not tolerate even the hint of political partisanship. 29

This tendency means that he left behind only hints of his political views. I have therefore adopted a less systematic approach to coding Marshall’s concept of liberty. I have collected circumstantial evidence about his ideology in two categories: domestic and foreign policy.


28 Many scholars have noted the correlation between the anti-statist Southern democrats and their defense of segregation and institutional racism. While the link is undeniable, it is worth noting that Southern Democrats divided over the New Deal—many southerners were major backers of the President’s agenda, including inveterate racists. As Patterson puts it “except on racial issues, the south was not ‘solid’ in Congress” during the era of the reaction against the New Deal—those who opposed it did so out of genuine ideological conviction. They were “temperamentally inflexible” and were often “essentially Jeffersonian Democrats, to the degree that politics permitted.” Byrnes fit this mold, motivated more by ideology that racial issues. Patterson, Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal, quotes p. 330 (emphasis added), and p. 16. On the non-solid south see Robertson, Sly and Able, pp. 249-252.

Marshall had little incentive to dissemble, since he neither sought nor desired political preferment. I believe the evidence points overwhelmingly towards a negative concept of liberty rooted in an older set of American values. Still, given the odd nature of Marshall’s career and the idiosyncratic nature of the evidence, it is fair to treat it with a certain amount of caution.

MARSHALL’S DOMESTIC VIEWS. Virtually the only domestic political program Marshall ever expressed any interest in or support for was the New Deal Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC was a jobs program that placed thousands of unemployed workers under the command of the U.S. Army and employed them on environmental conservation projects. Marshall was interested in the program because it strengthened his ideal of the citizen soldier and seemed an adequate substitute for the Universal Military Training the Army favored. The citizen soldier ideal was in many respects a substitute for a large standing military and has a long pedigree in early American negative liberal thought. At best, this was an exception to what his wife described as conservative political views, and likely dovetailed with them. The only other expression of policy opinions found in Marshall’s published papers is an expression of support for civil liberties, which also fits with a negative liberal temperament. 30

Marshall used to describe his politics thus: “I have never voted, my father was a Democrat, my mother a Republican, and I am an Episcopalian.” This clever statement obscures the truth of his very conservative background—his father was a Southern Democrat in the mold of the incredibly decentralist Grover Cleveland, while his mother came from a rock-ribbed Republican and well to do family in Pennsylvania. As he admitted to his biographer, “my political views [in early life] were largely those of my mother’s. She was inclined to be a Republican in her instincts” and gave him his first “political lesson” by approvingly noting the defeat of a local Democratic candidate for Governor by the Republican machine in Philadelphia. 31

Marshall’s political views also come out in his friendship with a very active anti-New Deal figure: Governor of Oregon Charles Martin, whom he knew from Martin’s previous Army career. Martin was an anti-labor rabble-rouser known for defending business and attacking strikers. He was prone to extremely belligerent rhetoric, urging sheriffs deployed against striking workers to “beat the hell out of them… crack their damn heads! These fellows are there for nothing but trouble—give it to them!” Like many other advocates of negative liberty, Martin considered sit-down strikes nothing less than the theft of private property, and frequently ordered the national guard to put them down. As for the bureaucratic reforms of the New Deal, he was fond of rephrasing Roosevelt’s inaugural remarks as “we have nothing to fear from the future but our own foolishness and slothfulness.” 32

Surprisingly, Marshall did not treat Martin with the carefully hedged anti-political language he usually deployed in his correspondence. Congratulating Martin on his election, he

wrote “mere congratulations would be a mild expression of my feelings... to me your splendid career in civil life is one of the few cases where the genuinely fine character receives something of the success deserved.” Writing to General Pershing, he confessed Martin to be “amusingly and daringly frank in his views on the present tendencies” of the New Deal. To Charles Dawes he enthused that “Martin is making a great name for himself out here for fearlessness, extreme frankness about the ‘crack pot ideas’ of this day and age, etc. The radicals are trying to organize a heavy fight on him for the nomination next spring, and many Republicans are changing their registration in order to vote for him.” On the eve of that contest, Marshall wrote Martin that “I submit my prayers and hopes towards your success... and I wish that I could cast my first vote in your behalf.” He called Martin’s defeat “such a tragedy to the State of Oregon that I am without words on the subject” and forwarded press clippings to Pershing that praised Martin for sacrificing his own political fortunes for the good of Oregon. Given Martin’s extremely strong point of view, Marshall’s very supportive comments, and Marshall’s normal political reticence, it appears that Marshall found much to admire in Martin’s ideology.$^{33}$

MARRIALL’S FOREIGN POLICY VIEWS. Marshall was a firm supporter of civil control of the military and keeping the power of the Armed services under the check of political control. He refused to wear his uniform when testifying before Congress and demanded his aides do the same, loath to give the Army a political stake in legislative decisions. Similarly, he felt that the legislation requiring him to certify materials as non-essential before they could be sold to Britain was unconstitutional: it took power away from the elected Commander and Chief and placed it in the hands of an unaccountable military bureaucracy. In the run-up to World War II, he deftly navigated the isolationist-interventionist divide, never endorsing any view beyond preparedness, and bringing along both sides with his program of rebuilding the budget-starved Army. Indeed, privately he was sometimes skeptical of interventionist measures like aid to Britain, which he feared might be a lost cause sucking critical resources from the nation’s defense. In general, he defended all of his proposals as necessary for hemispheric defense, and advised against over-extending the United States outside the Western hemisphere before it was attacked.$^{34}$

Marshall’s cautious views about foreign policy and state building came through after the war as well. While scandalized by the quick disintegration of the Army he had built following the post-war demobilization, he noted that what was needed was a not a large Army but “an attitude of preparedness that is not going to beggar the taxpayer and is going to be maintained in time of peace.” For this reason he favored Universal Military Training, as a way to split the difference between preparedness and a small Army. Marshall also opposed the basing system developed after World War II, which he felt was probably going to be unaffordable—his view was that “you were not going to get the means to support these [bases] and they would be a weakness instead of a strength.... the thing was to have certain things we had to have and concentrate on them and let everything else peel off.” Such disintegration was just part of the way democracies fought war, and Marshall considered it a good thing, even if it sometimes had bad consequences.$^{35}$

$^{33}$ Quotes are from Marshall to Charles Martin, November 7, 1934; Marshall to John Pershing, November 26, 1936; Marshall to Charles Dawes, October 8, 1937; Marshall to Charles Martin, May 14 and May 27th, 1938, respectively. For press clippings, see Marshall to John Pershing, November 23, 1938. All are found in PGCM, I: 442, 516, 560-561, 597-598, and 654, respectively.

$^{34}$ Stoler, George C. Marshall, pp. 71-84.

Even though he ended up leading America into a more active foreign policy than ever before, Marshall was very conscious to impose restraints and avoid overextension. In crafting his famous Marshall plan address, Marshall admitted that he ignored the belligerent example set by Dean Acheson's expansive speech in Mississippi the week before and instead relied on the restrained approach of George Kennan and Charles Bohlen. He constantly worried about over-committing American power, noting that “the feelings that were dominating action in Europe, I felt certain, would be modified... we got into these things in a revengeful or vicious mood, and now we were trying to get out of them.” In a rare display of political posturing, Marshall argued vehemently against extending American recognition to Israel, declaring that “this is not a matter to be determined on the basis of politics” and threatening to break his habits of non-participation and vote against Truman if he authorized the recognition. In short, he frequently displayed concerns about the costs of foreign policy and the size of military bureaucracies.36

COMPOSITE CODE. Though the evidence is sparse due to Marshall’s steadfast avoidance of political issues, circumstantial evidence indicates Marshall fits within the negative liberal tradition. His background was one of conservative political ideas and his upbringing within the older mold of American values. Such political views as he did express seemed to be in sympathy with anti-New Deal ideological arguments, and he frequently expressed anti-statist concerns in his foreign policy discourse. In light of the sketchy nature of the evidence, I code Marshall as more in than out of the set of negative liberal ideals, as NL: Medium.

ACHESON’S CONCEPT OF LIBERTY

Dean Acheson was the ideal typical member of the American foreign policy “establishment,” driven in part by his adherence to the emerging set of positive liberal norms becoming more common among the American elite. Unlike others in the Truman administration, Acheson came to the Democratic Party for ideological reasons. He believed the concept of freedom could be applied to groups as well as individuals, and he was cool towards the separation of powers, fearing that judicial interference would limit executive prerogative. A conventional Keynesian and supporter of big labor, Acheson’s ideas about economics were interventionist and influenced his take on foreign policy.

EXPLICIT PHILOSOPHICAL STATEMENTS AND CENTRALIZATION. Acheson came to a positive concept of liberty early on in his career and associated his desire for a new liberalism with the fortunes of the Democratic Party. In the 1920’s he was a member of the Penguin Club, a liberal debating society in Washington D.C., and became active in local Democratic politics in Montgomery County, Maryland. In “sympathy with the New Freedom of Woodrow Wilson, the politics of Republicans Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge were increasingly repugnant,” to Acheson; New Era Republicans were associated with policies crushing the effective freedom of labor and others who lacked the power and resources of business.

The core of Acheson’s ideology was built on the massive disadvantages labor suffered because of this lack of capacity. By themselves workers could not achieve their goals and seize the opportunities nominally available to them. Instead, American’s needed to recognize that “we are passing... from the day of the individual to the day of the group.” In an unpublished

manuscript, Acheson argued that "the press of the population, the centralization of power, the intricacies of a highly developed culture are forcing the individual to secure his interests through group rather than solitary action" and that "the group as an entity should develop interests as real as any with which the law has to deal." Acheson was perfectly comfortable with the highly interventionist and centralized state necessary to effect such a transformation.37

Acheson’s fervency for a positive liberalism only increased with the coming of the New Deal. He was active in the movement to organize women in the garment industry, earning him the appellation “brilliant as a lawyer, well known as a progressive… one who could understand the heart of our labor movement,” by labor leader David Dubinsky. Others viewed his actions with less kindness, such as Jeffersonian Democrat and former Missouri Senator James A. Reed, who sputtered that “if the devil scrapped the cauldrons of hell, and out of the scum created a sensate being, he would not be as vile as this man [pointing cane at Acheson] who comes here to defend stripping women naked in the streets of the city.” Picking ideological sides like this made him a prominent backer of Roosevelt, even after the latter had fired him from government for refusing to defend potentially illegal policies. Recruited to join the “Democrats for Landon” movement started by Lew Douglas and other future members of the Truman administration who felt the New Deal had gone too far, Acheson declined, instead endorsing Roosevelt in a newspaper editorial that was later reprinted as pro-Roosevelt propaganda.38

As a lawyer, Acheson explained his positive liberal commitments most eloquently in commentary on the law. He stood up for centralization of power in the executive branch in speeches advocating judicial restraint—clearly aimed at the Supreme Court striking down New Deal legislation. In the process he heaped praise on Chief Justice Roger Taney—infamous for the Dred Scott decision—arguing that an active judiciary would disarm government “of the powers necessary to accomplish the ends of its creation and see the functions it was designed to perform transferred to the hands of privileged corporations.” Acheson argued that property rights had led to the restrictions on the lives of those who were not property owners, whose “interests were not recognized in any way in our legal order.” To remedy this deficiency, government had to recognize “those who are not owners… have interests in property and in the use of property which must be considered and protected” by government intervention. Such intervention would be justified by as little as “a widespread popular belief that an industry has been particularly resistant to control.” As such, this was a job for the executive and not a judiciary that “condemned on a priori reasoning the efforts of puzzled men as lacking any rational foundation and as purely fanciful.”39

FISCAL NORMS AND ECONOMIC REGULATION. Though not often given to speaking about fiscal issues, Acheson was a conventional Keynesian on economic affairs, believing that the government had a duty to use fiscal measures to stimulate the economy. He “got on famously” with Lord Keynes and was instrumental in easing negotiations with the British over the Lend-Lease agreement and imperial preferences in trade. Acheson inserted language into the

37 Quotes in James Chace, Acheson: The Secretary of State who Created the American World (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 59 and 39, respectively. See also Ibid., pp. 48-49. First quote is by biographer James Chace, second is from Acheson’s unpublished book “The Administration of Justice in Industry” excerpted by Chace.
38 Quotes in Chace, Acheson, p. 70. See also pp. 69-77.
agreement emphasizing the importance of efforts “directed to the expansion, by appropriate international and domestic measures, of production, employment and the exchange and consumption of goods.”

Acheson’s proclivity towards economic regulation has already been demonstrated above. Interestingly, he explicitly tied these views to international conduct. Consulting with Roosevelt during the 1940 campaign, Acheson argued that President was too defensive about foreign policy. What the campaign needed to do was “to relate the past eight years of the New Deal and the great horizons it had opened for the common man to the dangers threatening freedom everywhere.” By making explicit the connection between government intervention and its freedom promoting effects, Acheson felt Roosevelt could win support for a more active foreign policy.

Earlier, Acheson had diagnosed the root causes of the war in the failure of government to manage the accumulation wealth. As he offered in reflecting on the causes of the world wars: the “Nineteenth Century world economy was far from perfect. It contained within it injustices that demanded correction”—dictatorship and militaristic expansion were “the response of Asia and a large part of Europe to the failure of some of the vital mechanisms of the Nineteenth Century world economy.” This suggested a “therapeutic aspect” to American post-war policy, centered on providing capital and supporting properly interventionist democratic governance in the under-developed parts of Europe. In a world where people could make effective use of their freedom, individuals abroad would not be tempted to pin the realization of their hopes on aggression and dictatorship.

Acheson summarized his domestic and foreign policy views as seeking the creation of a “political economy of freedom—at home and abroad.” The purpose of domestic policy was to provide effective freedom to American citizens through government intervention and regulation of the economy. Concurrently, “the purpose of foreign policy is to preserve the freedom of our homes, and also the freedom to do one’s work… there are millions throughout the world with the same aspirations—to be allowed to live out their lives in their own way.” As in domestic affairs, securing this freedom abroad would require active government intervention, both of foreign and American governments.

COMPOSITE CODE. McClellan aptly summarizes Acheson’s concept of liberty: “in espousing the right of government to a larger role in the social order, Acheson looked further than immediate goals of humanitarianism and meliorism… Acheson saw looming up the whole question of American society adjusting to a new economic and social order which would supersede that of individualistic liberalism.” Acheson favored the group over the individual, the centralization of power in the federal government and its executive branch, fiscal Keynesianism, and heavy government regulation of the economy. He tied these beliefs explicitly to the expansion of freedom, both at home and abroad. I place him fully within the set of positive liberty, as PL: High.

40 McLellan, Dean Acheson, pp. 47-49, quote 48.
41 Chace, Acheson, p. 81. This quote is a very succinct summary of the positive liberal attitude towards freedom at home and abroad.
44 McLellan, Dean Acheson.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Explicit Philosophy</th>
<th>Centralization</th>
<th>Economic and Fiscal Views</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Truman</strong></td>
<td>Support for limited state role; distrustful of state growth; strong supporter of democracy as intrinsic good.</td>
<td>Hated bureaucracy; thought government inefficient and wasteful; loved executive leadership.</td>
<td>Staunch fiscal conservative; somewhat anti-welfare spending; economically interventionist; pro-labor.</td>
<td>Mixed Liberal: ideals from both sets.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Byrnes</strong></td>
<td>Supporter of limited government; activism only for emergency purposes; organized anti-FDR “conservative coalition.”</td>
<td>States rights supporter.</td>
<td>Anti-welfare spending; anti-labor; wanted limits on government economic interventionism.</td>
<td>NL: Medium, solidly within the set.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Marshall</strong></td>
<td>Pro-civil liberties; strong supporter of anti-New Deal governor Charles Martin.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Worried about the fiscal and economic costs of overseas commitments and large standing military.</td>
<td>NL: Medium, solidly within the set.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Acheson</strong></td>
<td>Liberty a group concept; state must regulate property.</td>
<td>Pro-executive power; concerned about activist judiciary.</td>
<td>Economically interventionist; fiscally Keynesian; international economies connected to freedom at home</td>
<td>PL: High, fully within the set.</td>
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</table>
GEOPOLITICAL THREAT

I turn now to coding the European balance of power during the early Cold War period. To do so, I rely, as before, on two central concepts of power. Initially, I aim to assess the latent economic potential of the European great powers. I employ three different indicators to get a sense of whether there was any one power economically strong enough to potentially over-run the continent. First, I compare the European poles on the Correlates of War (COW) index of steel production and energy consumption; this measure provides a rough take on their relative economic size and high technology industrial potential. Second, I examine Paul Bairoch’s index of total industrial potential. Third, I compare great powers at the same level of economic development using Angus Maddison’s series of historical Gross Domestic Products (GDP). Maddison’s series is conventionally regarded as the best measurement of raw economic size, while Bairoch’s index includes a series of high-technology industries beyond steel production, which can be misleading on its own. I start the comparisons in 1947, the first year for which reliable figures are available across all indexes.

Next, I examine the military balance of power, by comparing the relative size of European armies. The idea here is to check and see if any major actor would have a decisive advantage in a short war, independent of its industrial potential. Admittedly, the changing technology of war and the likely geography of a third European conflict make the raw size of European armies misleading if interpreted as a strict indicator of the military balance. Even so, they are valuable as a very rough indicator of the ready forces available for a European fight. The data here are collected from the COW dataset.

These indicators show that the Soviet Union was a potential hegemon, or at least on the verge of becoming one. Economically, Great Britain underwent precipitous decline during from 1947-1952, while the Soviet economy continued to surge. By the early 1950s, the USSR possessed an economic advantage over the next leading European pole greater than any other peacetime comparison reviewed in this study. The trend was even starker in military terms, as the Soviet Union plowed its economic gains into its Army, while the West European powers all cut back military spending. The Red Army possessed a numerical advantage in its standing forces greater than that of the Nazi’s at the height of their power.

However, both of these measurements need qualification. The economic situation was if anything, worse than the figures indicate. All of Europe had been devastated by the war and its aftermath, but Germany was in the worst shape when the guns stopped firing. Not only was it economically bankrupt and materially plundered, the Reich had politically disintegrated into four zones occupied by the victorious powers. Thus, the largest pool of Western European latent power was completely unavailable for counterbalancing Soviet gains. Nor was it clear, at least initially, that France could even remain a going concern as a nation state. Militarily, circumstances were more balanced than they appeared. Much of Soviet strength was hollow, more a paper creation than a real force, and no European power was anxious for a test of
strength. Moreover, the American nuclear monopoly made any Soviet conventional assault suicidal, at least until the USSR could arm in kind, which it did in 1949.45

All in all, I rate the Soviet Union as a potential hegemon whose relative power was only increasing. The European power configuration is closer to that of 1941-1944 than any other period in this study. Like the position of Nazi Germany in those years, Soviet power could theoretically be balanced by the remaining European poles. But also like the Nazi’s, the USSR enjoyed political and geographic advantages that worked against a balancing coalition. The main source of potential strength in Western Europe was a political basket-case. The second leading European power, Britain, was fading fast and had no clear long-term access to the potentially decisive theater. Soviet growth rates, rearmament, and nuclear capabilities accelerated while the Western European powers lagged behind on all fronts. In short, Soviet power had the potential to over-awe all of Europe, but structural conditions also suggested it could be balanced. Whether a balance would form was a political question, and indeed, the principal question of post-war politics.

LATENT ECONOMIC POWER. Table 6.2 displays the figures from the COW index of steel production and energy consumption. While the initial figures imply a rough equality between the Soviet Union and Great Britain, the trend line is stark. The Soviet economy expanded and the British position declined even more rapidly. The French economy stagnated. Only politically shattered West Germany showed any signs of real growth. By 1950, the Soviet Union was slightly more powerful in comparison to Britain that either Imperial or Nazi Germany ever was. By 1951, the economic difference was vast, and this in comparison to Europe’s offshore power. Given the political state of Germany and absent an American commitment, it is unclear how Britain would be able to deploy what strength it had if things came to a head on the continent.

However, the table also shows that the potential for an anti-Soviet coalition existed. The “big three” powers of Britain, France, and the Western Zones of Germany out produced the Soviets by a quarter or more throughout Truman’s time in office. Even “the six” countries of what would become the EEC—France, West Germany, Italy, and the Benelux nations—maintained a twenty percent advantage in industrial strength. The raw assets were there if the political problems could be solved.

| Table 6.2: Relative Percentage of European Industry, 1947-1952 (COW) |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                                 | 1947  | 1948  | 1949  | 1950  | 1951  | 1952  |
| USSR                            | 37.6  | 38.0  | 39.3  | 40.7  | 41.8  | 42.7  |
| Britain                         | 33.6  | 31.3  | 27.7  | 26.3  | 24.3  | 23.0  |
| FRG                             | 12.8  | 15.2  | 17.8  | 19.2  | 19.7  | 20.3  |
| France                          | 15.9  | 15.6  | 15.2  | 13.8  | 14.2  | 14.0  |
| USSR/Br                         | 1.12  | 1.22  | 1.42  | 1.54  | 1.72  | 1.85  |
| USSR/Big Three                  | .60   | .61   | .65   | .69   | .72   | .75   |
| USSR/EEC                        | .8    | .8    | .8    | .8    | .8    | .8    |

45 Kennedy notes that “it was difficult to tell the difference, in economic terms, between France and Germany” after the war, so badly had the Nazi’s raped the French nation. On the devastation across Europe, including, to be sure, the brutalized western zones of Russia, see Paul M. Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000 (New York: Random House, 1987), pp. 361-368, quote 366.
Table 6.3 shows much the same picture when measured via Maddison’s GDP figures and Bairoch’s more comprehensive industrial/technological index. The latter is given for the year 1953, Bairoch’s observation for the period. As is uniformly the case, the GDP figures show that power is more balanced, but not in comparison to previous eras. By 1950, Soviet relative GDP had outpaced previous German advantages by between a quarter and a third. Bairoch’s index also shows its highest ratio of any period, with the Soviet industrial potential rated at nearly 1.3 times that of the British. Still, Maddison’s numbers also show the potential for a balancing coalition, either among the big three or the six.46

Also worth noting is that sectoral indicators are becoming less and less useful as the world economy develops, increasing the superiority of GDP as an indicator of overall economic strength. After Europe recovered from the war, its economies maintained similar levels of economic development—the industrial revolution has done its work. As that level of economic development increases overtime, the importance of steel production as a measure of technological sophistication is drastically reduced. As the world economy integrates, at least in the West, the location of steel production comes to matter less and less. And as European economies become more sophisticated, gross energy consumption matters less than how efficiently that energy is converted into real wealth. In short, latent economic power is more and more obvious in the overall size of European economies as time runs forward. The Truman era marks the transitional period. I continue to include COW and Bairoch data throughout the study for consistency’s sake.

Table 6.3: Relative Percentage of European Industry, 1947-1952 (Maddison GDP)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>328</td>
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<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRG</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>21.6</td>
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<td>France</td>
<td>16.4</td>
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<td>16.5</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR/Br</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR/Big Three</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR/EEC</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MILITARY POWER. Table 6.4 shows the size of European armies given in the COW data. These figures ought to be taken with several grains of salt. As the Second World War demonstrated, the size of standing armies in the industrial age is less important than the total

46 Maddison does not give a measurement of Luxembourg’s GDP, so the EEC production in the table measures only five countries. Luxembourg matters most for the COW data, since it produced quite a bit of steel—though this only underscores the decreasing utility of COW over time. I have bootstrapped an EEC figure for Bairoch’s data, as he includes only Belgium among the Benelux countries in his calculations. I have done so by conjuring a number for Dutch industrial potential: I multiplied Bairoch’s Belgian number by a ratio equivalent to the Netherland’s GDP advantage over Belgium in the relevant year of Maddison’s data. I include no figure for Luxembourg. Obviously, the Bairoch EEC figure should therefore be regarded with extreme caution. Nonetheless, I believe it gives a rough sense of what total EEC latent wealth looked like, and it is consistent with the other indicators of EEC industrial potential.
manpower and equipment that could be mobilized for war. The Soviet figures are probably inflated, and many of its divisions "existed only in skeleton form, or were essentially garrison troops." A substantial portion of the Red Army was used to police its new provinces and satellite states. The nuclear age also radically changes the calculus of conventional combat; certainly, it would have been extremely risky for the USSR to try exploiting any conventional military advantage they might have had during the period of American nuclear monopoly. 47

Nonetheless, in a world where nuclear forces had not yet proliferated to the point of Assured Destruction capabilities, and where continental powers had an uncertain prospect of obtaining such weapons, the figures do give a fair picture of Soviet preponderance in Europe. The USSR simply focused the majority of its resources on expanding its military and war productive capacity, while the Western European states channeled resources more efficiently towards broader economic recovery. Per capita GDP in Britain and France was nearly double that of the USSR, with correspondingly greater standards of living, but the Soviet military establishment reigned supreme. The table shows that by 1951, the total size of the Soviet military was more than two and a half times that of the next five European powers combined. This advantage was growing. In the short term, a Soviet attack was implausible for both economic and strategic reasons. In the long term, the military balance looked ominous. 48

Table 6.4: Size of European Standing Armies, 1947-1952 (COW)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1947</th>
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<th>1949</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1951</th>
<th>1952</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>2,700,000</td>
<td>2,900,000</td>
<td>3,600,000</td>
<td>4,300,000</td>
<td>5,000,000</td>
<td>5,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>1,302,000</td>
<td>847,000</td>
<td>770,000</td>
<td>689,000</td>
<td>826,000</td>
<td>872,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>580,000</td>
<td>577,000</td>
<td>588,000</td>
<td>695,000</td>
<td>620,000</td>
<td>655,000</td>
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SUMMARY OF CODING

The Truman administration was solidly in the negative liberal camp, rating as NL: medium until at least Truman's second term. Truman himself had genuinely mixed views, holding an incoherent blend of the negative liberal heritage and the positive liberal development of the Democratic Party, of which he found himself the leader. His first two Secretaries of State, James Byrnes and George Marshall, were at least solidly within the set of ideal typical negative liberal attitudes. Evidence also indicates that there were a host of other negative liberal leaning figures in the foreign policy apparatus of the Truman administration, though there has not been space to fully code them here. Importantly, Truman took a backseat in making foreign policy, leaving matters mostly in the hands of his negative liberal advisors.

The ideological valence of the administration began to change in Truman's second term, when Dean Acheson emerged as a central figure in American foreign policy. As noted, Acheson was fully within the set of positive liberalism, rating as PL high. His ascension to Secretary of


48 On per capita GDP, see Kennedy, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, p. 369.
State means that the Truman administration moved more to the ideological center over time. That said, many important negative liberal figures remained influential and thus moderated Acheson’s independent effect—a situation compounded by Truman’s own oversight of U.S. strategy. My composite code for the administration over its eight years in office is therefore NL: Medium, though I acknowledge there is a waning of anti-statist influence under Acheson.

The balance of power reveals the Soviet Union initially on the verge of potential hegemony and crossed that threshold at some point during the period. The key factors in making this assessment are the rapid decline of British power and the slow political reconstruction of Western Europe, trends of which decision-makers were well aware by 1946-1947. In principle, Soviet power could be balanced: both the big three poles and the EEC six outstripped the USSR in economic production. In practice, no coalition could possibly form while German power was politically disintegrated, the French nation-state plausibly dead, and the British military therefore without long-term access to the continent. In military terms, only the absolute priority of Soviet economic reconstruction and the American nuclear monopoly held the Russian hordes in check. Both of these restraints were loosening as time wore on.

TLFP therefore predicts America will adopt a grand strategy of buckpassing. The Truman administration should have envisioned an organic balance of power in Europe, one that prevented Soviet hegemony but was otherwise malleable. It should have sought to support and organize a balancing coalition, but one designed to shift the costs of balancing to the Europeans, in order to better preserve anti-statist values at home. As the negative liberal forces in the administration wane, and geopolitical threat grows, we ought to observe more commitments abroad. These should nonetheless maintain their buckpassing character, as the Truman administration sacrifices potential control over the balance of power for reduced costs.

American Grand Strategy 1945-1948: Buckpassing

As predicted by TLFP, the American grand strategy during Truman’s first term was to pass the buck. The American vision was to create a self-sustaining balance of power in Europe, on whose efforts the United States could free-ride. We can infer this strategy from its component elements.

At first, American policy emphasized cooperation with the Soviet Union and attempts to permanently reduce German power. The hope was to foster a benign international environment where an American commitment could be limited to a brief period of financial support for Europe and a small, temporary occupation of Germany. As growing Soviet power became more ominous and the Cold War dawned, America intermittently transitioned to a confrontational posture towards the Russians, focused on keeping Soviet influence out of Western Europe and the western zones of Germany. Diplomatically, American statesmen sought to rebuild Europe into an integrated and unified “third force” capable of balancing Soviet power alone. But the U.S. focus was on economic recovery and integration, with a correspondingly limited military strategy: a couple of under-strength American divisions occupying Germany backed by the threat of one-sided air atomic war.

TLFP’s expectations are further confirmed by the causal processes underlying the formation of American strategy. Both the international system and negative liberal ideology had important influence. Given the immense latent power potential in the Soviet Union, American diplomats immediately perceived a material threat from Russia. But consistent with negative liberal biases, they were at first inclined to downplay the danger in the hopes of reducing
American costs. And it was only after cooperation with the USSR failed that American statesmen began to worry about ideology, and even then only in power political terms: they feared that communist subversion in the economically shattered West would bring all of Europe’s material resources into Moscow’s orbit. Negative liberal sentiment also shaped the character of policy commitments. Diplomatically, America favored allied strength and burden-sharing ability over international influence; American military policy was limited to a relatively small investment in off-shore nuclear capabilities.

In addition to providing the primary impetus for American commitments, the international system also played an integrating role: the United States cycled through several low cost alternatives to balancing, as initial attempts to limit American liability met with failure. American statesmen were drawn slowly towards more involvement in shaping European politics over the course of the period. Still, before the Korean War, American strategy was quite restrained and surprisingly detached from European commitments. American retained a buckpassing posture, focused on building an independent European pole of power.

RESPONSE TO EUROPEAN THREATS

Even before the end of the Second World War, American thoughts had turned to the post-war order. With most of Europe a burnt out husk, and Great Britain economically broken, the prospect of a bipolar future was recognized early. But several features of the new landscape led to considerable optimism on the part of American decision-makers, who believed a cooperative—or at least quiescent—relationship with the Soviet Union could be formed, and American influence withdrawn from the continent. As cooperation failed and fears of Soviet power grew, Americans began to worry that Western European communists and communist sentiments might facilitate Soviet hegemony. Importantly, these fears were rooted in a concern for the future balance of power, rather than as an ideological threat to the United States.

MATERIAL THREATS MINIMIZED. Consistent with negative liberal incentives, the Truman administration was initially inclined to downplay the importance of Soviet latent strength. To begin with, American power simply over-awed Soviet capabilities. The Soviets had no navy worthy of the name and no air force capable of strategic attack. They had developed a massive army, but lacked the industrial capacity that America had so convincingly displayed during the war. The American atomic monopoly was a trump card the Russians could not match. Furthermore, it was widely expected that Russia would be inwardly focused for a period of several years as it attempted to rebuild itself, and that Moscow would welcome American financial and technical assistance in doing so. American military planners believed there would be a five to ten year period of Soviet weakness that would make confrontation a losing game for the USSR. As the State Department’s Bohlen-Robinson report noted, “any war between the U.S.A and the U.S.S.R. would be far more costly to Russia than to the United States.” American capabilities would be “manifestly and decisively superior” to the Russians for a period the authors labeled “American Hegemony, period I.”49

American diplomacy was therefore aimed at producing a stable balance of power based on cooperation with the USSR. Occasional American bluster aside, the U.S. had given up keeping Eastern Europe free from Russian domination relatively early. The State Department based much of its early post-war thinking on exactly this concept, attempting to find a way to work out a “spheres of influence” deal with the Soviets without explicitly saying so. Many diplomats recognized the Soviet’s economic and security interests in Eastern Europe as legitimate aims America should embrace, perhaps even publicly, as a part of the “long-term stabilization of American-Russian relations.”

Another foundation of this relationship was recommended by Charles Bohlen, America’s top Russia hand: “sharing with the USSR, immediately and without condition, the knowledge necessary for the production of the atomic bomb.” This radical option was explored at the highest levels of government as late as 1946, culminating in the Acheson-Lilienthal proposal for the internationalization of nuclear weapons. The basic idea behind all these proposals was simple: to shape future Soviet behavior during present American hegemony by asking for “substantially less than the current capabilities of the United States could secure.”

This low-key response to lopsided Soviet power in Europe was not the work of idealistic cranks. It constituted the considered thinking of the United States government and was manifested in real policy proposals to the Soviets. Against his initial judgment, Secretary of State James Byrnes pushed hard for the internationalization of atomic energy at a December 1945 conference in Moscow, essentially offering the Soviets many of the technical secrets necessary for the production of atomic weapons. Even though, for changing strategic and political reasons, nothing ever came of the American nuclear proposals, the very fact that they were even made is telling. The Truman cabinet approved them, Byrnes introduced the proposals to the public in a radio address, and official offers were made to the Soviets to end the American nuclear monopoly. Byrnes also agreed to recognize the governments of Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe on what were basically Moscow’s terms, and to settle the post-War peace treaties exclusively with the “Big Three” allies, as Stalin had been demanding for months. In short, on issues of atomic capability and a sphere of exclusive domination for Moscow, American diplomacy was quite flexible.

The American vision for the balance of power was one of accommodation between two loose power conglomerates in the East and West. Radical plans could advance so far because the Americans had no intention of engaging in a security competition with the Soviets. The view of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) before Yalta in early 1945 is instructive: “it would seem in the highest degree unlikely that Britain and Russia, or Russia alone, would be aligned against the United States... so long as Britain and Russia cooperate in the interests of peace, there can be no great war in the foreseeable future.” The Soviets might be powerful, but a good working relationship could make that power largely irrelevant in a military sense.

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MATERIAL THREATS REALIZED. But by the spring of 1946, the policy of cooperation seemed to be foundering, and thus Soviet power could no longer be ignored. George Kennan’s “long telegram” in early 1946 marked an attitudinal shift in official Washington. Arguing that Moscow had deep-seated psychological insecurities, military dominance on land, and a highly disciplined capability of ideological subversion and infiltration, Kennan asserted that only vigilant opposition could prevent Soviet expansion. Soviet intransigence over Iran, Turkey, and Germany, and belligerence in Stalin’s public statements now seemed explicable. As importantly, temporary U.S. atomic superiority and internal Russian disorder seemed much less important. Kennan’s message spread like wildfire in Washington. Within months it was presented as dogma by the State Department; Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal ordered several hundred copies printed and made it required reading for naval commanders.53

The failure of cooperative policies meant Soviet power had to be viewed in a new light. In November 1945, the State Department argued that “since the Soviet Union itself has many internal problems to solve in the next few years... the Soviet Government may decide to abandon its policy of full control in [Eastern Europe]. We should adapt our policy to encourage them in this direction without loss of face, if circumstances permit.” By April 1946, a leading memorandum asserted “the U.S. must accept the fact that it is confronted with the threat of an expanding totalitarian state which continues to believe and act on the belief that the world is divided into two irreconcilably hostile camps.” Senior statesmen shifted as well: President Truman became much more belligerent and hard line between November and January, and James Byrnes became noticeably more confrontational. Old disputes over Eastern Europe were reinterpreted in a new light. What was formerly disreputable but understandable security driven behavior by a recovering great power—such as the redrawing of the Polish-German border and instituting totalitarian regimes in Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria—was now evidence of a revisionist state using its considerable capabilities to expand.54

As TLFP expects, the pressure from the international system forced American diplomats to reconsider their past approach. Faced with an unchecked presence in the heart of Europe, Western European governments might be inclined to make political concessions to the USSR that would open the door to the wider ideological subversion and economic losses Kennan warned about. In effect, if Soviet power remained unbalanced, Western Europe’s latent strength might be peacefully absorbed into Moscow’s industrial complex. The threat looked increasingly real: Western Europe, and Germany in particular, was in very bad shape. There were millions of refugees, a swath of devastated regions, no functioning economy to speak of, and a serious food crisis. The winter of 1945-1946 was one of the worst in living memory. At the same time, the Soviets were beginning to make obvious appeals to the German people. In early 1946, the Russians forced the Socialist and Communist parties in Germany’s Eastern zone to merge, creating the appearance of a unified workers party, one that would have a certain legitimacy in


the Western zones. The Russians continued to make overtures for influence in the administration of the Ruhr, which would give them critical influence in the Western zone and industrial heart of Europe.\textsuperscript{55}

It was only in this context that American policymakers became seriously concerned about the possibilities of communist expansion in Europe. By early 1946, General Lucius Clay, head of the U.S. military government in Germany, was warning of communist influence in the Western zones. As he wrote during the winter food crisis, when the Eastern zone had higher food rations than the western zones, “there is no choice between becoming a communist on 1500 calories a day and a believer in democracy on 1000 calories. It is my sincere belief that our proposed ration allowance in Germany will not only defeat our objectives in middle Europe but will pave the road to a communist Germany.” The State Department’s views on Germany were also more anxious, as Kennan argued firmly that “what the Russians want in Germany is the dominant power over the life of the country: power both to control internal affairs and to govern Germany’s international behavior.” In sum, by spring of 1946, the Russians were generally thought to be an aggressive, powerful, and seeking to expand by all means short of war. Their primary method of ideological subversion was seen as particularly threatening in Germany.\textsuperscript{56}

DIPLOMATIC POLICY

The Truman administration’s vision of Europe’s future power constellation comes out most clearly in its diplomatic approach to Germany. The essential vision was one where no single power dominated Europe, but was otherwise flexible about political structure. This flexibility came from a desire to reduce American costs by shifting them to other states—American statesmen had no intention of making a lengthy commitment to European stability. However, some policies were more suited towards forestalling a European hegemon than others. As Soviet power became clearer, the dictates of the international system pushed America towards greater involvement in European politics. But negative liberal concern with increased costs held America back from balancing commitments. This tension can be observed in three major diplomatic initiatives: an attempt to work out a spheres of influence settlement in Germany; an attempt to negotiate a “four-power pact” facilitating American withdrawal; and the acceptance of American economic commitments through the Marshall plan.

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE. At the Potsdam conference in July 1945, Byrnes led American policy in trying to create a quiescent power configuration in Europe, balanced between the Soviet sphere of influence and a rebuilding Western Europe loosely associated with the United States. In such a scheme, trying to organize the German economy and government as a single unit under quadripartite control was a recipe for distrust, disagreement, and disaster. The central problem was German reparations. The Soviet Union had demanded fifty percent of all post-war reparations from Germany in acknowledgment of its wartime sacrifice. It had already begun to strip its eastern zone of occupation of industrial equipment under an expansive definition of “war booty.” If the Soviets were going to move unilaterally like this, any agreement on reparations would result in the western powers subsidizing Soviet actions, since they would have to help


finance imports into the Eastern zone to replace Soviet seizures. Serious friction stemming from the Grand Alliance’s very different preferences for running Germany was bound to result in a burgeoning great power competition; a far more stable power configuration would be one where Germany was more or less split in half.

Byrnes thus emphasized that “the United States wanted its relations with the Soviet Union to be cordial and friendly... what had impressed him the most—it was more than the money involved—was the desire to remove any source of irritation between our two governments.” So in place of the complicated set of agreements that would have been necessary to administer reparations on an all-German basis and run the occupation economy as a single unit, Byrnes suggested that each ally should take reparations from its own zone, running the occupation as each saw fit. In return for Soviet acceptance of what would have been the default outcome anyway, Byrnes made two concessions. America would accept the Eastern border of Germany where the Russians had drawn it and would send Russia some reparations from the Ruhr valley: 15% of industrial capacity surplus to Western zone needs would be traded for agriculture from the Eastern zone, and an additional 10% of surplus capacity would be given free and clear. After much haggling, the Russians accepted the agreement, which was enthusiastically backed by Stalin. 57

But by the spring of 1946, the Byrnes policy had run aground on the shoals of the international system. The administration realized that the Soviets were stronger and more aggressive than expected, while the Europeans were weaker and more vulnerable to Soviet subversion than it had hoped. Cooperating with the Soviet Union had not yielded two stable spheres of influence that would permit an American withdrawal from Europe; instead the Russians looked to be aggressively trying to co-opt parts of the western sphere via communist proxies throughout Europe. American policy was refocused on “walling [the western zones] off against Eastern penetration and integrating them into the international pattern of Western Europe.” Europe would have to be economically and politically rebuilt if it were to be kept out of Soviet hands and an American departure ensured. 58

In order prevent such unacceptable power configurations, the German people would need to be convinced their future lay with the West. Such persuasion would require, in turn, the economic revival of the western zones and the promise of some sort of political self-determination in the near future. Above all, Germany had to be divided without America appearing to have done so. The method for achieving these aims was a reversal of the Potsdam agreement, and a decision to start economically and politically organizing the western zones of Germany. In May 1946, Clay halted reparations payments from the “surplus capacity” of the

57 Quoted in Foreign Ministers meeting, FRUS, 1945, Potsdam II: 430. Ambiguity in the Potsdam agreement and disputes on its meaning between Byrnes and the leaders of the American occupation have obscured the nature of American policy in 1945. Suffice it to say, all parties were looking to cooperate with the Soviets in one way or another in order to facilitate an American withdrawal from Europe. For a thorough discussion of these issues see McAllister, No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943-1954, pp. 84-98; Trachtenberg, A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963, pp. 15-33. For example, General Lucius Clay, though believing the grand alliance should run Germany as a unit, was an advocate of troop withdrawals, see Schwabe, “The Origins of the United States’ Engagement in Europe, 1946-1952,” p. 162. For Clay’s views generally, see Krieger, “Was General Clay a Revisionist?” esp. pp. 168-173. On the disputes over how to run Germany within the American government, see McAllister, No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943-1954, pp. 98-116; Trachtenberg, A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963, pp. 43-47
western zones on the excuse that the Soviets were refusing to make the agreements necessary to run Germany as a single economic unit. Of course, the deal struck at Potsdam was to avoid doing exactly that. But the Soviets could not confront the United States with this publicly—saying that both sides had essentially agreed to divide Germany nine months earlier—without alienating the German people.  

The reparations stop gave the Americans and the British the freedom of action to move ahead in economically organizing the western zones, merging their occupation areas into the “bizone” in July, all the while claiming that they were the ones who wanted to run Germany as a single unit. By the end of the summer, the Soviets and Americans were competing openly for the hearts and minds of the German people. At the second session of the Paris Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) in July, Molotov accused the Americans of attempting to divide Germany and destroy its industry. Responding with his famous Stuttgart speech in September, Byrnes enthused that “it is the view of the American government, that the German people, throughout Germany and under proper safeguards, should now be given the primary responsibility for their own affairs.” The Cold War was on.  

THE FOUR POWER PACT. The Truman administration’s early vision of cooperation between two loose power masses was intended to solve the German problem: the Grand Alliance would go its separate ways on organizing German economics and politics, but would work together to keep Germany permanently militarily disarmed. To this end, Byrnes introduced a demilitarization treaty at the Moscow conference in 1945, to Stalin’s hearty approval. The treaty called for a “four power pact” in policing and inspecting Germany to ensure it never rearmed for a period of at least twenty-five years. It was designed to remove Germany from the balance of power in Central Europe, thus reassuring the Soviets with American cooperation on the permanent repression of German might. But the Russians were not reassured, having seen a demilitarization pact fail to contain Germany twenty years earlier; and they were right to be skeptical.  

Although Byrnes often portrayed the treaty as a sign of American commitment and an end to American isolation, it was actually an instrument of American withdrawal. After listing an impressive array of conditions for German disarmament and providing for an inspection regime, the treaty merely noted that its parties should negotiate other agreements “for the number and type of forces that each party shall make available for purposes of this treaty… subject to ratification… in accordance with their respective constitutional processes.” It was commonly assumed in American government that Congress would never ratify a permanent commitment. Byrnes himself considered one of the primary benefits of the treaty the smaller American occupation force it would allow, and he seemed to envision it being enforced primarily by airpower. He also argued that to enforce the treaty the contracting parties could “rely more upon a force of trained inspectors and less upon the infantry.” Byrnes position reflected a negative liberal concern with costs: the four power pact foresaw a quiet Europe policed by someone else.  

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61 The text of the treaty can be found at FRUS, 1946, II: 190-193, quote 193. For Byrnes and Molotov’s views, and the nature of the treaty as a troop reducing implement, see Denise O’Neal Conover, “James F. Byrnes and the Four Power Disarmament Treaty,” Mid-America 70 (1988): 19-34, Byrnes quoted on p. 22. Until the summer of 1946,
The failure of the spheres of influence policy led Byrnes to abandon the four-power pact except as a propaganda tool by the fall of 1946. But a renewed push for cooperation began under Secretary of State George Marshall, who replaced Byrnes at the beginning of 1947. In typical anti-statist fashion, Marshall believed that the American people would not, and should not, maintain themselves on war-footing indefinitely in order to protect Europe. Unimpressed by the red menace, Marshall believed that anti-communist sentiment was a fleeting fad when compared to the burdens of power politics. He therefore viewed continued four power cooperation on the German problem as essential for a long term solution to America's security interest in Europe—it would take good relations with the Soviets and among the other members of the Grand Alliance to keep Germany down after America had left the scene. To be sure, American power should be used to help this transition, perhaps even for several years. But in the end only a renewed great power concert could solve the German problem. So Marshall set about trying to find a way to repair relations with the USSR and renew cooperation while administering Germany as a single unit.62

His primary initiatives in this regard took place at the Moscow CFM in spring 1947. Going into the conference, Marshall's basic view was consonant with the strategy Washington had been pursuing in 1945. Described aptly by scholar/participant Charles Kindleberger before the conference, it had "three basic ideas. One was that Germany should be militarily impotent. Second that this should not cost us too much. Third, that we must agree in Europe with the other victors and work out a system of international cooperation... it is our foreign policy to work out an agreement with the Russians in Germany." For their part, the Russians were eager to return to reparations, though now from current production rather than in capital equipment. Most of the American government was opposed to any deal, more comfortable with the division of Germany than "the hollow unification which in fact but opens the door to the accomplishment of Soviet purpose in Germany as a whole."63

Marshall's worries about the long-term costs of American strategy instead led him to offer the Soviets a bargain. He made several key concessions to the Soviet position on reparations, which required him to get approval to from President Truman. First, though the official American position was that Potsdam precluded reparations from current production, Marshall worked out a formula through which they would be possible. They would substitute for capital equipment reparations that could not longer be made because of a simultaneous agreement to revive the German economy. Second, these reparations would be valued in a way that was extremely favorable to the Soviets: by their value as "going concerns" in the German economy, which would provide a much heftier cut for Moscow. Finally, after a study had been made hashing out the details, he was willing to let reparations start before Germany's fiscal


house was in order. If the U.S.S.R. was willing to run Germany as a single unit, then it would be able to have a stream of what would likely be generous reparations.  

At the same time, Marshall returned to the four power pact for the disarmament of Germany as the primary instrument for managing the balance of power—and, ultimately, for ensuring American withdrawal. Marshall stressed that the most important feature of the post war world was whether the Grand Alliance could hang together. Against French objections that American guarantees were not strong enough and that firmer alliances and international control of the Ruhr were needed, Marshall argued that “we do not fear so much seeing Germany rising again if a genuine agreement of the Four Powers is established. What we are worried about is a Germany which will ally herself with one or the other of these Four associated powers… we should recall that her motto is: ‘Divide in order to rule’.” A “genuine agreement” of cooperation with the Soviets was necessary; far more necessary, Marshall argued, than any of the stringent control measures the French imposed. Without it, Germany would eventually evade control measures. Control measures might lapse, but if great power relations stayed friendly, they could be re-imposed in a crisis.

Marshall illustrated this point with a remarkable analogy that reveals his thinking on the American role in Europe. At the same meeting with the French, he responded to repeated protests by the French foreign minister in favor of harsh control measures by saying,

All the measures which you imagine for the establishment of the future regulation of Germany… seem to me ‘superficial’, if I compare them with the necessity for the Four Power Pact… I knew these problems after the last war. I have personally heard Foch and Weygand talk about them. They were discussing at that time, as now, the Ruhr. The solution of Foch was simple, it was a solution of force. Do you not think that there may be an element of force in the Four Power Treaty? An element of continuity also? What preoccupies me is not what is going to happen in four or five years in Germany, it is the situation in which we will find ourselves within 10 years.

In other words, the control of Germany after World War II was likely to resemble the controls used after World War I. There would be “elements of continuity.” In a few years the Americans would be long gone. The will to implement a “solution of force” would lapse in France, even as it did twenty years earlier. The most important thing, then, was to make sure Germany could not play the Allies off against one another, or join up with a hostile Soviet Union. The four-power pact could prepare the American people to act in concert with their allies, if necessary, but the solution would not be one of long-term occupation and dismemberment. It would be one of friendly relations that might be called into service if needed.

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Marshall soon learned the lesson Byrnes had been taught a year earlier: the Soviets were not interested in a deal, either on reparations or on a disarmament treaty. Stalin sought to reassure Marshall about the eventual success of Allied negotiations, but Marshall left the conference profoundly pessimistic about the prospects for future cooperation. Though he would hesitate throughout the rest of the year to engineer a firm break with the Soviets, he also realized that an alternative source of power was needed in Europe to balance the Soviets.

THE MARSHALL PLAN AND THE THIRD FORCE. His solution was to rebuild European power, whence the genesis of the European Recovery Program (ERP) or Marshall Plan, the famous American program for the economic reconstruction of Western Europe. After his return from the Moscow CFM, Marshall put George Kennan in charge of the Policy Planning Staff at the State Department and charged him to develop an economic plan for reviving Europe.67

The Marshall Plan had two essential elements. First, it aimed to rebuild the economy of Western Europe to compete against Soviet power, primarily by breathing life into West German industry, the engine of the European economy. The hope was that by pouring in a substantial commitment of aid, Western Europe could be rebuilt and its politics stabilized within a few years. At such time, the political economy of Europe would hopefully be remade on a self-sustaining basis; possessed of the economic foundations for its own defense and psychologically strong enough to resist the pressures of communist influence.68

Consistent with the administration’s previous preferences, America’s substantial largesse in the short term would reap a long-term reduction in costs. American effort would, in Kennan’s words, “be directed not to the combating of communism as such but to the restoration of the economic health and vigor of European society. It should aim, in other words, to combat not communism, but the economic maladjustment which makes European society vulnerable to exploitation.” A healthy Europe would not require American protection. And this more limited goal would be a one time shot: “The program must contain reasonable assurance that if we support it, this will be the last such program we shall be asked to support in the foreseeable future.”69

Second, the ERP was aimed at integrating the sovereign states of Europe into a single economic, and ultimately, political, unit. The idea was to create a “third force which was not merely the extension of US influence but a real European organization strong enough to say ‘no’ both to the Soviet Union and to the United States.” The ERP would encourage such a force by making economic integration a goal of the American effort, in the hopes that this would lay the groundwork for political integration. The Europeans were to be encouraged “to assume there was no one to help them, to imagine that they had no choice but to try to work out an acceptable economic future without any outside support” and thus “adjust themselves to certain basic


changes which have occurred and are continuing to occur in their international position.” Once Europe had adopted the economic pattern of the United States—a giant area of free exchange and efficiently coordinated production—it would be prepared to lift its own burdens. As Armin Rappaport argues, for the first time in history a great power was seeking not to divide and conquer, but federate and unite.\(^70\)

John Foster Dulles, who at this point was a major advisor to the State Department representing the Republicans and had a large influence on policy making, advanced the third force idea with vigor. On several occasions he defended the ERP on behalf of the administration before a skeptical congress, even when he feared the Europeans were not moving fast enough on integration. Dulles’ fears demonstrate nicely the intended point of European unity. His private objection to early forms of the NATO alliance was that “any permanent arrangement might seem to guarantee the status quo and make it less likely, rather than more likely, that the Western European democracies would unite to create strength between themselves.” It was absolutely vital that Europe be woken “from the illusion that we can be relied upon indefinitely to rescue them from their own errors… we will subtract from the likelihood of Europe effecting her own cure if we nurture the illusion that she can count on us; and we will add to that likelihood to any extent that we help Europe see the awful danger she faces and the emptiness of reliance upon us.” This was the “basic concept of the ERP” and its ultimate end was the political unity of Western Europe.\(^71\)

Once again, though, international resistance meant that American diplomacy was not as effective as Washington had hoped. Europe proved very difficult to coordinate in its shattered condition, and America ended up taking much more of the lead than intended. One important reason for this failure was that the states of Europe sensed the American reluctance to make a commitment and did not want to be abandoned. From the European perspective, rebuilding Western Germany meant that it would have to be controlled, lest it return to aggressive militarism or revanchist nationalism. Moreover, it also meant that the Soviets would be angered, and that they might take steps to counter Western policy. In fact, they seemed to be doing just that, as the blockade of Berlin was launched in response to Western plans for the political unification of West Germany and coincided with the communist take over of Czechoslovakia. It was Europe’s collective desire for a security guarantee that drove diplomacy in the latter part of this period, concluding in the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949.\(^72\)

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\(^{71}\) McAllister, *No Exit: America and the German Problem, 1943-1954*, pp. 135-141 quotes on 138, 139. See also Lovett-Vandenberg meeting, April 27, 1948, FRUS 1947, III: 104-108.

\(^{72}\) On the disappointment of early American efforts at integration, see Schwabe, “The Origins of the United States’ Engagement in Europe, 1946-1952,” pp. 167-176; Lundestad, *"Empire" by Integration: the United States and European Integration, 1945-1997*, pp. 29-36. As they note, American efforts did not bear great fruit for several reasons, including a desire not to be seen as politically interfering in European politics, and by British intransigence on supranational solutions. On European security concerns generally see Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The*
MILITARY POLICY

American military policy during the first Truman administration was a low-cost effort consistent with its free-riding diplomatic posture; it emphasized minimal military connections to Europe and standoff forces. Initially, the hopes for a spheres of influence peace facilitated an aggressive demobilization that reduced American military power dramatically. After American diplomacy reoriented around building a third force, military commitments lagged well behind. American statesmen were satisfied to defend Europe with atomic airpower as a stopgap measure prior to European recovery; they resisted several attempts at firmer military guarantees. Even after the Truman administration acquiesced to the North Atlantic Treaty, it interpreted the agreement in a unilateral manner and would not commit additional American troops. The international system incentivized further American commitment, but the Truman administration’s negative liberal incentives meant that policy was mostly stationary.

POST-WAR DRAWDOWN. Wartime plans envisioned little post-war European role for the U.S. military. American policy was mostly just a reiteration of traditional American interests in the Western hemisphere and the Pacific. Europe was a notable exception to American post-war basing plans, since the administration foresaw no long-term presence there. Early emergency plans for war in Europe envisioned conflict arising out of accidents in Eastern Europe or the Balkans and were premised on a straight withdrawal from the continent without any holding action. Europe was an area of British and Russian interests, and the JCS agreed with Truman that the limits of an American commitment should be to act as an umpire between them. Regarding the Soviets in particular the JCS felt that “while the United States can afford to make no concessions which leave its security or vital interests at the mercy of the Soviet Union, there is almost no other concession which it can afford not to make to assure Soviet collaboration in the maintenance of security.”

Most impressive was the rapid de-mobilization the American military undertook, and its implications for the conduct of American policy in Europe. American military strength dropped by seventy-five percent in the first year after the war and another fifty percent by 1947. Moreover, the “first-in/first-out” principle meant that American combat units lost their most experienced personnel first. The Army therefore lost its combat effectiveness much more quickly than even the already startling de-mobilization rate suggests. The JCS estimated that most units had lost between fifty and seventy percent of their combat value as soon as two months after VJ-day.

Though concerned about being required to support expansive political goals with this ragtag force, the military and the State Department fell back on a military strategy of very low standing forces and a threat to re-mobilize American power. As Byrnes wrote to Secretary of War Patterson: “It seems unlikely that the size of the occupation force in Europe by next July [1946] (probably under 200,000) will be large enough to be impressive in providing support for our political policies. The situation would not be greatly improved if the size of the force were


double that figure next July. The important thing is that our country must have sufficient military strength at home and abroad to give evidence of a determination to back up the policies of our Government anywhere that may be necessary.” In short, American military policy would be to cooperate with the Soviets, dramatically scale down forces, and back its political objectives with an implicit threat to regenerate conventional military power or use its atomic arsenal. 74

**ATOMIC TRIPWIRE.** From a military perspective, rising international pressures on American policy posed a question squarely: how would Europe be defended while the third force was being built? Europe was still economically distressed and in no position to provide for its own defense. Some kind of American commitment would be required. But what kind? Europeans pushed for explicit alliance guarantees, military aid, and a forward defense of Europe. France was particularly obstinate, refusing to sign on to the fusion and political unification of West Germany without more of an American ante. 75

But the United States resisted such balancing commitments, preferring to emphasize a low-cost strategic posture using only off-shore military power. American diplomats were content to stick with an “asymmetric” strategy of containment, one that focused on the economic reconstruction and political stability of Western Europe as a whole—including Germany. They downplayed the importance of rearmament for Europe and America alike. Europe would be defended with a trip-wire military strategy: the presence of American troops in Germany would serve to involve the United States in a European war if the Soviets were so foolish as to attack. Massive Soviet conventional superiority might quickly overrun Europe, but the United States would then launch a one-sided atomic air campaign to devastate Russia and any European industrial centers captured by the Red Army. Eventually, America would win the war in virtue of its atomic monopoly and re-liberate the continent. Needless to say, this strategy did not offer much satisfaction to the Europeans. If they wished to forestall these outcomes, they would have to overcome their own political divisions and develop the means to deter or defend against the USSR. 76

Thus, the strategy had great appeal from a free-riding perspective. The Americans rejected two successive European proposals for a security guarantee. The French hoped for a free-riding perspective. The Americans rejected two successive European proposals for a security guarantee. The French hoped for a

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74 Quote is in Byrnes-Patterson, November 29, 1945, FRUS, 1946 I: 1132. On mobilization see Patterson-Byrnes, November 1, 1945, FRUS, 1946 I: 1111-1112 and Krieger, “Was General Clay a Revisionist?” pp. 175-176. For the State Department’s military views, see State Department meeting and memo prepared for the Secretary’s staff committee, November 13, 16, 1945, FRUS, 1946, I: 1119-1128. State recommended a bare bones military policy focused on allied cooperation and greater mention of the atomic bomb.


76 The concept of an asymmetric strategy is used in this connection in Gaddis, Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy. For the essence of the American military plan, see Trachtenberg, A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963, pp. 83-91; Wolfgang Krieger, “American Security Policy in Europe Before NATO,” in NATO: the Founding of the Atlantic Alliance and the Integration of Europe, ed. Francis H. Heller and John R. Gillingham. The French could be quite colorful in voicing their displeasure with the American strategy. One French statesman said he feared that “the United States will abandon Western Europe to the Soviets: that the Russian hordes will occupy the area, raping women and deporting the male population for slave labor in the Soviet Union: that France and Western Europe will be occupied and devastated by the Soviet hordes and atomized by the United States.” Macarthur-Bidault, January 29, 1948, FRUS, 1948, III: 620.
three-power guarantee against future German aggression, along the lines of the four-power pact proposed by Byrnes. This would bring America decisively into the security situation in Europe: it would prevent future German revisionism, but even more importantly, would hedge against Soviet aggression as the Western powers moved forward on reconstituting a German state. But the Byrnes treaty had been based on the idea of Soviet cooperation; the situation now was Soviet enmity. The State Department argued that “it would be futile to accept these restrictions and bind only one part of Germany.” And the wrong part, at that, as Western Germany needed to be rebuilt, not disarmed. 77

For the same reason the American government frowned on a British attempt to draw America into an anti-German pact modeled on the Treaty of Dunkirk. As Kennan put it, “the role of the German people in any European union will eventually be of prime importance. The general adoption of a mutual assistance pact based squarely on defense against Germany is a poor way to prepare the ground for the eventual entry of the Germans into this concept.” Though “only such a union holds out any hope of restoring the balance of power in Europe without permitting Germany to become again the dominant power,” it had to be one the Germans could join. Moreover, “people in Europe should not bother their heads too much in the initial stage about our relationship to this concept” and just concentrate on making a union work. If Europe could unify, America would be happy to be the offshore ally of last resort. 78

Kennan in fact led a section of the government that was very skeptical of any sort of military commitment at all, on the theory that it would over-extend America and distract Europe from the real and pressing business of “political, economic, and spiritual” unification. At most, the American President should issue a unilateral declaration along the lines of the Monroe Doctrine, declaring that if the Soviets decided to bully Western Europe they would answer to American power. In the end, however, those who dealt most directly with the Europeans realized that unification could not move forward without something that at least seemed like a tangible security guarantee: the Europeans were simply too terrified of the dual menace posed by the once and future Germany, and the now and present Russia. Out of this tension, after much pulling and hauling, a deal was born. The United States would ratify the North Atlantic Treaty, and the West European powers would move ahead with the potentially dangerous step of creating West Germany. 79

The Truman administration’s international objectives thus drew it towards a formal alliance, but its negative liberal commitments meant that even this historic step lacked heft. America structured the treaty such that it retained the freedom to decide whether its commitments had been invoked, and the Congress retained its authority in the war-making process. When the treaty was debated in the Senate, the administration framed it as a deterrent. Senator Vandenberg went so far as to declare that “I don’t care if there were no subsequent implementation, I would feel that the treaty had gone a long, long, way in the direction of an insurance policy” just by way of its Article Five guarantee against aggression.

“No subsequent implementation” turned out to be a fair descriptor of the situation before the Korean War. Congress delayed the funding of the “mutual assistance” portions of the treaty,

and cut this military aid from $1.4 billion to $500 million. $400 million of this was withheld until organizational structures—the "O" in NATO—could be developed that would pave the way for a future German military contribution in lieu of an American one. The first meeting of these structures, in the form of the North Atlantic Council, reaffirmed the status-quo military strategy: America would be responsible for strategic bombing and Europe would have to provide any ground forces. As Wolfgang Krieger aptly summarized American posture, "in a way the policy of asymmetric response, i.e. politico-economic containment, was a continuation of the pre-war isolationist policy towards Europe." 80

SUMMARY OF AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY, 1945-1948

TLFP's predictions are confirmed by the American buckpassing strategy during Truman's first term. Both the content of America's foreign policy posture and the process of its formation are consistent with the theory. The administration's vision of the future European power constellation was one balanced between an eastern and western sphere. The American pole would be loosely associated with the western sphere, but would mostly free-ride on its efforts as American statesmen anticipated an early departure from Europe. Negative liberal and systemic impulses pushed American policy in opposite directions in implementing strategic decisions. Soviet and European resistance to American buckpassing schemes caused statesmen to alter policy, incentivizing a better match between America's diplomatic means and power political ends. At the same time, the Truman administration's negative liberal aversion to costs kept commitments minimal and focused strategy on building the strength of Western Europe.

I would highlight three especially compelling pieces of evidence for these claims. First, the effects of negative liberty and the international system are both evident in American threat perceptions and policy responses. In spite of the growing Soviet power advantage, policymakers were initially inclined to downplay the threat of a European hegemon. Rather than make ready commitments to defend Europe's future, American diplomats tried to offer the Soviet Union policy concessions, in the hope that cooperation might beget an easy balance between a European-led West and a Soviet-led East. Additionally, negative liberal biases helped dismiss communist ideology as threatening until it became part of a security question. Conversely, the true size of Soviet power and the pressure of Soviet policy ultimately forced Washington to acknowledge the threat and adjust its policies. This kind of systemic pressure moved American strategy from a hazy idea of cooperation between European spheres of influence to a more integrated idea of building a third force to oppose the Soviet Union.

Second, consonant with negative liberal tendencies, American diplomatic policy systematically displayed an impulse to reduce costs and free-ride on others. The American plan for managing the remnants of German power, evident in the Byrnes' Potsdam policy and the four-power pact, was to leave the problem in European hands while promising to return if the European security situation took a turn for the worse. Even after European penury and Soviet predation convinced the Truman administration that it had to rebuild Western Europe, its engagement remained limited and its eyes fixed on the exits. Through the means of the ERP, American diplomats stressed economic reconstruction over military rearmament and pushed European economic and political integration as a means to confront the Soviets. American

policy adjusted repeatedly to international reality during the period, but never contemplated more than limited and temporary American commitments.

Third, American military policy was nearly non-existent until the end of Truman’s first term. The end of the war saw a strikingly rapid demobilization that policy-makers acknowledged as an impediment to any kind of expansive political goals. After the ERP moved forward, the American Army was neglected in favor of a trip-wire atomic strategy that promised, effectively, to destroy the European village in order to save it. The initial iteration of the North Atlantic Treaty was less a military alliance than a public relations campaign, intended to reassure European capitals without changing either the military situation on the ground or America’s actual defensive commitment. The Truman administration’s desire to keep military costs low integrated well with its cheap political strategy.


Truman’s second term saw at least some movement on both of TLFP’s independent variables. Russia’s atomic test in August 1949 objectively changed the European military balance. This change combined with Russia’s rapidly growing economy to increase the salience of potential Soviet hegemony. Concurrently, Dean Acheson’s ascendance to Secretary of State shifted the Truman administration’s concept of liberty towards the center of the ideological continuum, as a highly positive liberal figure assumed an important position for the first time. The former change caused a marked increase of the American diplomatic and military commitment to Europe, as it became clear that Europe needed a defense on the ground if it was to withstand Soviet pressure. The latter change helped cement this more intense commitment, since Acheson was more willing to contemplate a long-term engagement. At the same time, the shift towards the ideological center also made American policy less coherent, as the Truman administration’s military strategy was pulled in multiple directions by different liberal ideas.

Nevertheless, the basic American strategy remained the same. The United States worked harder and faster to build a third force in Europe, but still aimed to make the resulting pole an independent power in its own right. Europe would balance the Soviets on its own. America would help on the margins and as a last resort, while enjoying the blessings of liberty at home in the form of a free-riding foreign policy. We can infer the continued buckpassing character of this strategy from its constituent elements and from the policy-process that generated American commitments.

Increasing Soviet power did not initially disturb the trajectory of American policy, as diplomats pushed for innovative ways to advance European integration while politicians kept military budgets low. The advent of the Korean War brought long-standing fears of Soviet hegemony to the surface, but mostly just increased the pace and cost of American efforts to build a third force in Europe. The Europeans were asked to accept German rearmament and supranational military integration as the price of American divisions, whose deployment in Europe was intended to be temporary. This deployment was accompanied by exhortations for the Europeans to do more, and the development of an extensive nuclear capacity that would allow the Americans to do less.

The process of American policy-making reveals that the international system clearly signaled a growing disintegration between Washington’s political-military means and ends. This gap ultimately did result in an increased American commitment to shape European politics at higher costs. But negative liberal biases held back a response to increasing Soviet power for
over a year. They further impelled Washington to continue pushing for a third force after the Korean War began and increased diplomatic agitation for burden-sharing mechanisms. Meanwhile the American ground force commitment was limited to six divisions and priority given to off-shore power. In the aggregate, systemic pressures forced costlier and more integrated strategic commitments, while negative liberal priorities shaped those commitments to cap American costs and encourage European independence.

RESPONSE TO EUROPEAN THREATS

Estimates of Soviet capabilities increased drastically after Russia tested an atomic weapon in 1949. This event caused intense worry in the Truman administration and led to NSC-68, a strategy document aimed at mobilizing the American government for war. The North Korean invasion of South Korea confirmed the concerns voiced in NSC-68 by demonstrating that Soviet power was far greater than previously expected. Still, before the Korean invasion, negative liberal constraints held back a policy response to the administration’s escalating sense of material threat; there likely would have been very little change in European strategy absent the Korean War.

NSC-68 AND ESCALATING MATERIAL THREAT. On August 29, 1949, the Soviet Union detonated its first nuclear device, sending shockwaves throughout Kazakhstan and the American government. Although not unexpected, the explosion came earlier than anticipated, and the development threw the delicate balance of power in central Europe into question.

Soviet atomic capability radically changed the military situation, increasing the potential for Russian hegemony in Europe. The American tripwire military strategy depended on the prospect of a one-sided atomic air war. Even if, as was likely, Western Europe was overrun, the eventual mobilization of American nuclear power would bludgeon the Soviet Union into submission with a force that it could not match or stop. This advantage allowed the Americans to take a somewhat leisurely attitude towards fighting the war—as late as 1949, the American nuclear strategy was backed by only a few weapons and incompetent Air Force plans. But in a two-sided nuclear exchange, speed would be of the essence. Each side would be trying to annihilate its enemy’s potential for nuclear attack, weapons development, and heavy industry. These incentives could lead to a long and deadly war where the Soviet advantage in Europe might never be reversed, and which America could conceivably lose if it did not strike quickly enough.

Policy-makers therefore began displaying serious concern about the implications of growing Russian power. The American Embassy in Moscow argued that “in view of favorable developments on the atomic energy and China fronts, the Embassy believes that Moscow may consider it an opportune time to regain the initiative on the German question.” The JCS began to advance their long-held views in favor of German rearmament with renewed vigor. In the year after the explosion, American intelligence began to pick-up signs that the Soviets were preparing to flex their new-found muscle. The Soviet economy started transitioning to a war footing: military and civilian stockpiles were being established, war material was pushed into forward

areas, and factories were being reconfigured for armaments production. Spies in the Eastern bloc countries reported that high-level Soviet communist officials were telling their satellite counterparts that the Soviets had a window of opportunity in central Europe, which could only be exploited before the West built up strength. Émigrés from the Eastern block similarly brought word of increased military exercises and offensive military planning. We now know that there was an aborted plan to attack Tito’s Yugoslavia during the period, so that these rumors were not without foundation. 82

The product of these fears for European security was NSC-68. This paper, less strategy than propaganda, was designed to “so bludgeon the mass mind of top government” as to permit a change in policy: a bigger defense budget, a stronger military posture, and a more aggressive diplomatic strategy of “rolling back” Soviet strength where possible. Though its authors, Paul Nitze and Dean Acheson, were cagey enough not to put a dollar figure on their proposal or outright call for German rearmament, they harped on increasing Soviet power, the inadequacy of American military strength, and the need to rally support from allies. There is scattered evidence that the Truman administration might have been on the verge of implementing some form of the proposed policy. Internal opponents of the policy and fiscal conservatives such as head of the Council of Economic Advisors Edwin Nourse were replaced with policy supporters. Others, like Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, were marginalized. Apparently the beginnings of an effort to mobilize support in Congress were being made, and hardliner Averell Harriman was brought in to manage the process of “implementing” the programs of NSC-68. 83

For the Truman administration, the proof that NSC-68 was right about Soviet geopolitical strength came from North Korean attack on South Korea on June 25, 1950. Western statesmen assumed, correctly as it turned out, that Stalin had authorized the attack as part of his program of expansion. The analogy to Germany was obvious in many minds: would the communists use their new found power advantages to attack another divided country that was lightly defended? The West Germans certainly had a hysterical reaction. The American liaison to the Bundestag reported that the parliament members had “cleaned out the market [for cyanide], prepared to take their lives when the Communists come.” German industrialists began to take out advertisements in Communist newspapers as a hedge against political change. Especially after the Chinese responded to the American escalation of Korea, American decision-makers believed that there was grave danger for Europe. As Acheson noted in a late 1950 NSC meeting, “time is shorter than we thought... we used to think we could take our time up to 1952, but if that were right, the Russians wouldn’t be taking such terrible risks as they are now.” 84


It therefore became essential to counteract the rapidly increasing Soviet capabilities. Western Europe needed some kind of forward defense on the ground, for two reasons, both articulated well by Chairman of the JCS, Omar Bradley. First, in a two-sided atomic war, he argued flatly, “we might be in danger of losing.” Particularly if the Soviets built up sufficient nuclear forces, the American industrial advantage could be quickly wiped out, and the outcome of a long war put in doubt. As a result, the Soviet conventional advantage in Europe would be that much more valuable of an asset in turning the continent’s production against the Western hemisphere. Second, and more importantly, Bradley had argued earlier that “we cannot count on friends in Western Europe if our strategy in the event of war dictates that we shall first abandon them to the enemy in promise of later liberation” which could produce “nothing better than impotent and disillusioned allies in the event of war.” Such impotence and disillusionment was in widespread evidence during the summer of 1950.85

THE PERSISTENCE OF AN ASYMMETRIC STRATEGY. But these revised assessments of Soviet power did not immediately cause a change in strategy. American policy remained focused on advancing European integration and economic reconstruction. The Defense budget remained restricted and the State Department continued to emphasize non-military solutions in the European arena.

Negative liberal constraints worked to minimize the administration’s response to the international environment before Korea. Truman’s dedication to fiscal conservatism had kept the military budget very low throughout his presidency. Even during the war scare of 1948, when the communists gained control of Czechoslovakia, Truman derogatorily “commented that every department of the government has gone warlike.” Truman granted the JCS only $3.2 billion in additional funds—a third of the supplemental appropriation they had sought. He then cut the budget the next two years. Indeed, the biggest cut, in the planned FY 1951 budget, occurred in December 1949, in the face of growing concerns about Soviet power and intentions.86

The administration had also held the line on its low cost free-riding strategy of building a European third force. It opposed German rearmament, despite JCS protests and British encouragement. Truman had called a JCS plan to rearm Germany “decidedly militaristic,” and Acheson had gone so far as to tell Congress that “I think everybody is clear that it would be quite insane to make any sort of [German] army of any kind whatever.” During the winter of 1949-1950, the State Department would often have to put out fires set by those who favored German rearmament, as these kind of rumors were treated with grave seriousness by Europeans. Even following the North Korean invasion, the State Department still briefly resisted German rearmament, arguing that it would undo the strategy of integration that was moving forward with the Schuman plan. Only in late July 1950 did Acheson reverse this position and adopt a more militarized approach.87

Finally, NSC-68 was initially put on ice due to negative liberal concerns about cost. Upon receiving the report, President Truman referred it to the NSC for further consideration, adding that “I am particularly anxious that the Council give me a clearer indication of the

85 Trachtenberg, A Constructed Peace, quotes pp. 98 and 101.
programs which are envisaged in the Report, including estimates of the probable cost of such programs." Truman demanded that all kinds of budgetary authorities be included in the discussion, presumably so that he could ensure his fiscal priorities were adhered to. The note concluded with italicized instruction that "it is requested that this report be handled with special security precautions in accordance with the President's desire that no publicity be given this report or its contents without his approval." This is consistent with action Truman took three years earlier with the famous Clifford-Easley report, a similar anti-communist manifesto that Truman locked all copies of in his personal safe. In May, Truman would tell the press twice that he was going to cut the defense budget again the following year, and he mentioned to aides that the budget for NSC-68 “was definitely not as large as some people seem to think.” It seems likely that either NSC-68 was headed nowhere fast, or would at most have resulted in a modest budget increase, consistent with the selective steps Truman was taking towards its implementation. 88

DIPLOMATIC POLICY

American diplomacy during the second Truman administration continued to emphasize a free-riding posture. American statesmen focused their efforts on European integration, responding to systemic resistance by considering the relationship of Great Britain to the growing power mass on the continent as well as pushing new supranational plans. After the Korean War began, American strategy intensified, shifting towards European rearmament and integration in the military field. But the new phase of American strategy was more of an acceleration of existing plans than an actual change of course. New military and diplomatic commitments were made, but the focus remained on European integration and self-sufficiency. These goals would now just have to come on a faster timetable.

BRITISH PARTICIPATION. For almost a year after the Soviets had tested their nuclear weapon, America's European diplomacy stayed on the same track. Despite increasing international military pressures, the major debate in the Truman administration was on how to proceed with European integration. Tactical disagreements did not obscure the consensus that economic and political ties were to be stressed, while pushing German rearmament back—even in light of the new Soviet strength. The result was an important decision about America's diplomacy with Britain. 89

For the American buckpassing strategy to succeed, European resistance to integration had to be overcome. This systemic feedback caused America to adjust its diplomatic means and ends. Kennan realized that the British “tended to exert a retarding influence” and would put an


89 There were two schools of integrationist thought in the Truman administration. The first argued that British leadership in European projects was essential; the second believed it detrimental. The "pro-Britain" school of thought eventually lost out to the "continental" school of thought, led by the arguments of George Kennan and Dean Acheson detailed in the text. For an example of the debate, see Meeting of the U.S. Ambassadors at Paris, afternoon session, October 21, 1949, FRUS 1949, IV: 483-496, esp. 491-496. On agreement to de-emphasize military preparations, see Klaus Schwabe, “The Origins of the United States’ Engagement in Europe, 1946-1952,” in NATO: the Founding of the Atlantic Alliance and the Integration of Europe, ed. Francis H. Heller and John R. Gillingham (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), p. 172
“upper limit” on the measures necessary to eventually rearm Germany and create the supranational political decision making structure needed to direct a revived German Army. Worse still, when the British made commitments that their disintegrating political situation could not deliver on, “this usually resulted in having the problem created by such commitments ending up on our doorstep”—exactly the situation American policy was trying to avoid. Better to encourage British association with America and Canada, while letting the continental European states form the nucleus of the third force. 90

Though more of an Anglophile than Kennan, Acheson agreed a new approach was needed to overcome systemic resistance to American strategy. The buckpassing goals of American diplomacy dictated a reduced British role in European projects. While integration did not require “at this time an extensive surrender of sovereignty” the State Department always had to consider “the larger concept of European integration we hope ultimately can be achieved.” In this vein, Acheson “believed that France and other continental powers would be willing to go farther along road to integration (including Western Germany) than would the British, and… would not wish to see this progress retarded by British reluctance.” France needed to become a leader in the process of creating supranational institutions if these were “to create a structure strong enough to carry out the purposes of the Atlantic Pact and resist threats from the East” which were central to the “analysis of what is needed if Russian or German, or perhaps Russian-German domination, is to be avoided.” Like the U.S., Britain should participate where it could, but probably couldn’t be expected to surrender this kind of sovereignty. Indeed, the British might be a positive hindrance: Truman believed that “the British are doing everything possible to break up Western European unity,” while Acheson had to reprimand London for stirring up a hornet’s nest by pushing German rearmament. The debate on integration tactics was a turning point: one of the most notable aspects about the “special relationship” with Britain between 1950-1960 became the especially derogatory treatment London received on issues of European integration—viewed less as a British Lion than a Trojan Horse. 91

ECSC. Without British interference, America had better odds of constructing a supranational institution on the continent, one that would eventually be able to balance Soviet power without American help. But as American diplomats constantly noted, integrationist attempts had to be led by Europeans in order to have success. By late 1949, Acheson was practically begging Prime Minister Schuman of France to take the lead on building supranational organizations with in Europe and “to advance the Germans a political credit they have not fully earned.” In May 1950—responding in part to American attempts to strengthen the Atlantic Alliance—France came through with the Schuman plan for a unified market in coal and steel. 92

90 Meeting of the combined policy committee, September 13, 1949, FRUS, 1949, I: 520-522, quote p. 521.
The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was a proposal to turn European coal and steel into a cartel of rationalized production and sale. It was significant economically because it involved commercial cooperation among its member nations and discrimination against those without. But more important was the fact that it gave authority to a supranational decision-making body. National authorities and private companies would give up their capacity to influence decisions over the very sinews of modern military power; it would be impossible for a nation to organize a military rearmament without either the permission of this body, or its obvious deconstruction. This fact served as a large confidence-building boost between France and Germany, for obvious reasons. From the American perspective, the proposal was also exciting because it provided the industrial basis for a genuine third force. What the supranational body could prevent, it could also produce: the foundation of a truly European military power.93

Washington was ecstatic, and with good reason: American diplomats had been advocating similar solutions for years. As head of the World Bank, John McCloy had proposed an early version of the ECSC. And as John Foster Dulles noted in a contemporaneous telegram to Acheson, “this proposal is along the lines that Secretary Marshall and I thought about in Moscow in 1947, but which we did not believe the French would ever accept.” Nor was American enthusiasm limited to cheering from the sidelines. Behind the scenes, American diplomats worked diligently to get the ECSC negotiated and ratified. McCloy, as High Commissioner of the German occupation, used threats and promises of considerable influence to break heads among German industrialists and get the deal done. German interests were over a barrel, having to accept French domination and give up valuable considerations to fend off McCloy’s pressure.94

AMERICAN COMMITMENT, GERMAN REARMAMENT, AND THE EDC. After the invasion of South Korea, American statesmen quickly realized Europe would need more than a third party nuclear deterrent for its defense. But their first impulse was to respond by funding the Europeans to defend themselves, in the style of the Marshall plan and other third force thinking. Acheson sent an all-hands message to American diplomats in Europe, informing them that they could expect a large degree of American assistance in raising forces, including the extension of Marshall Plan aid and new programs from Congress. He also admonished that Europe should “think and act in terms of an effort over the next two years, limited only by… its ability to recruit, train, and maintain qualified manpower to meet its requirements under NAT planning… we believe all countries will have to accept lower levels of consumption than would otherwise be possible and will have to divert resources from investment in peacetime production to other purposes.” Though Acheson was happy to discourse on European sacrifices, the lengthy telegram made no mention of American forces. Subsequent diplomacy at North Atlantic Council would withhold the promise of U.S. troops until mid-August, 1950.95

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95 Acheson-Diplomatic Offices, July 22, 1950, FRUS, 1950, III: 138-141, quote 139-40. I have corrected abbreviations from the original telegram. See also Ibid., pp. 188-195. Though quickly accepted by the State
However, it soon became apparent that American troops were exactly what would be required to overcome European resistance. France wanted it “clearly demonstrated that in any war that might come, French soldiers would be dying for something that has a chance to survive.” Germany wanted similar assurances, driven by their aforementioned despair over Soviet power after Korea. In general, it was argued, the allies “doubt that the Soviet hordes can be resisted. Their view is that there is practically no chance of their being successful in war… the problem is how to encourage the rebirth of a determined will to fight. Except for the relatively rare individual, among most people the will to resist is related to their calculations of their chances of success.” In order to give the Europeans the psychological strength to make the sacrifices required to rearm, an American military contribution would have to be made, just as it required an American economic contribution in the Marshall Plan to bolster European economies against communism. By early August, the American ambassadorial team was firmly agreed on this point.96

The international system had sent another signal that American political goals were outstripping its means—an increased American military commitment to Europe would be required to ensure the latter’s political integrity. However, this increased commitment was coupled with policies designed to make it temporary and less costly: German rearmament and the creation of an integrated European Defense Force, one that could both restrain German autonomy and forge the nucleus of an army that could balance the Soviets. Given long-standing American policy opposing German rearmament, and the intense trouble that would ensue over the issue in the next four years, these changes are particularly noteworthy.

The logic of combining the American commitment with German rearmament and an integrated European army was shaped, at least in part, by the fear of a long-term American entanglement. When American Ambassador to Britain Lewis Douglas first broached the idea of an American commitment to Acheson on July 12, he noted that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were opposed to parts of his proposal, and that “you may consider that this letter should go directly into the waste paper basket. If so, I understand completely.” The same feelings came through again as officials wrestled with the problem of German rearmament and an integrated force. Americans recognized that the only way to get around French objections to German troops was to integrate them into a non-national force; “a truly common effort is the only way out.” But as Ambassador to France David Bruce argued:

Such an approach may run up against the problem that the European nations probably could go much farther than the US and the UK in surrendering control of their defense and rearmament effort to a central body. The French are aware of this fact and acknowledge that it will be more difficult to bury the fear of Germany in a strictly European army than it would be to bury it in an army with a wider basis. However, just as the Schuman proposal or a European federation can be part of a more loosely united Atlantic community, so also could a European army participate in NATO.

Department, the deployment of American troops to Europe was not officially sought by Truman until late in the summer.

96 Bruce-Acheson, July 28, 1950; Douglas-Acheson, August 8, 1950; both in FRUS, 1950, III: 151-159, 190-192 quotes 158, 191. The emerging debate, which is quite interesting, can be followed in the same volume of FRUS, esp. FRUS, 1950, III: 132-207.
McCloy and Douglas also suggested a similar approach of attaching the American contribution to a European army more loosely through NATO. A clear motive—and concern—of the American commitment was the ability to continue the policy of the third force. 97

The same buckpassing motives required German rearmament, though there was disagreement within the administration over how soon rearmament should be pursued. By 1950, it was commonly expected that America had only eighteen months to two years left of control in West Germany. In that time, Germany would have to be tied firmly to the West. If the West rearmed but left Germany behind, Germany would be nothing more than a ward of the United States, its people demoralized and dispirited, prone to neutralism and communist appeals. It was also unlikely such a situation would be stable on the American end. In response to French complaints about the “delicacy” of French opinion on the subject of German rearmament, McCloy was livid. “U.S. opinion is getting damn delicate itself” he wrote to Acheson, and if “U.S. Troops should get pushed around without German troops to help them because of French reluctance to face facts, I should shudder to think how indelicate U.S. opinion would suddenly become.” 98

America was not going to be the permanent caretaker of Europe. If rearmament were going to happen now, then the Germans had to come along now, and further integration had to proceed swiftly—America could not afford to leave behind a politically unstable and divided Europe. This was the logic of the “single package” proposal insisting on German rearmament and U.S. commitment simultaneously. As the official statement of the U.S. position put it, “it is our objective to assist the European nations to provide a defense capable of deterring or meeting an attack. When this objective is achieved it is hoped that the United States will be able to leave to the European nation-members the primary responsibility, with the collaboration of the United States, of maintaining and command such force.” Some kind of organization had to be left behind when the Americans departed, and it had to have a device for containing Germany within Western Europe. An American withdrawal could only be underwritten by integration and German rearmament, and these critical elements could not be risked by delay. 99

The French were dead set against German rearmament, both for domestic political reasons and because they feared it would provoke the Soviets. After the single package was introduced at a NATO meeting in September 1950, the French broached a counter-proposal. Instead of German rearmament with strict restraints through NATO, they suggested a genuinely integrated European force, of the kind supported strongly in the State Department. This proposal was eventually crafted into a sincere overture for further supranational integration in the military

97 Douglas-Acheson, July 12, 1950; Bruce-Acheson July 28, 1950; both in FRUS, 1950, III: 130-132, quotes 132, 157-58. For further comments about a more distant American relationship to the proposed European force, see Douglas-Acheson, August 8, 1950; McCloy-Acheson, August 11, 1950; McCloy-Acheson, August 3, 1950; all in FRUS, 1950, III: 190-192 (esp. 192), 205-207 (esp. para 2, 206), 180-182 (esp. para 7, 182), respectively.
98 For great detail on McCloy’s treatment of the German problem see Schwartz, America’s Germany, esp. pp. 124-155, 216-234, quote p. 139. See also Acheson’s comments to the North Atlantic Council, in Acheson-Acting Secretary of State, September 15, 1950, FRUS, 1950 III: 316, which are typical of concern about German Eastward orientation found in many documents. On arguments against German rearmament see Douglas-Acheson, August 2, 1950, “But to plunge Germany into this matter to soon, before we have made our commitments and the French will to fight has been substantially encouraged, is hazardous business”; Bruce-Acheson, July 28, 1950; Bruce-Acheson, August 9, 1950 “German man-power… should be postponed”; all in FRUS, 1950, III: 177-179, 151-158 (esp. 156), 194-195, quotes on 178-179, 195.
realm, known as the European Defense Community (EDC). Through the mechanism of negotiating and ratifying the EDC treaty, the French would delay German rearmament nearly until Eisenhower's second term. In the interim, Eisenhower was named Supreme Commander Allied Forces, Europe (SACEUR) and three additional American divisions were sent to the continent. Nevertheless, the negotiation over German rearmament that dominated the next four years of diplomacy in Europe was spurred in the first place by the renewed American desire to exit the European continent.100

Indeed, the American fear of a long-term commitment runs through the various attempts to grapple with the impasse over the EDC. Acheson’s initial impulse was to secure temporary German rearmament and then build the core of the EDC force structure within NATO while the French and Germans were hashing out the details. He felt that from the “long term view point it is probably neither practical nor in the best interests Europe or U.S. that there should be a US Commander in Europe or substantial numbers of U.S. forces on Continent. We would, however, regret to see the concept of international forces that is now accepted ever disintegrate to point where nothing would remain on the Continent except national forces solely under national control.” Eisenhower could organize the defense of Europe such that French and German units were grouped together, and could place them under the command of a French General on the Central Front. In this way, there “would be a force which, as a military force, would not have to be changed in any fundamental way whenever the time came that the overseas contingents might be withdrawn.”101

But most of the American diplomats serving in Europe thought that these tactics would be unable to achieve American free-riding aims. Bruce argued in another famous “long telegram” that “after US commander and US troops are withdrawn, national components in NATO will surely revert to separate national armies unless there is permanent European political structure.” A supranational force could not wait, and its postponement might even prevent an American exit. What is more, the French and Germans would simply never come to terms any other way; the EDC would be the fastest way to achieve German rearmament in the near term. McCloy agreed with this analysis, while stressing the long-term goals of American diplomacy in a meeting with West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. He pressured the Chancellor to move forward quickly with the EDC because the “concept of European army is in harmony with US long-range policy of closer association for Europe and is akin to Schuman Plan and the federation of Europe.” These integrative measures were essential because “it is evident that no single country has resources to defend itself but that Europe together has the resources adequate for a real defense against the East.” In short, the EDC was now the sine qua non of the third force strategy. If the American buckpassing strategy was to succeed it required up-front investment in integrating institutions that could not be built on the fly at a later date.102

There were some in the government who disagreed with this entire line of thinking, ultimately including Dean Acheson. Yet, whatever his personal views, support for a third force

100 For a detailed analysis of the convoluted diplomacy leading to the EDC, see McAllister, No Exit, pp. 189-205. The delay was not purely due to the French; the West Germans contributed by insisting on strict political equality in any force in which they participated. At one point the German minister negotiating demanded that his parking spot be next to those of the other delegation heads. Schwartz, America’s Germany, p. 211.
101 Acheson-Bruce, June 28, 1951; Acheson memo, July 6, 1951; both in FRUS, 1951, III: 800-805, 813-819, quotes 802 and 816. I have corrected abbreviations from the original telegram.
102 Bruce-Acheson, July 3, 1951; McCloy-Acheson, July 6, 1951; both in FRUS, 1951, III: 805-812, 1487-1489, quotes 806 and 1487-1488. I have corrected abbreviations from the original telegrams.
within the administration won Acheson’s support. After Bruce, McCloy, and Eisenhower all expressed firm support for the EDC as the fastest route to German rearmament and American long term goals, Acheson presented the third force position to Truman: America should support the creation of a supranational EDC in order to reconcile continental fears and interests, while placing it within the “broader” framework of NATO in order to mitigate “British and other fears of continental integration.” This was the same idea that Douglas, Bruce, and McCloy had presented a year earlier and essentially the same concept that Kennan had worked out in 1949.

And indeed, Acheson would play hardball to defend the essence of this position: a temporary American commitment. France, Belgium, and the Netherlands all got cold feet in the run-up to the signing of the EDC convention, justly afraid that it would weaken NATO and leave them alone on the continent with a rearmed Germany. But Acheson resisted their demands for further American commitments and for guarantees of American troop increases if Germany were ever to leave the EDC.103

The Truman administration gave the Dutch the equivalent of John Foster Dulles’ later “agonizing reappraisal” speech—a scarcely veiled threat that American support could only be guaranteed by further integration, rather than European demands for further commitment. McCloy and Bruce’s suggestions both used a lecturing tone, captured well in Bruce’s sentence: “this opportunity must not be lost, and if Benelux opposition has this result, it would be hard to justify to American opinion.” Acheson went easier on the French, but his opposition to their importunes was just as resolute: “It must be made clear that our troops are not in Europe to police the obligations of friends but to prevent aggression from without.”

In the end, Acheson refused to modify the American position in order to promise the French more security, with the exception of a face-saving change “not altering the meaning” of the tripartite declaration of general support America and Britain would make. As Acheson described the issue to the President, “all this is largely theoretical. Seventeen years hence either the European Defense Community will be a strong, vital community from which no component would wish to withdraw, or else long before then it will have received the kiss of death and be but a hollow shell.” European unity would survive on its own, or not at all.104

MILITARY POLICY

American military policy during Truman’s second term featured the massive rearmament associated with the Korean War and the commitment of American divisions to Europe. But in administering these programs, the Truman administration continued to push its negative liberal preferences: rearmament focused on nuclear weapons, the American ground commitment was limited, and efforts were made to shift more costs to the Europeans. By the end of Truman’s time in office, high-level American strategy had become disintegrated: Truman was unwilling to


shoulder further American costs and Europe seemed unable to increase its own resource extraction. The positive liberal Dean Acheson was focused entirely on ground forces and was dismissive of attempts to substitute tactical nuclear weapons for troops. American grand strategy was integrated on the ground by Eisenhower in his post as SACEUR, where he developed a doctrine similar to the one he would employ as president.

LIMITED GROUND FORCES, NUCLEAR BUILD-UP. The new military commitment to Europe was actually quite small compared to what might have happened. Despite a desire to build a forward conventional defense, the United States only contributed six divisions to the NATO line throughout the Cold War. This modest contribution meant that NATO could not maintain an entirely conventional defense of West Germany without additional troops, at least during the Truman period. Indeed, much of the fear generated in the Senate “Great Debate” over the American commitment stemmed from unofficial estimates that America would have to provide as many as fifteen divisions. Rather than focus on building ground forces, though, the Truman administration opted to send over only three additional divisions, promised before Congress they would be a temporary commitment, and accepted limitations on its ability to raise the number of troops without further Congressional approval. The administration relied instead on military assistance funding to spur further contributions from Europe.105

Truman’s negative liberal impulse to cut costs meant that the administration pushed strongly for investment in independent European defense capacity, and for the European production and finance of as much major military material as possible. As one report put it, “U.S. aid after the capital buildup period must taper off sharply. Unless Europe is in position to maintain its own defense effort post '54 it will not have achieved the goal of NATO adequate security, based on the economic and political health and independence in Europe.” Marshall, then secretary of defense, explained the negative liberal sentiments driving policy in his proposed defense to Congress: “we are buying European manpower in place of U.S. manpower in the interest of the defense of the U.S. The European people have real economic problems resulting from the war. They have lost great numbers of men and they have a difficult Communist vote problem. In helping them solve these problems and get ahead with the defense effort with U.S. assistance, we are defending the U.S.”106

At the same time, the Truman administration focused on offshore military power: it increased the budget for nuclear weapons three times during the 1950-1952 period. This included a several fold increase in the amount of fissile material and a two orders of magnitude increase in the number of weapons. The strategic air offensive against the Soviet Union remained top military priority, and the Air Force received over forty percent of the Defense budget. Several crucial technological innovations were funded and developed during this period, which increased the efficiency and yield of nuclear weapons. Finally, the development of tactical nuclear weapons for battlefield use moved forward at a brisk pace. The result of these decisions was the development of a robust American nuclear capability, both on the battlefield and strategically, paired with a relatively anemic ground effort. As Marc Trachtenberg aptly

106 ISAC report, August 17, 1951; Meeting on the MTDP Gap, June 21, 1951; both in FRUS, 1951, III: 248-253, 197-204, quotes 249, 201-202. For the extensive strategizing throughout government over how to get Europe to build and finance a defense capability, see also the meetings and memos in FRUS, 1951, III: 1-6, 29-34, 58-64, 82-86, and 123-125.
describes, it was “as if the United States was telling its European allies: you want forward
defense? Then come up with the troops. But if you can’t, don’t complain if we end up relying
on nuclear weapons.” The administration’s military decisions, though increasing the ground
commitment to Europe, were also consistent with the negative liberal focus on avoiding ground
troops and using standoff power to limit liability.  

STRAEGIC DISINTEGRATION. But by the end of the Truman administration, competing
perspectives behind American strategy were at odds with each other. Some in the State
Department thought that European integration was well on its way to developing an independent
center of power, but that America had to forestall the opinion that “we are now looking forward
to not too distant time when we can bring our troops home and return to pre World War II
relation to Europe.” By 1952, Acheson himself had gone further than supporting just a lose
association with Europe, arguing that the U.S. should oppose the “possibility of a European
Union becoming a third force or opposing force.” On the other side, David Bruce and other
European diplomats averred that “little consideration has been given in the US to the possibility”
of the third force becoming hostile to the United States and were openly debating Kennan’s
proposals for long term withdrawal from Germany. 

This confusion was reflected in American military strategy: led by the positive liberal
Dean Acheson, the administration’s diplomatic efforts focused entirely on a conventional build-
up. The Lisbon conference in 1952 set the force goals that were supposed to guide NATO
throughout the Cold War, and they were predicated on a wholly conventional defense as far East
as possible. Once this goal was explicitly made out to be a strong area defense East of the Rhine,
the force requirements of the concept were simply more than the economies of Western Europe
could bear. But the Truman administration still pushed relentlessly for an entirely conventional
strategy. Diplomacy during this year was focused on the issue of “closing the gap” between the
Lisbon force goals of 89 divisions (itself a political compromise) and what the Europeans were
willing to provide.

At the same time, Acheson’s ground force priorities were running into Truman’s cost
cutting proclivities. Acheson saw tactical nuclear weapons as “Buck Rodgers gadgets” and
repeatedly fought off European attempts to utilize nuclear forces as a way to restrain the defense
build-up. But Truman refused the suggested alternative that America “assume some additional
portion of force requirements under the plan, after all the water has been squeezed out and we
have asked them [Europe] to do everything they can.” In short, the administration was
demanding a conventional defense, but conflicting preferences at the highest levels of
government ruled out every method of achieving it: America would not use tactical nuclear
weapons, it would not contribute more, and Europe could not contribute more. Despite strong
signals from the international system, American military means were disintegrated from its

A. Wampler, “Conventional Goals and Nuclear Promises: The Truman Administration and the Roots of the NATO
New Look,” in NATO: the Founding of the Atlantic Alliance and the Integration of Europe, ed. Francis H. Heller

108 Webb-Spofford, August 17, 1951, FRUS 1951, III: 254-256, quote 255; Acheson-Bruce, September 19, 1952,
FRUS, 1952-1954, V: 323-327, quote 324; London Chiefs of Mission Meeting, September 24-26, 1952, FRUS,

109 On the Truman approach generally see Wampler, “Conventional Goals and Nuclear Promises: The Truman
Administration and the Roots of the NATO New Look,” passim; Duffield, Power Rules, pp. 47-52 and 56-64.
political goals, perhaps because the growing liberal incoherence within the administration pulled policy in different directions.

It was left to Eisenhower as SACEUR to construct the obvious solution on the ground: to use what conventional forces he had, and what nuclear forces he could get, to defend Europe as far to the East as possible. Eisenhower did exactly this, putting into place the basic pieces of what would later become the “New Look.” He secured the command of nuclear forces for use on the continent, squelched military proposals for an initial American retreat from Germany in the event of war, and developed a plan based on the fifty to sixty divisions he thought he could obtain alongside the early use of nuclear weapons on the battlefield. The pattern of American military policy as actually implemented thus stayed on the same course it had been on since World War Two. Though the Korean War had drawn the United States into a closer commitment, American diplomatic policy was still building a center of power in Europe, and American military policy was still seeking to limit American liability through a temporary ground deployment and a nuclear strategy.¹¹⁰

SUMMARY OF AMERICAN GRAND STRATEGY, 1949-1952

TLFP correctly predicts a continued buckpassing strategy during the second Truman administration. American policy remained centered on building a third force in Western Europe that could block Soviet hegemony, though rising Soviet capabilities increased the cost and effort Washington sank into the project. Even given its increasing engagement to protect an acceptable balance of power in Europe, American policy retained important free-riding elements: the number and pace of integrative projects increased, ground force commitments were kept to a minimum, and the existing emphasis on nuclear weapons only rose. While the level of threat in the international system rose after the Soviet nuclear test, and Dean Acheson’s positive liberal views reduced the administration’s level of ideological coherence, core negative liberal personnel were retained in the diplomatic corps and Defense Department. Combined with Truman’s fiscal rectitude and mixed ideological views, significant negative liberal impediments existed to a ready embrace of a balancing strategy.

Three kinds of evidence highlight TLFP’s power to explain the persistence of American buckpassing. First, systemic and negative liberal influences on threat perception continued to work at cross-purposes. The Soviet nuclear test started a chain of American security worries culminating in NSC-68, which advocated massive American rearmament and implied further commitments to Europe in order to oppose Soviet power. The trip-wire military strategy was deeply problematic once America lost its nuclear monopoly, and American political hopes for European balancing were increasingly tenuous in the face of such an obvious threat. Even so, it was more than a year before American policies actually became integrated with their goals, as Truman preferred to keep military budgets low and stashed NSC-68 in a dark corner of the bureaucracy. The balance of power drove increasing threat perceptions, but negative liberal cost-consciousness impeded a policy response.

¹¹⁰ Acheson quote from Meeting on the MTDP Gap, June 21, 1951, FRUS, 1951, III: 202. On European defense as it was actually developed on the ground during the late Truman period, see Trachtenberg, History and Strategy, pp. 160-162; Wampler, “Conventional Goals and Nuclear Promises: The Truman Administration and the Roots of the NATO New Look,” pp. 363-368. On Truman administrations conventional focus and dismissal of nuclear weapons, see Ibid. p. 353-360.
Second, negative liberal priorities meant America’s European diplomacy continued to work towards a third force and the pursuit of innovative solutions in order to advance this goal. The decision to break with British preferences on European integration reversed a long-time tacit priority in American diplomacy. The ECSC was a real integrative breakthrough, facilitated by years of American advocacy and an intense round of political strong-arm tactics in Germany. The ECSC promised to form the core of a real power center, and it was this context that made the increasing American troop commitment plausible. American statesmen made clear that this temporary commitment had to be paired with intense economic strains on Europe’s part, a major German military contribution, and a supranational political framework for managing it all. The Truman administration accepted several years of international turmoil and increasing military risk in order to secure these third force goals; it was not about to absorb the costs of defending Europe for the long-term.

Finally, increasing ideological incoherence in the administration may have swamped systemic pressures for strategic integration. On the one hand, Truman’s cost cutting proclivities limited the American troop commitment to six divisions. The Defense Department emphasis on developing a massive and varied nuclear arsenal and the political emphasis on inducing European troop increases both meshed well with this vision. On the other hand, Acheson’s NATO diplomacy was focused entirely on ground forces and he dismissed the battlefield possibilities of nuclear weapons. The combined effect was to acknowledge the need for a forward defense of Europe but simultaneously rule out every method of achieving it. It fell to Eisenhower to integrate American military strategy with its political goals, when as SACEUR he instituted an early version of his nuclear heavy “New Look” strategy. And as the next chapter will show, Eisenhower’s military choices were rooted in his ideological views.

Conclusion

American grand strategy in the early Cold War was subject to frequent adjustment and reintegration, as the Truman administration’s negative liberal biases sat uneasily within an international system that increasingly tended towards bipolarity. TLFP expects this kind of strategic outcome: when international and ideological incentives point in opposite directions, policy will often swing between liberal preferences and systemic imperatives. Interestingly, the growing disintegration between the second Truman administration’s political ends and military means was plausibly the result of rising ideological incoherence. The positive liberalism of Dean Acheson meshed well with an international system incentivizing a forward defense of Western Europe. The administration’s build up of nuclear forces and insistence on small ground commitments would eventually produce a coherent alternative under Eisenhower’s influence. But by 1952, the two tendencies were at odds with each other, and the result was a forward commitment without an assured forward defense.

In the main, though, TLFP’s variables produced a reasonably coherent buckpassing strategy throughout Truman’s time in office. During his first term, the administration quickly recognized the European power imbalance, but worked to downplay its importance through cooperation with the Soviets. When the cooperative policy fell apart over Germany, the administration acknowledged the realities of Soviet power and worked to develop a third force. This strategy was designed to allow an early American withdraw from the continent and a reduction of costs, albeit not as quickly or as inexpensively as had been originally envisioned.
Thus, the ERP emphasized European integration and economic recovery, while military policy was little more than a threat to unleash the strategic deterrent.

After the Soviets broke the American nuclear monopoly, American commitments were forced to change, though they did so at a leisurely pace, given the stakes. It took an unexpected war in Asia to launch a policy response to growing Soviet power. Still, American statesmen retained a near obsession with building a European pole. A number of important diplomatic initiatives preceded Western rearmament, which was itself coupled to integrative and political projects of impressive ambition. The American commitment continued to be envisioned as temporary, while the bulk of American defense spending built a powerful nuclear force well suited for an offshore power. The negative liberal aversion to military costs, entangling alliances, and permanent bureaucracies was evident during both periods. It would only increase after Truman left office.
Chapter Seven

Buckpassing, Balancing, and the Cold War Transition: American Grand Strategy under Eisenhower and Kennedy

The period following the Cold War founding was the most tumultuous decade of the superpower confrontation, and its most dangerous. From 1953-1963, tensions ran high in Europe. Superpower clashes occurred over the political organization of Western Europe, the military disposition of the Federal Republic of Germany, the status of West Berlin, and they ultimately culminated in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Yet by the time of President Kennedy’s assassination in the autumn of 1963, the Cold War had “cooled down.” The superpowers shifted much of their attention to the third world for the final three decades of the conflict, and Europe was calm in comparison. How did such a watershed transition in an erstwhile dangerous arena come to pass? In essence, world politics calmed down when the Kennedy administration shifted to a balancing strategy.

A stable political order then emerged based on the permanent division and subordination of Germany. American power became permanently committed to the European continent, where it would lead an alliance that integrated West German power to the status quo, while counterpoising the might of Western Europe against Soviet expansion. On the other side of the line, the Soviet Union dominated its Eastern European satellites, most notably East Germany, mobilizing a powerful military alliance and imposing a political totalitarianism, both of which prevented the Western orbit from moving East. Each side balanced the other perfectly, and European policy was locked into the designs of the Superpowers. The result was the longest period of peace in European history. But it could not come about until the last major adherents to the older liberalism had left the scene. TLFP thus provides a useful tool for analyzing this major American strategic change and its international political consequences.

As TLFP expects, during the negative liberal Eisenhower administration, American grand strategy stayed on the buckpassing path set by Truman: Eisenhower pursued a European “third force” with even more vigor than his predecessor, seeking to shift primary responsibility for containing the Soviet Union to a European conglomerate. West Germany remained critical to this strategy, as it needed to be strong enough to lead a united Europe, but dependent enough on others that fear of German power would not fracture a balancing coalition. To this end, Eisenhower pursued diplomatic policies that would tie the Germans to Europe and military policies that would arm them with nuclear weapons. Eisenhower’s refusal to compromise on his ambitions for the FRG lay at the heart of Cold War tensions in the 1950s.

The positive liberal Kennedy completely reoriented American grand strategy, assuming a balancing posture—towards both the Soviets and the Western Europeans. No longer interested in an exit from Europe, American strategy under Kennedy actively sought to crush the possibility of a third force, to better facilitate a compromise with Russia and protect liberalism in the West. The FRG was denied nuclear arms and political independence, while Western Europe as a whole was brought to heel within NATO. In return for the permanent American commitments that guaranteed West German quiescence, the Soviets tacitly agreed to cease challenging the status quo in Europe, most notably in Berlin. In this way, Kennedy’s strategy led to the establishment of Cold War bipolarity: Europe was peacefully managed by the superpowers, and the liberal order that had arisen in the West was protected from the centrifugal forces of nationalism, autarchy, and autocracy that might be produced by the tensions of power politics.
The process underlying American strategic decision-making also strongly confirms TLFP. Eisenhower concentrated on the growing material threat from the Soviet Union; he had little interest in communism per se as a threat, and was personally willing to acknowledge the de jure legitimacy of the socialist regime in East Germany. Diplomatically, he continued to craft champion the third force through numerous institutional solutions, hoping to thereby shift America’s Cold War burdens to its European allies. Militarily, he kept the focus on nuclear weapons and American offshore power. Much of his policy was driven by intense anti-statist rationales and the fear of a garrison state emerging if America had to make permanent commitments abroad.

For Kennedy’s part, he feared Soviet power, but was more concerned with the effects it might have on the Western liberal order. Kennedy’s hostility to the third force was driven by the fear that such a power conglomerate would quickly become illiberal—either inward looking and economically autarchic, or driven to outward aggression by nationalism and anti-democratic impulses lying just beneath the surface of the Western European body politic. He therefore sought more control over European foreign policy, diplomatically neutering the possibility of a third force and asserting the primacy of American dominated NATO. Militarily, Kennedy moved towards a more ground force-centric approach to the defense of Europe, as such forces would both give more influence in a crisis situation and also cemented control of the alliance with Germany.

The international system provided the major impetus behind American commitments in both periods, though it cannot explain the change between Eisenhower’s buckpassing and Kennedy’s balancing, as Soviet power made it a potential hegemon well into the 1960s. Systemic feedback also continued to play an integrating role. West European resistance to the EDC forced Eisenhower to fall back on other strategies for integrating Europe, most prominently several policies for transferring nuclear weapons to Europe. This in turn, caused Soviet pressure in the form of the Berlin crisis, to which the Eisenhower and Kennedy administration had different responses. The constant level of geopolitical threat caused both administrations to adjust their means and ends, but it was not until negative liberal impediments were removed that America actually changed grand strategies.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate these claims and to root their causes in variables of TLFP. I begin by measuring the independent variables, illustrating that while the level of geopolitical threat remained constant, there was a major ideological shift between Eisenhower’s negative liberal administration and the positive liberal views of Kennedy. The next two sections detail Eisenhower’s buckpassing strategy and Kennedy’s balancing strategy. I show that the character of these grand strategies is consistent with my primary theoretical predictions and that the process surrounding policy formation was driven by each administration’s different liberal concerns. A final section addresses potential alternate explanations for the American grand strategy during the entire Cold War period covered in this study, from 1945-1963.

Measuring the Independent Variables

In this section I take measurements of the independent variables in order to generate empirical expectations for TLFP. I am principally concerned with establishing the concept of liberty held by Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy, who were the primary foreign policy decision-makers in their respective administrations. As before, I survey mostly private views expressed before each President took power, expressed across three substantive categories:
explicit philosophical statements, attitudes towards political centralization, and views of fiscal and economic issues. I conclude the section with a measurement of geopolitical threat from 1953-1963.¹

EISENHOWER'S CONCEPT OF LIBERTY

Dwight Eisenhower was a negative liberal. His private discourse reveals a classical Lockean approach to liberty, a deep fear of centralization, a strong defense of balanced budgets, and a spirited defense of the free-enterprise economy. The idea of liberty as freedom from constraint runs throughout his views.

PHILOSOPHY. Ira Chernus succinctly sums up Eisenhower's philosophical approach: "when laid out the general's ideological views constituted a sort of primer in the popularized Lockean theory that underlay so much of the discourse of his day." The key features of this system were its design to secure "a maximum of individual liberty" and that its "insistence on individual freedom springs from the unshakeable conviction in the dignity of man, a belief—a religious belief—that through the possession of a soul he is endowed with certain rights."²

The great threat to these rights was the central state. Eisenhower explained this threat in his family discussion of a proposal to make a movie version of his life. Writing to his brother Milton, he expressed skepticism, but hoped the project might express "the virtues of the American system." Eisenhower thought that "the theme of the picture could take the slant of glorifying opportunities presented under the American system and tend to support initiative, effort, and persistence in the average American family, as opposed to the idea of collectivity that discards self-dependence and is ready to trust to regimentation for a secure future." To his wife Mamie, Eisenhower hoped the movie "might encourage the kids to work, and to depend on themselves, rather than become to complacent with respect to the State's obligation to the individual."³

In other private remarks, Eisenhower displayed similar concerns. As President of Columbia he defended teaching undergraduates about communism in a letter to Louis Smith: "I believe all of us should be taught the inevitable results of adopting statism either through inevitably drifting into it or through conquest from without... at first hand I know something of the human stultification that comes about through paternalism that finally results in complete

¹ Omitted here for space reasons is a survey of the views of Eisenhower and Kennedy's principal subordinates. In Kennedy's case, his major cabinet secretaries and foreign policy advisors only increase the administration's positive liberalism. Eisenhower's administration is more mixed, but the other major foreign policy figure, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, shared Eisenhower's negative liberal views. In both administrations the President was the dominant force in foreign policy decision-making, meaning their political attitudes are a good proxy for the type of liberalism present in the administration as a whole.
loss of freedom and in the surrender of all personal initiative to absolute governmental regimentation.”

Eisenhower displayed common negative liberal tropes about the value of democracy: it was useful for preventing the rise of tyrants and the hijacking of the public good by special interests. Writing early in the Second World War to Mamie, he worried about the revolutionary upheaval the war was causing to human society, and the effects this might have on the American political system. “Even after we have won the military victory” he wrote, “the problems facing the world will be such as require courage equal to that of the battlefield… the danger is that special economic, industrial, or social groups will apply pressures that will either be disruptive or might force, for a time at least, the adoption of some form of dictatorship in our democracies.” The pent up demands resulting from fifteen years of material privation might overwhelm a system of limited government to the benefit of rent seekers. This would be not only unfair, but a grave threat to freedom. Democracy “if we have to define it in one word—must be grasped by the word cooperation,” Eisenhower thought. “If any group of individuals seeks only its own immediate profit, it inevitably lessens the efficiency of the whole” at producing liberty for all. Thus, democracy’s primary value was to hamstring such special interests. In a letter to British Field Marshall Henry Wilson he argued in this vein that “the unrestricted genius of all the people will in the long run be responsible for constructive development beyond that possible in a regimented and police state.”

CENTRALIZATION. Eisenhower advocated a limited night-watchmen style state to “carry on necessary central functions, including the basic one of security,” both from external threat and internal crime and disorder. For these purposes it needed “rules and laws to control relationships among individuals and protect the whole from without.” But Eisenhower also felt keenly the negative liberal fear of centralization. Writing a letter to a friend on the now mundane subject of federal funding for education, he pronounced “one of my abiding convictions is that the more we permit the Federal Government into such matters, except on the basis of research, the more we are drifting towards an undesirable centralization of authority and power. That I am against.”

The agent of the central state was the bureaucracy, for which Eisenhower had choice words. Writing in his diary, he worried that “the trend towards government centralization continues—alarmingly. In the name of ‘social security’ we are placing more and more responsibility upon the central government—and this means that an ever-growing bureaucracy is taking over an ever-greater power over our daily lives. Already the agents of this bureaucracy cover the land… they nag, irritate, and hound every businessman in the U.S.” His dislike of creeping bureaucratic influence made him detest the New Deal. The problem with Roosevelt’s program was that it “sought to substitute SECURITY for OPPORTUNITY.” Talking to his friend William Robinson, Eisenhower railed that “the unlimited growth of bureaucracy in Washington is a national disgrace… unless this is cleaned up completely and thoroughly, our Federal government in any hands faces a doubtful future.” Chernus sums up Eisenhower’s negative liberal fear of central authority well: “in his political vocabulary, freedom was not

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primarily the ability to make rational choices, but the freedom from external constraint, the freedom to control oneself.” Therefore, society must either be “governed by justice or enslaved by force.”

FISCAL AND ECONOMIC VIEWS. Eisenhower was a fiscal conservative, believing the government should keep its budget balanced, avoid high spending, and keep down inflation. He worried that if America’s fragile fiscal house got out of order, the basis of its military strength would be sapped and opportunity at home diminished. He was prone to somewhat wild-eyed anti-tax rhetoric in his private correspondence, once writing a columnist to congratulate him on the phrase “taxes turn free men into things of the government.” Even when more rhetorically restrained, he viewed government spending as a debit against the fruits of free labor, and warned against “repressive taxation.” For the same reason, Eisenhower feared the eroding solvent of inflation, which chipped away at savings and investment, thus undermining hard work, free enterprise, and personal virtue. Above all, Eisenhower believed in working conscientiously towards a balanced budget. Eisenhower was ferociously anti-Keynesian, attacking the budget theories of Truman’s CEA head Leon Keyserling for several years after Eisenhower had assumed the presidency. It was only by restraining the state’s fiscal capacity that the relationship between ends and means, between freedom and collective good, could be maintained.

Eisenhower recognized that the main entry on the American fiscal ledger was military spending, and was particularly determined to keep it in check. As early as 1949, before the major increases in American defense expenditures, Eisenhower was writing in his diary that America must “prepare a position of strength... without bankrupting ourselves.” The theme of national bankruptcy was a common one in his discourse as time went on, as he warned that the American people could “eventually destroy ourselves through expenditures we cannot afford.” Trying to maintain absolute security was counter-productive to freedom: “if we are then trying to defend a way of living, freedom which is tied up with free enterprise, we cannot bankrupt the system at home by pretending to mobilize forces that are going to protect it.” Ultimately, it was a question of balance. “A democracy will always have a deficit in the desirable strength of its security establishment,” Eisenhower argued. “Some middle line must be determined between desirable strength and unbearable cost.”

Eisenhower placed fundamental importance on capitalism and a free-market economy. Indeed, free enterprise was the bedrock principle protected by the American system: “if the individual is to be truly free, he must be provided with the opportunity to gain a livelihood through means of his own choosing.” When the state interfered in the economy, the end result was that individuals “would necessarily respond only to orders from the government.” Individual opportunities would be eliminated and individual initiative destroyed. The growth of the state, the regulation of business, and the reduction of freedom were all tied up together in Eisenhower’s opposition to much of the New Deal. Writing to himself in his diary about why he had not taken his opposition public, he noted in passing “as between the so-called concept of the

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7 Quotes in Eisenhower diary entry, January 14, 1949, PDDE, 10: 431; Chernus, General Eisenhower: Ideology and Discourse, p. 91, caps in original; Ibid., p. 87.
welfare state and the operation of a system of competitive enterprise there is no doubt where I stand."

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

COMPOSITE CODE. An ideologue in the least derogatory sense of the term, Eisenhower was a firmly within the camp of negative liberty. He despised bureaucracy, distrusted centralization, worried over fiscal profligacy, and was committed to a free enterprise economy with little state interference. As a post-Great Depression American, he had made his peace with some parts of the New Deal, meaning he departs somewhat from the ideal typical negative liberty advocate. But he is at least solidly within the set of negative liberty, easily more within than without. Conservatively, I code him as NL: Medium.

Table 7.1: Eisenhower’s Concept of Liberty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explicit philosophy</th>
<th>Centralization</th>
<th>Fiscal views</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eisenhower</td>
<td>Anti-statist, opportunity focused, individualist.</td>
<td>Highly decentralist; anti-bureaucracy.</td>
<td>Fiscal conservative; anti-regulation, anti-labor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KENNEDY’S CONCEPT OF LIBERTY

John Kennedy was a positive liberal, whose type of liberalism trended more positive as he separated his politics from those of his virulently negative liberal father. His private discourse reveals a basic support for the welfare state, centralization of power, expansionary fiscal policy, and government intervention in the economy, stemming from his analysis of comparative social systems as a young man. Though occasionally voicing negative liberal views early in his career and in anti-communist contexts, he was in fact greatly concerned by the decadence of negative liberal individualism.

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PHILOSOPHY. Kennedy’s starting point for political analysis was the importance of redistribution and government intervention for creating real freedom. He seems to have developed these views during college on a pivotal summer trip to Europe. There, he had the opportunity to observe aristocracy, fascism, and communism, while struggling with the different social systems in his trip diary. Of the upper class French he wrote that “while they all like Roosevelt, his type of government would not succeed in France, which seems to lack the ability of seeing a problem as a whole. They don’t like [Premier] Blum as he takes away their money and gives it to someone else—that to a Frenchman is _tres mauvais._” In attacking both parties to the Spanish Civil War, he noted that “at the beginning the government was in the right, morally speaking, as its program was similar to the New Deal.” Later, during a brief interval at Stanford, he would point “to FDR as a model of how to make big changes without overturning traditional institutions.” Clearly, the basic philosophy of positive liberty at the heart of the New Deal was congenial.12

Personally, Kennedy’s own vision of freedom emphasized active participation and the development of valued faculties characteristic of positive liberty—he had a teleological vision of freedom. As a young man, he contended in his senior thesis that democracy was valuable “because it allows for the full development of man as an individual.” Reflecting privately for his memoirs on audiotape before assuming the presidency, he recalled that “I saw how politics filled the Greek definition of happiness—a full use of your powers along lines of excellence in life-affording scope.” He argued that “everything now depends upon what government decides. Therefore, if you are interested, if you want to participate, if you feel strongly about any public question,” politics was the place to be—and his list of what counted as a ‘public question’ included subjects as broad as “labor, what happens in India, [and] the future of American agriculture.” Kennedy’s own vision of freedom stressed active participation and government’s role in deciding many questions.13

CENTRALIZATION. Influenced by his father’s views, Kennedy occasionally harped on negative liberal themes in public speeches, especially in an anti-communist context. He referred to a “scarlet thread that runs throughout the world” and noted that “the right of the individual against the state is the keystone of our Constitution.” Along these lines he voted in Congress for the Twenty-Second Amendment limiting a President to two terms and would also defend Congressional committee prerogatives against institutional centralization.14

However, these expressions were a minor theme against a backdrop of skepticism regarding the inefficiency and decadence of undirected individualism. The major theme of his senior thesis at Harvard, soon after published as a reasonably prominent book, was the inefficiency of democratic capitalism in foreign policy. The British humiliation at Munich was caused by Britain’s unwillingness to pay for rearmament, a product of classical liberal illusions and the free play of self-interest in a democracy. Even as the storm in Europe approached, “every group wanted rearmament, but no group felt there was any need for it to sacrifice its privileged position.” This was a general problem of negative liberty: “when it requires a period of years to build up an industrial system able to produce this armament, we see the disadvantages of democracy’s position. She is forced to pay for everything out of our budget, and she is limited

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13 Dallek, _An Unfinished Life_, pp. 64, 120.
by the laws of capitalism—supply and demand.” Without the ability to control prices, direct production, and increase revenues, liberal democracies were threatened. The lesson for America was obvious: “instead of claiming that our great national wealth and high standard of living are due to our democratic capitalist system, we should realize the great natural resources we have. Maybe they were the best form for developing the country, but that doesn’t mean they don’t have to be proved the best today.” The modern world called for more centralization and control.\(^5\)

Kennedy harped on such views throughout the Second World War. He detested efforts to gainsay wartime practices, fuming in a private letter that “This war is not a debate over war potentials and possible production limits... it is not a war that can be won by the blue-prints of bombers that some day will cover the sky. This war must cease to be run as a political battle. Generals must take charge—must, if necessary, regiment the country to the extent that makes the Nazis look like starry eyed individualists if we are ever going to come out on top.” Spinning wild geopolitical fantasies about Japan invading America, he concluded in another letter that the war was much more important than “parity prices, 40-hour weeks, cost-plus contracts, what happens to the U.S.A.” These complaints were just an example of how America was succumbing to British individualist decadence: “in a war like today’s, tradition and way of life and a great past history are merely excess baggage that impedes movement.” In short, Kennedy embraced centralization with gusto.\(^6\)

**FISCAL ROLE AND ECONOMIC VIEWS.** Kennedy began his political career as a fiscal moderate, but rapidly shifted towards a more expansive role for government spending. Early in his congressional career, he would occasionally play the balanced budget card as a national security issue, and there is evidence to indicate he was uncomfortable with the degree of spending desired by his working class constituents. But by the time he arrived in the Senate in 1953 he had adopted conventional Keynesian views: his first major effort as a freshman senator was to produce an incredibly detailed report promoting a massive federal subsidy of the New England economy. Moreover, as he neared his run for the Presidency, he surrounded himself with Keynesian advisors. No less a figure than Paul Samuelson wrote the pre-inaugural assessment of the American economy for the transition team, which Kennedy approved. The report mentioned “the mistaken notion that the economy is unable to bear extra-burdens” from defense spending, and recommend that defense increases “can only help, rather than hinder the health of our economy in the period immediately ahead.” As Kennedy’s head of the Council of Economic Advisors would later put it, his growth-oriented fiscal views “put at his disposal, like nothing else can, the resources needed to achieve great societies at home and grand designs abroad.”\(^7\)

Kennedy did not develop sophisticated views on domestic policy until he was running for Congress after the war. Though occasionally expressing balanced budget views and a reluctance to go as far on economics as some of his working class constituents, his positive liberalism increased over time. The appointment of Theodore Sorenson as a policy advisor and Kennedy’s principal speechwriter marked this evolution, of which Kennedy was quite conscious. As he reassured Sorenson, who harbored doubts that Kennedy’s past record made him too conservative, “you’ve got to remember I entered politics out of my father’s house.” But the past was not

\(^{16}\) Hamilton, *JFK: Reckless Youth*, pp. 465, 481, 482.
indicative of the present, and Kennedy had formed his own views. Even Joseph Kennedy
himself was forced to admit to Sorenson that "you couldn't write speeches for me. You're too
much of a liberal. But you writing speeches for Jack is different."18

Indeed, Kennedy moved over time from an incoherent mix of his father's fiscal
conservatism and his own appreciation of the New Deal, to a more consistent positive liberalism
he viewed as a moderate alternative to other social systems abroad. This came out in his
stringent anti-communism, which was based in part on staving off radicalism at home. In
attacking Henry Wallace as soft on communism, he sought to defend the superiority of the mixed
economy in left-wing terms: "many people will tell you" Kennedy argued, that "the Russians are
achieving economic security at not too great cost in loss of personal freedom. The truth is that
the Russian people have neither economic security nor personal freedom." There followed a
prodigious attack on Soviet economic production, followed by the sobriquet "Is that economic
security? If it is I hope and pray that we never have economic security in the United States."19

Kennedy's alternative was a government-guided capitalism that created effective freedom
for all. He insisted against his father that he "was not for laissez faire—business did need
regulation by the government 'to eliminate the trends of over-production and low purchasing
power.'" Kennedy defended his party affiliation by listing a long string of New Deal
accomplishments and concluding "most important, in my opinion, the Democratic party
recognizes that our prosperity is precarious and to protect it the government must be prepared to
use its strength and its resources in fighting economic stagnation where ever it threatens." He
made his major issues housing and labor. Kennedy attacked the anti-labor Taft-Hartley
amendments to the Wagner Act viciously, and claimed that "the only time that private enterprise
alone anywhere near met the demand for houses was in 1925." By the time he had reached the
Senate, he held conventional liberal views on the economy. His fundamental New Deal
orientation took him towards the positive liberal viewpoint.20

COMPOSITE CODE. Kennedy held fairly typical views on positive liberty associated with
his support for the New Deal. He believed from an early age that government intervention was
necessary to secure economic liberty; that active participation in political affairs was an
especially valuable kind of freedom; and that political centralization needed to replace
decentralized individualism in American society. Though initially retaining some of his father's
conservative economic and fiscal views, he shifted left towards more fiscal and economic
interventionism as he matured politically. By the time he ran for President, Kennedy held the
conventional attitudes of positive liberty, sitting in the ideological center of the Democratic
Party. I code him conservatively PL: Medium.

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18 Both quotes in Ibid., p. 180. See also Ibid., p. 221 for further examples of Kennedy's rejection of his father's
ideology, and pp. 142-143 for his early negative liberal expressions.
Table 7.2: Kennedy’s Concept of Liberty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explicit philosophy</th>
<th>Centralization</th>
<th>Fiscal and economic views</th>
<th>Overall</th>
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</table>

GEOPOLITICAL THREAT

I turn now to coding the European balance of power during the Cold War transition from Eisenhower and Kennedy, between 1953 and 1963. To do so, I rely, as before, on two central concepts of power. Initially, I aim to assess the latent economic potential of the European great powers. I employ three different indicators to get a sense of whether there was any one power economically strong enough to potentially over-run the continent. First, I compare the European poles on the Correlates of War (COW) index of steel production and energy consumption; this measure provides a rough take on economic size and high technology industrial potential. Second and third, I compare great powers at the same level of economic development using Angus Maddison’s series of historical GDPs and Paul Bairoch’s index of total industrial potential. Maddison’s series is conventionally regarded as the best measurement of raw economic size, while Bairoch’s index includes a series of high-technology industries beyond steel production, which can be misleading on its own. I start the comparisons in 1947, the first year for which reliable figures are available across all indexes.

Next, I examine the military balance of power, by comparing the relative size of European armies. The idea here is to assess if any power would have a decisive advantage in a short war, independent of its industrial potential. Again, these numbers need to be treated cautiously. Aggregate measures of military personnel are a poor substitute for an analysis of the actual conventional balance. Nevertheless, they can be an illuminating window into the broader strategic context.

These indicators show that the Soviet Union remained a potential hegemon throughout the period and by some measures increased the size of its advantage. Its share of steel, energy, and high technology industrial production increased throughout the decade. Soviet GDP increased in relative size for most of the fifties and was overtaken by European economic growth as the decade turned, leaving it with a still sizeable absolute advantage. Its military advantage peaked in the mid 1950s, but it retained a favorable force-ratio thereafter.

Still, the potential for a balancing coalition within Europe remained. Even on unfavorable measures, the EEC six maintained economic equality for most of the period; by GDP they even held substantial superiority over the USSR. European rearmament, the development of nuclear weapons in large numbers, and the demobilization of many (probably not very useful) Soviet personnel made a military defense of Western Europe at least feasible. The Soviet Union was a potential hegemon but Europe also had potential balancers.
LATENT ECONOMIC POWER. Table 7.3 shows the COW data for energy and steel production, while table 7.4 gives the values from the representative years reported in Bairoch’s broader index of industrial potential. Ratios are given between the Soviet economy and that of its next leading competitor. These figures show the familiar story of skyrocketing Soviet production and stagnating British growth. By the COW figures, the USSR produced more than half of Europe’s economic might by 1961; West Germany had overtaken Britain as the second leading power in 1959. In the Bairoch data, Soviet industrial power more than doubles between 1953 and 1963 while British size increases by about twenty-five percent. In both cases, the Soviets hold around a two and a half fold advantage over the second leading power by decade’s end.

But as noted earlier, these numbers have probably lost the bulk of their utility by the time Europe had recovered from the Second World War. By the 1950s, European economies had dug themselves out of their hole and maintained similar levels of economic development—the industrial revolution has done its work. As that level of economic development increased overtime, the importance of steel production as a measure of technological sophistication was drastically reduced. As the world economy integrated, at least in the West, the location of steel production came to matter less and less. And as European economies became more sophisticated, gross energy consumption mattered less than how efficiently that energy was converted into real wealth. In short, latent economic power was more and more obvious in the overall size of European economies as time ran forward.

### Table 7.3: Relative Percentage of European Industry, 1953-1963 (COW)

<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>16.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRG</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>12.6</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>11.7</td>
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<td>10.9</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>10.9</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.02</td>
<td>2.16</td>
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<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.51</td>
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<td>.9</td>
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<td>1.0</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
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<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
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### Table 7.4: Relative Percentage of European Industry, 1953 and 1963 (Bairoch Index)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1953</th>
<th>1963</th>
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<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
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<td>760</td>
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<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>330</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRG</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>330</td>
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<td>France</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
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<td>USSR/Br</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>2.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR/EEC</td>
<td>.8</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The GDP data in table 7.5 likely tell a more accurate story. The picture is still one of unbalanced power. The relative size of the Soviet economy peaks at 1.62 times the next leading power in 1958 and hovers near a one and a half fold advantage over the entire period. This is a significantly greater degree of economic superiority (on the continent) than had previously been
observed in European history. At the same time, the foundations for a balancing coalition are also obvious. From 1953-1963 the EEC six out-produced the Soviet Union by about forty percent in aggregate terms; this disparity would be enhanced with the addition of British power. Indeed, with the exception of the early 1960s in the COW data, the other industrial production measures also show the EEC at least keeping pace with the Soviet economy.

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>37.1</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>38.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>FRG</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1.53</td>
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<td>1.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USSR/EEC</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MILITARY POWER. Table 7.6 presents COW data on the size of European standing armies from 1953-1963. Sadly, the utility of these numbers also plunges by this point in time, since they give little nuance into the actual relative strengths involved in what had become a highly anticipated potential military clash in Central Europe. A number of non-trivial observations can still be made from the data.

First, the Soviets continued to modernize and reconfigure their powerful military during the period, shutting down paper divisions and moving forces to the Central Front. They certainly maintained conventional superiority over the Europeans; whether their actual superiority was as large as the early two and a half to one force ratios or as small as the later forty percent advantage is not clear. Second, in the last half of the decade, Germany rearmed and Europe began to produce a still lower, but not incomparable, number of troops than the USSR. British and Dutch forces declined during the 1950s, while the strength of French and Italian contributions increased. Finally, European forces were backed by six ready American divisions and a nuclear strategy during the period. But most post M-day divisions were anticipated to come from Europe, and it is unclear how many more ready divisions might have been produced without the American contribution. In any event, the United States did not even consider a conventional defense of the continent under Eisenhower, so the Europeans did not need to plan for one.21

The conclusion I draw from these observations is that an organic European defense of Western Europe was by no means inconceivable after German rearmament, particularly if the Europeans could gain a nuclear capacity. Though work on the early Cold War conventional balance remains spotty, NATO could have probably managed a non-nuclear defense by the early 1980s. There is at least some evidence to indicate that NATO was very close to such a capability in the early 1960s, at least before Vietnam. The upshot is that while Soviet military superiority

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needs to be acknowledged, so too does the existence of a military counter-weight in Western Europe.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Table 7.6: Size of European Standing Armies, 1953-1963 (COW)}
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\hline
USSR & 5,800,000 & 5,800,000 & 4,500,000 & 3,600,000 & 3,000,000 & 3,110,000 \\
Britain & 865,000 & 809,000 & 702,000 & 565,000 & 475,000 & 450,000 \\
FRG & 0 & 205,000 & 70,000 & 290,000 & 350,000 & 425,000 \\
France & 699,000 & 802,000 & 913,000 & 992,000 & 720,000 & 735,000 \\
Italy & 330,000 & 318,000 & 321,000 & 321,000 & 470,000 & 515,000 \\
Netherlands & 203,000 & 188,000 & 173,000 & 158,000 & 141,000 & 130,000 \\
USSR/EUR & 2.77 & 2.50 & 2.24 & 1.80 & 1.55 & 1.39 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

COMPOSITE CODE. Economic indicators show that the balance of power in Europe was strongly weighted towards the Soviet Union, which qualified as a potential hegemon from 1953-1963. In raw economic capacity, the USSR outstripped its nearest rival by fifty to one hundred percent over the course of the period, depending on the measure. In military strength, it was the clearly dominant power on the ground. However, the potential for an organic European balancing coalition continued to exist, as the economic strength of Western Europe combined met or exceeded the Soviet economy. Militarily, Western Europe was approaching Soviet power in the total numbers of ground forces, which probably understates their ability to defend in Germany, given that nuclear use was likely.

CODING CONCLUSIONS

Under both Eisenhower and Kennedy, Europe faced a large geopolitical threat from the Soviet Union, which was a potential hegemon. The continued presence of such a powerful state implies that the American incentives for international commitments to protect West European industry should remain in place, and the Cold War should continue. Primary source evidence indicates that Dwight Eisenhower is best classified as a negative liberal and John Kennedy as a positive liberal. The variation in the dominant concept of liberty between the Eisenhower and

Kennedy administrations means that we should see different strategies for pursuing systemic imperatives. Under Cold War conditions, negative liberty’s proclivities for buckpassing ought to be expected under Eisenhower, and positive liberty’s tendency towards balancing should be exhibited by the Kennedy administration.

Eisenhower’s Buckpassing Strategy

From 1953-1960, the Eisenhower administration pursued a strategy of buckpassing. The basic concept of this strategy was a continuation of the “third force” idea: America would build Western Europe into an independent pole of power that could balance the Soviet Union by itself. America would then pass the buck to this “United States of Europe,” withdrawing from the continent and positioning itself as the balancer of last resort. The strategy recognized a need to keep the Soviets from absorbing Western European industry and sought influence over the international power constellation consistent with this aim. But the primary mechanism for managing the balance of power was free-riding—Eisenhower sought to reduce American costs by shifting burdens to an integrated Europe.

We can infer this strategy from its component policies. Eisenhower’s diplomatic policies focused on supranational European integration. Integrative projects like the European Defense Community (EDC) and European Economic Community (EEC) were designed to create a single European pole by uniting the economic and military foundations of power across national boundaries. American defense policy focused on burden sharing and a military division of labor: Eisenhower envisioned removing American forces from the continent and leaving conventional defense to the Europeans. American nuclear power would stand as a last line of defense if the Soviets began to over-run Europe. In the interim, Eisenhower focused the American effort on standoff forces. He employed a strategy of decisive nuclear escalation in the defense of Europe that would minimize American state-building costs. Finally, though eager to avoid confrontation with the Soviets, Eisenhower refused to compromise on his plans for creating an independent European nuclear power, a critical part of the third force program and one that required giving West Germany some nuclear capability. Together these policies show an administration committed to passing the buck: Europe would be built up and then left largely to defend itself.

This section establishes the buckpassing character of Eisenhower’s grand strategy, showing it to be in accord with the theoretical expectations generated by TLFP. I also show that the process evidence surrounding policy formation is consistent with the theory: this strategy was driven by negative liberal rationales, by negative liberal fears of cost and commitment, and by negative liberal preferences for burden-sharing relationships and off-shore military power. Moreover, geopolitical forces also impacted American strategy as TLFP expects. The international system provided the motivation for American commitments, while feedback from European reactions these projects helped integrate Eisenhower’s diplomatic and military means with his political ends. In short, Eisenhower chose to pass the buck because it allowed him to split the difference between the existence of geopolitical threats and his negative liberal concerns. I proceed by surveying the major American initiatives across three policy areas: diplomatic policy towards Europe, military policy, and the perception and response to the Soviet threat.
American diplomatic efforts towards building a European pole were focused on supranational European integration. By creating supranational foundations for power, America could one day hope to exit Europe. I treat three major elements of Eisenhower's attempt to build a self-sufficient European pole: the EDC, EEC, and attitudes towards British participation in European structures. These all reveal a revived and expanded focus on shifting burdens to a European center of power.

EUROPEAN DEFENSE COMMUNITY. The heart of Eisenhower’s diplomatic policy was the EDC negotiated by the Truman administration. Recall that the EDC was a treaty for a supranational army that integrated the militaries of “the six” countries at the heart of European integration: France, West Germany, the Benelux countries, and Italy. The EDC was to be commanded by the NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) initially, but was ultimately designed to act independently. It is no exaggeration to say that all of American foreign policy turned on this issue during the first two years of the administration. Efforts to ratify the EDC motivated American posture towards the Soviets, American support for French policy in Indochina, delayed American defense and military plans, and were the primary object of America’s West European diplomacy until the defeat of the treaty in August 1954. It was, as Eisenhower said, “our one great objective” to which other priorities must be subordinate—“he wanted everyone to keep still” until the treaty was ratified.23

The EDC was vital because it solved America’s central strategic problem: the military disposition of West Germany. Without a strong defense contribution by the FRG, America would have to defend Europe in perpetuity. But other European states were terrified of a resurgence in German military power. A supranational army would solve these problems by ensuring Franco-German military cooperation and serving as the core of an anti-Soviet balance of power. As one American diplomat aptly described,

Our policy in essence has been based on the premise that if Europe is to be defended, the major part of such defense must be borne by the Europeans. This can only be achieved if there is a strong and united Europe. The heart of the problem of Europe’s strength is the relationship between France and Germany. If France and Germany are woven together in a European fabric, Europe will be strong. If they cannot pull together in the same harness, Europe will remain weak and divided and hence indefensible. The additional and essential increment of strength which the United States has been willing to provide to European defense will be meaningless unless there is a strong and united Europe. In other words, if Europe remains weak and divided, the United States will be frittering away its resources, which are not unlimited, in a program which has no real meaning.

This belabored emphasis on European strength and a minimal American commitment is characteristic of a buckpassing strategy and of negative liberty’s cost cutting logic.24

The EDC served a geopolitical objective, while also satisfying the negative liberal desire for lower costs through allied independence. As Eisenhower memorably put it, “as far as he was concerned personally, the Russian menace alone would provide sufficient justification for this course. It reminded him of the story of the man who was asked why he did not go to church any


24 MacArthur-Laniel meeting, December 4, 1953, FRUS: 1952-1954, V: 1740-1744, quote on 1742. To be sure, the administration, especially Dulles, also hoped the EDC would dampen Franco-German rivalry and contribute to European peace.
more. He replied that there were seven reasons, the first of which was that he had been thrown out and the six others did not really matter." But the point was to solve the geopolitical problem while avoiding its costs: "The American people were not avid for power or leadership," Secretary of State Dulles encouraged French Prime Minister Laniel. "They wanted to see the age-old leadership of the Western World flower again under France." 25

The French were very skeptical of the EDC. They feared, correctly, that America intended to abandon them to their German neighbors and constantly pressed for an ironclad American military guarantee of the EDC's integrity: an assurance that American troops would remain on the continent to prevent German domination of the institution. As French Foreign Minister Bidault put it bluntly: "with you, yes, without you, no." But this kind of guarantee would vitiate the entire point of the EDC for Eisenhower. Why bother building European strength if American strength will always be there? As he bitterly complained to Dulles, "After all that we have done to try to help Europe to help itself—and that, of course, was what EDC was—the Europeans come back to us seeking further commitments. They are absolute masters of the art of getting us to do for them things which they ought to do for themselves." American statesmen refused to offer the French anything more than empty diplomatic phrases, privately described as "nothing more than an effort to get timid men to overcome their own uncertainties." This negative liberal fear of over commitment probably doomed the EDC. 26

Indeed, the European resistance to American policy caused Eisenhower to seek new diplomatic means to serve his negative liberal political goals. In August of 1954 the Mendes-France government in France let the EDC treaty be defeated on a procedural motion. Over the rest of the year the Americans and the Europeans would work out a solution for German rearmament within NATO that did not involve supranational institutions. FRG sovereignty would be mostly restored. West Germany would rearm within NATO, though its forces would be carefully controlled: the Germans would be allowed neither to have nuclear weapons nor to evict NATO forces from their country. Nominally secured by the non-supranational Western European Union, the FRG’s compliance with these terms would be in fact guaranteed by a NATO presence within its borders—a presence founded on an American military contribution. The failure of the EDC represented a major blow to the Eisenhower buckpassing strategy, and the negative liberal commitment concerns that drove it. 27

But despite the pressure of the international system, the death of the EDC did not represent the end of the third force policy. Almost as soon as the vultures had left the carcass of the EDC, American diplomats were looking for ways to restart the project of supranational integration. As Dulles noted at one point, "almost any instrumentality was desirable if its use could develop the European rather than the national principle." 28

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY. An instrument appeared in 1955 that looked very suitable for American buckpassing purposes: the proposal to develop a European supranational

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27 This summary of the "Paris Accords" agreement on German rearmament follows Trachtenberg, A Constructed Peace, pp. 125-128.
customs union, the EEC. Though wary of public pressure after the EDC debacle, the administration was not shy about privately urging the Europeans onward and promising the Europeans open cooperation at the appropriate juncture. The logic of American support had not changed: the administration consistently spoke in terms of building European strength to balance the Soviet Union, mobilizing latent European resources, and taking the burden off of American taxpayers.\(^\text{29}\)

Eisenhower saw the EEC as a supranational body aimed at building the sinews of “a third great power bloc, after which development the United States would be permitted to sit back and relax somewhat.” Western Europe had all the preconditions to become “a solid power mass,” if it could mobilize its economic potential. Once its economies were linked, the pre-conditions for the supranational military strength the EDC had represented would be in place. In short, “with the common market Europe would be a third world force along with the US and the Soviet Union. If Europe does not have a common market, it will remain weak.”\(^\text{30}\)

Such a development would solve the American concern about the balance of power. The implications for negative liberty were just as considerable: reduced American commitments and a greater ability to free-ride. In its present divided state, Dulles argued, Europe was seen “as subject to being captured by the Russians or as representing some kind of charge on the US which the American public is not prepared to carry indefinitely. A united Europe, by contrast, could be as powerful as the United States or the Soviet Union,” certainly strong enough to resist the Russians unassisted. Indeed, Dulles believed that “the Europeans have an obligation to tie themselves together and to attain strength in that way so that it will not be necessary to call upon the US again.”\(^\text{31}\)

Negative liberty’s impact is further reflected in the extreme depth of the American desire to trade control in Europe for reduced American costs. In response to concerns about “any danger of separateness on the part a unified Europe,” Eisenhower responded that, in addition to being unlikely, the current European division was worse: “weakness could not cooperate, weakness could only beg.” Dulles believed that, as such, the crisis over the Suez invasion was actually “a very healthy development” if it spurred “these nations to try and mold themselves into a third force.” These projects were not, according to the Secretary of the Treasury, “purely philosophical as far as the nation’s check-book was concerned” but were rather an essential part of reducing long-term American burdens. The EEC and other integrative projects were just that fundamental. It was not a typical piece of bluster, then, when Dulles told Adenauer that “complete sovereignty for the many nations of Europe… is a luxury which European countries can no longer afford at US expense.”\(^\text{32}\)

BRITISH PARTICIPATION. One important obstacle to the achievement of European integration was the British government. In a remark that is probably too good to be historically


accurate, the British representative at the Messina conference where the common market was negotiated purportedly summed up his opposition thus: “the future treaty you are discussing has no chance of being agreed; if it was agreed, it would have no chance of being ratified; and if it were ratified it would have no chance of being applied. And if it were applied it would be totally unacceptable to Britain.” As Dulles often noted, like the Truman administration before him, the British naturally thought in terms of division on the continent, not unity, and they furthered this traditional vision through several schemes to water down European proposals. These included a “Grand Design” aimed to blur the difference between supranationality and simple cooperation between sovereign nations, and plans for a free trade area they hoped would rival the EEC and displace support for it.33

But the administration actively opposed these British maneuvers. Dulles believed that “the participation of the United Kingdom was not essential” for integrative efforts; in truth, he often argued that it was a positive hindrance. The administration made clear any free-trade area should be put on ice and only negotiated after the EEC had been ratified and put in place. Dulles was openly scornful of other British plans, telling Adenauer that “he agreed that there are some tendencies to endanger the prospects for practical European projects by superimposing rather vague, more generalized plans. The United States Government, he assured the Chancellor, would not participate in such maneuvers, and specifically had no intention of joining the Grand Design.” At bottom, given their geography the British probably couldn’t be trusted to be a first line defender of the continent, and they certainly showed no enthusiasm for any of the measures necessary to assume such a role. “Only the Community of Six offers promise of opening the way to a genuine United States of Europe,” Dulles told Eisenhower, and that meant freezing out the British. The “special relationship” was not so special in this policy area of primary importance.34

AMERICAN MILITARY POLICY

Eisenhower’s political plans were reinforced with a military strategy aimed at the same ends: transitioning Europe into self-defense, and reducing American costs through a more selective military strategy. This strategy, sometimes called the “New Look,” depended heavily on nuclear weapons and corresponding air and naval forces, while eschewing a strong role for American ground forces. It found its operational expression in the NATO war plan MC-48 and in Eisenhower’s plans for nuclear sharing. These latter plans were in some sense a military substitute for the diplomatic failure of the EDC, and demonstrated showing that Eisenhower would adjust his buckpassing goals but not abandon them.


THE NEW LOOK. The New Look was an explicitly buckpassing military posture. It focused on “the principle of concentration of forces.” American ground troops would be drawn down and eventually removed from Europe, reducing the stress on the American populace and federal budget. American defense policy would instead place an “emphasis” on “more fluid and mobile forces”: air power, naval power, and above all, nuclear weapons. The New Look envisioned a division of labor between America and Europe. “We would do the ‘big stuff’ (large-scale retaliatory attack). Our allies were expected to handle local hostilities,” Dulles asserted during the second term. Eisenhower agreed: “our policy should be that our friends and allies supply the means for local defense on the ground and that the United States should come into the act with air and naval forces alone.” As Eisenhower’s primary defense document, NSC 162/2, summarized: “In Western Europe, a position of strength must be based mainly on British, French and German cooperation in the defense of the continent.” The primary defense burden borne abroad, America could reduce its long-term costs through stand-off power.35

This free-riding military posture was driven by classic negative liberal concerns: fears of inflation eating away at the value of work, budget deficits destroying the value of the currency earned by workers, and taxes stealing the fruits of their labors. Early drafts of NSC 162/2 argued that “excessive government spending leads to inflationary deficits or to repressive taxation, or to both” and that “tax rates are so high and the structure of the tax system so bad that normal economic incentives for long term growth are seriously restricted.” It was not for nothing that Eisenhower made his Treasury Secretaries and Budget Directors permanent member of the NSC throughout his administration.36

Even worse was the long-term threat of a controlled economy and an end to the system of free enterprise. As Eisenhower argued:

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

The President demanded that threats be assessed not just by examining the Soviet Union’s military power, but also through anticipating the domestic responses that this power might prompt. The President argued against the idea that “we should do what was necessary even if the result was to change the American way of life. We could lick the whole world, said the President, if we were willing to adopt the system of Adolph Hitler.”37

37 NSC Meeting, September 24, 1953; NSC Meeting, October 7, 1953; both in FRUS, 1952-1954, II: 464-475, 514-534, quotes 469, 519. On the general issue of the fear of the garrison state, rife in both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, see Michael J. Hogan, A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security
A final concern was with the impact of arms policy on individual rights, with a special emphasis on the perils of conscription. It was certainly not acceptable to continue policies that might extend the draft “unless we are prepared to move towards further restrictions upon the freedom of individual citizens. Significant moves in that direction would tend to alter the character of the free institutions and values which our security programs are designed to preserve.” The individualist focus is also demonstrated in a certain amount of anti-McCarthyism rhetoric, a growing problem whose salience was only increased by active security policies: “the morale of the citizens of the United States must be based both on responsibility and freedom for the individual…. It is essential that necessary measures of protection should not be so used as to destroy the national unity based on the lasting values of freedom.”

These negative liberal rationales all led Eisenhower to understand the New Look as nothing more than a return to the old look in American strategy, with some modifications for new technical circumstances. The long-standing American preference was for “a minimum military establishment and mobilization base that could be expanded promptly in case of need.” American forces in Europe were a “temporary expedient” and a “stop-gap operation” en route to a strategy where the allies defended themselves. Once implemented, this strategy would “restore Japan and Germany as strong defenders against Russia, allowing the United States to be a central ‘keep.’” Motivated by Eisenhower’s traditional American concerns about liberty, and modeled on the initial American approach to the Cold War, the New Look was simply a “reaffirmation and clarification of what he had always understood.”

MC-48. The operational output of the New Look was MC-48, NATO’s war plan for Europe. The plan embodied the negative liberal commitment to standoff power and cost savings in a brutal manner: through quick nuclear escalation. NATO would use tactical nuclear weapons on concentrations of Soviet armor in order to equalize the conventional balance; whence NSC 162/2’s famous phrase: “in the event of hostilities, the United States will consider nuclear weapons as available for use as other munitions.” But this would only open the door for Soviet nuclear use, which meant that tactical nuclear defense would have to be coupled with a strategic nuclear attack as well. “The only presently feasible way of stopping an enemy from delivering atomic weapons” MC-48 grimly noted, “is to destroy his means of delivery at source. This will require early atomic counter-attack against the enemy’s delivery system.”

The American buckpassing strategy ultimately rested on a hair-trigger nuclear posture. Though often swearing up and down that the Soviets would start the war, Eisenhower and Dulles both made repeated references to launching strategic forces on alert or, “as soon as he [Eisenhower] found out Russian troops were on the move.” “Our striking power must blunt the attack at its source” one report advised, and the President agreed: “we must not allow the enemy

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Draft of NSC 162, September 30, 1953, FRUS, 1952-1954, II: 491-514, quotes 502, 511. For some of the repeated military worries about the draft, see Ibid., 446, 448, 469-471.

NSC Meeting, September 24, 1953; Cutler-Dulles, September 3, 1953; Legislative leadership meeting, December 14, 1954; all in FRUS, 1952-1954, II: 464-475, 455-457, 824-827, quotes 470, 456, 825-826. See also Eisenhower-Dulles, September 8, 1953, in Ibid., 460-463.

to strike the first blow.” At one NSC meeting, “the President stated that our only chance of victory in a third world war against the Soviet Union would be to paralyze the enemy at the outset of the war.”

The incentive to pre-empt led to a second feature of MC-48: pre-delegation of the authority to use nuclear weapons to NATO SACEUR and his subordinate commanders. As SAC commander Curtis LeMay would put it, probably with Eisenhower’s backing, “if I see the Russians are amassing their planes for an attack, I’m going to knock the shit out of them before they get off the ground.” The same applied for SACEUR. Meetings with his military advisors produced a consensus that a war in Europe would be begun “on the principle of the inherent right of a commander to defend his forces.” And Eisenhower maintained a very close relationship with SACEUR generals during this period, such that “no such [official] understanding” on pre-delegation was required. A nuclear-based strategy was cheap in dollars and American lives, but entailed a higher risk of war. In short, protecting negative liberty at home required quick pre-emption abroad.

NUCLEAR SHARING. NATO’s dependence on nuclear weapons put America’s Western European allies in an awful position. If it ever came to a fight, there was a strong chance Europe would be a radiating casualty of the American-Soviet rivalry. If the Europeans pushed America too hard, they might be abandoned to the Russians. But if they tied themselves too tightly to the U.S., they might be incinerated by the Russians. It was hard to tell which was worse. “A naked promise of nuclear protection” from the United States was “not a sound basis for any country’s security” it was argued at a NATO meeting. The allies needed their own protection. “The strategic concept contemplated that everyone should have an atomic capability,” the British stressed in meetings with Dulles about NATO strategy—even German units would have to be armed with American nuclear weapons.

This international pushback horrified large parts of the American foreign policy establishment and spurred domestic criticism of Eisenhower’s military policy. But the statesmen at the top were more than happy to help the Europeans develop atomic independence. If strategic integration meant European nuclear capability or a permanent American ground presence, Eisenhower would take the former. “For God’s sake, let us not be stingy with an ally… instead of being generous, we treat many of our allies like step-children,” he argued. Eisenhower “had always strongly favored the sharing of our weapons” because there should be “no monopoly” on the possession of nuclear weapons within NATO.

In the short-term, a series of ruses were developed to give the allies de-facto control over nuclear weapons while circumventing congressional controls. For example, nuclear-armed German fighter-bombers were guarded on the runway by only a single American private, and dual key missiles in Europe saw the second key go missing. Eisenhower and the allies both understood that these were controls in name only. As Eisenhower said to de Gaulle, the dual key

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42 On this issue, see Ibid., pp. 164-173, quotes on 171, 169, 165, and 170. Later versions of the NATO war-plan under Eisenhower were not quite as aggressive, but did not change the central elements.


system was “an illusory precaution” and “it would not be to difficult to obtain the key in a real emergency... [the French could] always arrange to seize control of the key.” He was just as blunt to SACEUR: “we are willing to give, for all intents and purposes, control of the weapons. We retain titular possession only.”

Eisenhower’s long-term solution was an independent European deterrent: the Multilateral Force (MLF). Intermediate range nuclear missiles would be given to NATO and deployed on NATO submarines manned by international crews. SACEUR would command the force, but in a major change, SACEUR would now be a European general. “When there was an American commander,” Eisenhower told a startled de Gaulle, “other countries looked too much to the United States to help them and did not accept their own responsibilities.” The heart of the plan was to turn NATO over to the Western allies. There would be no American veto over the use of the proposed force, and a European general at the head of a largely European alliance would make decisions surrounding it. The Americans might even be willing to do away with the dual-key hypocrisy, and give complete and open control of the warheads to the Europeans. Though the MLF did not get off the ground before the end of Eisenhower’s term, he considered it his parting gift to Kennedy—“a legacy of the finest ideas and plans this administration could develop.” It certainly embodied the negative liberal principles Eisenhower had sought to defend: stand-off power, allied independence, and a buckpassing grand strategy.

RESPONSE TO EUROPEAN THREATS

Eisenhower’s perception of European threats is most clearly evident in his position during the Second Berlin Crisis. He had little inclination to oppose communism per se and was willing to recognize the realities of the East German regime. It was the Soviet threat to Western Europe that concerned him. However, he was willing to go to the very brink of nuclear war in order to continue his buckpassing strategy—meeting the threat to Western Europe by balancing was no solution for Eisenhower.

MATERIAL THREAT AND THE BERLIN CRISIS. In November 1958, Nikita Khrushchev initiated the second Berlin crisis—the Russians were threatening war unless the Western powers negotiated a settlement normalizing the status of Berlin. In six months the USSR would sign a peace treaty with its East German ally which would not recognize Western rights in Berlin. If the Western allies attempted to maintain their position by force, the Soviets would defend East Germany. If an agreement could not be reached, either the West would have to liquidate its position in Berlin or risk nuclear war to maintain it.

The aggressive behavior of the Soviets underscored the massive power behind Soviet policy. Yet Eisenhower showed a great willingness in private to compromise. He and Dulles were both ultimately willing to live with de facto recognition of East Germany, odious though it might be—like Truman before him, the ideological posture of the East mattered little to Eisenhower. He also displayed some willingness to yield the Western military position in Berlin. He considered the troops behind Soviet lines to have been a mistake from the beginning and was willing to negotiate an end to the American military presence. Indeed, Eisenhower displayed a


great interest in various disarmament proposals that might help facilitate an American exit from Europe more broadly.\footnote{47}

But in practice, Eisenhower made no proposals to end the crisis, because he would not cross three red lines. First, he was unwilling to adopt the British position of finding a graceful means of surrender. If America was unwilling to risk nuclear escalation over Berlin, “we would first lose the city itself and, shortly after, all of Western Europe. If all of Western Europe fell into the hands of the Soviet Union and thus added its great industrial plant to the USSR’s already great industrial might, the United States would indeed be reduced to the character of a garrison state if it was to survive at all.” The stakes in question were geopolitical in nature, with awful consequences for negative liberty if American credibility was doubted.\footnote{48}

Second, for these same reasons, Eisenhower was unwilling to yield on the question of FRG nuclear weapons. The Soviets were clear from early in the crisis that the de-facto nuclear control enjoyed by the FRG was their real target. Though acknowledging, “the importance which he felt the Russians attached to a confirmation of the post-war German borders, and of the real fear they have of a reunited, armed Germany,” the Eisenhower administration was unwilling to budge from its nuclear sharing policy. He told Prime Minister MacMillan “flatly that he would take a strong Germany. He pointed out that the West was afraid of a strong Germany only when there was a weak Soviet Union. Now the central problem was the strength of the Soviet Union.” The balance of power required either a strong Germany or a forward deployed America, and Eisenhower was unwilling to change his buckpassing strategy. High geopolitical threat kept America on the continent, but did not end its attempts to leave.\footnote{49}

Finally, maintaining the buckpassing approach meant considerable deference to the allies. Eisenhower “thought that he could strike a bargain with Khrushchev… but he knew our allies would not accept his acting unilaterally.” In order to build European strength, the Europeans must be permitted a policy of strength, especially the West Germans. Eisenhower was willing to exchange influence over European policy in order to further his third force buckpassing objectives. So Eisenhower refused to push for a settlement that violated Adenauer’s hard line of no East German recognition. “A great deal is to be said in favor of the status-quo [in Berlin]” Dulles argued, but “that is a position we cannot take publically.” Eisenhower perceived a long-term geopolitical threat that required a European pole of power. In order to build that pole, his short-term solution to the Berlin Crisis ultimately amounted to pure deterrence: “a very simple statement to the effect that if the Russians want war over the Berlin issue they can have it.”\footnote{50}

\textit{Kennedy’s Strategy of Balancing}

\footnote{On the American willingness to deal and to accommodate its allies, see Trachtenberg, \textit{A Constructed Peace}, pp. 258-261. On the crisis more generally during the Eisenhower period see Trachtenberg, \textit{History and Strategy}, pp. 185-215., esp. fn. 56 on Eisenhower’s attraction to disarmament and disengagement. Dulles was less willing to tolerate the loss of Berlin than Eisenhower.}

\footnote{NSC Meeting, May 1, 1958, FRUS, 1958-1960, III: 79-98, quote 89.}


John Kennedy assumed the Presidency in 1961 and changed American grand strategy to balancing, a posture it would retain in Europe until the end of the Cold War. The basic mechanism of this strategy was a firm and permanent commitment of American power to Europe. Kennedy took an opposite diplomatic tack from Eisenhower: he sought to prevent the emergence of a third force at every opportunity. Instead, American diplomats sought to dominate Western Europe and manage European politics through the NATO alliance. Doing so provided the surest method of protecting the open system of democracy and free trade that had developed after World War II. European dependence would also allow a ratcheting down of the Cold War, increasing stability through a bipolar management of the conflict. The aim was to balance against the Soviets as well as the West Europeans, buying increased American influence over the European power structure at the cost of a permanent commitment to the continent.

We can infer this strategy from its different policy elements. Kennedy pursued détente with the Soviet Union, tacitly agreeing to ensure West German quiescence in return for an end to threats against West Berlin. American diplomatic and military policy supported this posture. Diplomatically, America sought to control European policy through British entry into European institutions and sought to limit European independence by cracking down on signs of non-NATO military cooperation. Militarily, the new doctrine of “flexible response” stressed the importance of raising the nuclear threshold in the event of war. The resulting focus on ground forces justified the centralization of nuclear weapons in American (and out of German) hands; the permanent commitment of American ground forces grudgingly brought the FRG around to permanent non-nuclear status.

Moreover, these policies served positive liberal ends as well: Kennedy’s diplomatic policy sought to protect democracy and free trade in Western Europe through the peaceful management of European affairs, while flexible response created the military options to bolster liberalism inside and outside of Europe. Together these policies formed a balancing posture: the Soviet Union would be contained, and Western European politics managed, by permanent forward American commitments.

This section establishes the character of Kennedy’s new balancing strategy. Furthermore, I demonstrate that positive liberal worries about democracy and free-trade abroad drove many policy initiatives and informed preferences about cost and control. In short, Kennedy chose to balance in order meet the geopolitical threat of the Soviet Union while also protecting liberal values abroad. I proceed, as usual, by examining policy across three areas: I detail American policy towards the Soviet Union, diplomatic policy towards the European allies, and military doctrine.

RESPONSE TO EUROPEAN THREATS

The first element of the new American balancing strategy is made clear in Kennedy’s approach to the Berlin crisis. The Kennedy administration came to power anticipating a renewal of the Berlin crisis and actively seeking solutions to the problem. Like Eisenhower, Kennedy was primarily concerned about the balance of European power; unlike Eisenhower, he saw the United States as the keeper of that balance. Kennedy sought not deterrence, but détente: a negotiated settlement and corresponding decrease in superpower tensions.

MATERIAL THREAT AND THE BERLIN CRISIS. Unlike Eisenhower, Kennedy was willing to make two major concessions in return for the guarantee of American rights in Berlin: a permanently non-nuclear West Germany, and a permanent American commitment to Europe to ensure FRG compliance. Even before the erection of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, Kennedy
had assured Khrushchev “that the US is opposed to a buildup in West Germany that would constitute a threat to the Soviet Union.” After the wall was up, Kennedy instructed the State Department to prepare to solve the German problem by considering how to negotiate “a limitation or prohibition of nuclear arms in either part of Germany... [and] A non-aggression pact between the NATO and the Warsaw pact countries.”

During those fall 1961 negotiations, Rusk told Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko “If there were a clear understanding of Western rights in and access to Berlin, we could look into broader questions relating to Germany and into security arrangements in order to improve stability in Central Europe.” Later, he intimated that “disengagement is not profitable because it would create a vacuum. However, the US takes disarmament very seriously and is prepared to see what progress could be made in that field. It is useful to see how confrontation in Central Europe could be reduced. It is in the interest of both sides to prevent the spread of national nuclear weapons.” In 1963, concessions were even more explicitly offered on the issues of nuclear sharing and the MLF: “if we could work out an understanding that there would be no more nuclear powers in either the Western camp or in the Socialist camp perhaps the Western powers would not feel the need for an MLF but could work out some other arrangements for European security.”

Those “other arrangements for European security” soon became obvious: just before Kennedy’s death, it became official American policy that “the United States will maintain in Germany ground forces equivalent to six divisions as long as they are required.” Dean Rusk announced this commitment publically in a speech in Frankfurt. In the next few years, the United States would sign and ratify the Limited Test Ban Treaty and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and would force the FRG, under protest, to follow suit. Though never explicitly articulated, the parameters of the Cold War settlement were clear. To preserve the status quo, Kennedy and his lieutenants were willing to make American commitments firm, costly, and permanent. America had adopted a balancing posture.

Also unlike Eisenhower, the Kennedy administration was not above negotiating behind the backs of its allies and presenting them with faits accomplis. Allies were told of American proposals immediately before negotiations, or even after, and were only informed, not consulted. This deepened the already rancorous Franco-American split and convinced West German leaders they were being sold out (which, given Kennedy’s position on FRG nuclear armament, was basically correct). By spring of 1962, Adenauer was denouncing American Berlin policy at public press conferences and engaging in a whispering campaign behind closed doors. But all to little avail. Kennedy was willing to play hardball with the NATO allies. As he had put it earlier, the allies expected him “either to threaten nuclear war to preserve the present status quo in Berlin with the fairly clear indication that if Khrushchev called his bluff he would in fact be asked not to start the war he was threatening” or “to make concessions in order to reach an agreement with the Russians which the French and the Germans could then blame him for.” For Kennedy’s

51 Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting, June 4, 1961; Kennedy-Rusk meeting, September 5, 1961; both in FRUS, 1961-1963, XIV: quotes on 91, 393. In this section, I have turned some of the cable jargon and omissions into standard English.
balancing strategy to work, America needed more influence over the policy of other powers. In order to get a deal, Kennedy seized control of NATO policy towards the Soviets.\textsuperscript{54}

In some respects, Kennedy and Eisenhower had similar threat perceptions. For both, American credibility was at stake in an area of geopolitical importance; as Kennedy put it, “if the US were driven out of West Berlin by unilateral action, and if we were deprived of our contractual rights by East Germany, then no one would believe the US now or in the future. US commitments would be regarded as a mere scrap of paper.” But they had two different responses to the similarly perceived threat. Rather than leave the balance of power to the Europeans, Kennedy wanted to manage it with an American presence: “The US is not asking the USSR to change its position” Kennedy argued to Khrushchev, “but it is simply saying that it should not seek to change our position and thus disturb the balance of power. If this balance should change the situation in West Europe as a whole would change and this would be a most serious blow to the US. Mr. Khrushchev would not accept similar loss and we cannot accept it either.”\textsuperscript{55}

The difference in strategy stemmed in part from Kennedy’s lack of negative liberal impediments. Seeing no need to purchase American security on the cheap, Kennedy was willing to commit America to Europe in perpetuity. And it stemmed in part from Kennedy’s positive liberal agenda abroad. He was very concerned about the advance of liberalism in the third world, and anxious not to lose these areas to communism. Kennedy aptly summarized some motives of his European settlement during the height of the Franco-American crisis in 1963: “it is regrettable that there are such problems with and in Europe because today’s struggle does not lie there, but rather in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. The whole debate about an atomic force in Europe is really useless, because Berlin is secure and Europe as a whole is well protected. What really matters at this point is the rest of the world.”\textsuperscript{56}

**AMERICAN DIPLOMATIC POLICY**

In opposition to the Eisenhower approach, Kennedy’s diplomacy abhorred and feared the creation of a European third force. European independence could only gum up the works of the emerging Soviet-American détente and it might threaten the liberal system that had emerged in the West after the war. Kennedy’s balancing strategy applied to his allies as well as the Soviets: he aimed to turn existing European institutions towards American ends and crushed new attempts at independent European cooperation. Kennedy’s anti-third force balancing strategy, and its positive liberal roots, are evident in American attitudes towards European economic and military integration.

**ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND BRITISH PARTICIPATION.** The Kennedy administration viewed European integration as an economic loser for America and therefore spent little political capital on new supranational initiatives. Existing European institutions like the EEC were valuable \textit{politically} if they could be used to control allied policy and buttress liberal values, but could be dangerous if they produced an independent third force. The Kennedy administration therefore spent the bulk of its diplomatic effort on trying to ensure the “right kind” of European community.


Positive liberal imperatives set the vision of European integration in the new administration: the right kind of community was one that America could manipulate and control. The head of the State Department’s intelligence arm noted that NATO and other European institutions served to inculcate a “sub-balance of power rivalry” which “offers certain advantages to the United States... As one state moves into disagreement with specific American policies...the others tend to move nearer the US.” The strategy did not go unnoticed. After Secretary Rusk castigated the French ambassador Alphand about evils of a third force, the ambassador observed that “the US would sometimes be accused of playing one European power against the other, sometimes of favoring a United Europe in order to be able to dominate it better.”

Thus, in contrast with the Eisenhower administration, Kennedy saw British participation in European institutions as positive: the key to controlling European politics was expanding the EEC to include Britain. In the words of one top official “we hoped that if England went into Europe, it would take a sense of ‘special relationship’ with it, and that we would then have a ‘special relationship’ with Europe.” Dean Acheson put the matter with characteristic bluntness: America must get Britain into the EEC to “act as our lieutenant (the fashionable word is partner).” Though softer language about Britain increasing European “stability” was more often used, the basic idea was clear: Britain would act as a kind of Trojan horse for American interests and would help steer European unity towards American ends.

As a result of British entry and American influence, European unity would remain oriented towards positive liberal values like free trade. The lead Europeanist in the State Department, George Ball, fretted that “both Germany and France have strong potential which would tend over the long run to make the EEC an inward-looking organization” and damned European “moves toward autarky and the third force delusion.” Even at the nadir of American relations with de Gaulle, Charles Bohlen, ambassador to France under Kennedy, still argued that the European “community will and should survive. Therefore we must bend our efforts to seeing that, as far as it lies within our power to influence events, it develops [as] an outward looking community.”

Moreover, a British led EEC would protect democracy in Europe. The Kennedy administration considered French and German democratic and market institutions fundamentally unstable. They were prone to collapse and disintegration if overly stressed by nationalism; free trade and free elections could quickly turn into autarky and autocracy. As Ball put it to Kennedy, “France conceals within her body politic deep divisive forces. Only by diluting those

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59 Ball-Caccia meeting, May 2, 1961; Ball to Bruce, March 14, 1963; Bohlen-State, February 3rd, 1963; all in FRUS, 1961-1963, XIII: 9-12, 527-528, 171-173, quotes on 10, 527-528, 172.
forces within the larger caldron of Europe can Frenchmen achieve lasting political stability.” De Gaulle, he warned was taking France down the wrong path domestically: “each week de Gaulle’s France grows perceptibly more absolutist... France conceals a profound political malaise. De Gaulle will not last forever and the hazards involved in France’s ultimate return to constitutional government [are] an omnipresence that hangs heavily over Europe.” Germany was even worse, in some regards, and America “face(s) dangerous weather in the Federal Republic.” After detailing the nationalist threat to Germany, Ball concluded “I am not overstating the dangers. No one can speak with assurance of the pressures and counter-pressures that may shape the future of a post-Adenauer Germany.” An, actual, vital third force was likely to shed its internal liberalism in an attempt to compete with the Soviets.60

The solution was to dilute these anti-liberal tendencies in institutions that stronger more liberal states dominated. Writing later, at the time of Britain’s second attempt to join the EEC, Ball summarized these liberal motives:

Britain’s application to accede to the Rome Treaty is epic in its implications... For three hundred years Britain has been a stranger to revolution, while France has endured absolutism, two empires, five republics, two constitutional monarchies, and two dictatorships. In the ninety-five years since it became a nation, Germany has averaged one violent change of government every twenty-four years. The Weimar Republic and the Fourth Republic each saw twenty-two governments during their brief life spans, while in contrast, Britain has had only six governments. Intimate British participation... could moderate these latent instabilities and provide a permanent balance, securing democracy in Europe. 61

In brief, Kennedy’s balancing strategy was committed to managing European politics. The right kind of European institutions could be useful in this task by allowing America to divide and conquer its allies, and by combating nationalism and illiberalism with Britain’s liberal influence.

MILITARY INTEGRATION. The wrong kind of European unity was cooperation in the military sphere, outside of American dominated NATO. The Kennedy administration viewed such cooperation as independent European action they needed to prevent if American influence and European liberalism were to be saved. Secretary of State Dean Rusk attacked the third force in a meeting with the French ambassador, hammering that “this touched a very sensitive nerve. The concept that Europe could be the arbiter between the US and the Soviets was basically fallacious.” Rusk threatened further that “If ever Europe decided to play an independent role, issues between the US and USSR would be greatly reduced. In a sense, the US rather than Europe was the ‘third force’ in this combination.” Kennedy was even more blunt, arguing to the French that “we did not fear a third force would be neutralist. We were concerned, instead, about whether there would be a wholly separate, independent force unrelated to American responsibility and interest.”62

In January 1963, American relations with its allies reached a low point: de Gaulle vetoed the entrance of Britain into the EEC and signed a treaty of friendship with West Germany that promised independent military cooperation. Kennedy administration officials were

60 Ball-Kennedy, June 20, 1963, FRUS, 1961-1963, XIII: 204-213, quotes 206-208. I have changed the verb tense in Ball’s first quote to agree with my sentence.
unremittingly hostile to de Gaulle’s proclamation of “a ‘European’ Europe under French leadership capable of functioning as third great power concentration of international political force.” They worried about the General’s appeal throughout NATO, arguing that his themes of European economic, military, and political independence “have considerable political potential in the hands of de Gaulle and perhaps other European leaders who are convinced that nineteenth century nationalism is the motor force of international affairs. Effective manipulation of these nationalistic forces could result in serious erosion of American position.” A third force would reduce American control of the diplomatic situation in Europe, and trigger the anti-democratic and nationalistic forces Americans were trying to eliminate. In short, as one official put it, a united Europe “would present us with a more formidable challenge than the present divided Europe.”

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

Kennedy’s balancing strategy could not permit a loss of so much influence over European politics. The American response was a threat to march American troops out of Europe if the Germans ratified the Franco-German treaty without reservations. Kennedy recognized that “the threat of withdrawing our troops was the only sanction we had” and the source “of our bargaining power.” Kennedy was willing to use the NATO alliance as an instrument of American hegemony, using the American commitment as leverage over its partners. American officials high and low made this point to the FRG, with a range of tones and diplomatic language, but the point was best put by Dean Acheson: “the Germans either thought the Americans were stupid or…the Germans were admitting that they were duplicitous.” They could have French cooperation or American protection, but not both.

American officials also tampered with FRG domestic politics in order to ensure a favorable reception to American threats. The Kennedy administration played up splits in Adenauer’s Christian Democratic Union party, “discreetly encourag[ing] [Adenauer rival] Erhard to insist that the Germans would ratify the treaty with France only with two reservations”: British membership in the EEC and the political supremacy of NATO. By early February Erhard was attacking Adenauer’s policy publically and there was a civil war in the ruling coalition. The West Germans did ultimately ratify the treaty, but with a long prologue of reservations stressing their fealty to NATO and the United States. It was the beginning of a process that would lead to the ousting of Adenauer, the great savior of post-war Germany, essentially at the bidding of the American government. The United States also advised the SPD rivals of the CDU on their foreign policy position, part of their ongoing reorientation away from an anti-NATO nationalism.

and towards détente. In order to save the supremacy of NATO as a hegemonic instrument, American policy was instrumental in reorienting the domestic politics of its German ally.66

AMERICAN MILITARY POLICY

Kennedy’s balancing strategy was reflected in the military doctrine of flexible response, though the actual operational changes of this doctrine have sometimes been overstated. The essence of flexible response was to reduce the importance of nuclear weapons and increase the relevance of conventional capabilities. The contribution of flexible response to the American balancing strategy can be seen in two areas: the centralization of control over nuclear weapons and investment in ground force capabilities.67

CENTRALIZING NUCLEAR WEAPONS. The reduced emphasis on nuclear weapons facilitated greater control over the management of European politics: flexible response provided a rationale for ending the Eisenhower nuclear sharing schemes and the political independence that came with them. The insistence on fighting a conventional war for as long as possible was obviously attractive to European publics and not one that European governments could disavow publically. But nuclear weapons would need to be tightly controlled in order to keep a war conventional and employed very selectively in order to avoid a massive exchange. Centralizing the control of nuclear weapons in the hands of the American government ensured there would be no third force.68

The Kennedy administration came to office intent on making itself the nuclear master of Europe. The famous “Acheson report” on NATO nuclear policy bluntly stated that “use of nuclear weapons by the forces of other powers in Europe should be subject to U.S. veto and control.” These concerns were ultimately and begrudgingly relaxed for Britain, and eventually even for France. But Germany had to be prevented from developing an independent nuclear capability. In the words of McGeorge Bundy, it was a “fixed point” of American policy “that Germany should not have independent control of nuclear weapons.”69

These desires led to a series of important policy decisions that placed control of nuclear weapons in American hands. Permissive action links, which secured nuclear weapons against unauthorized use, were placed on all the American nuclear weapons in Europe. Special emphasis was placed on establishing control over the many tactical nuclear weapons that had proliferated under Eisenhower’s de facto sharing policy. SACEUR, who under MC-48 had amounted to an independent political actor representing European interests, had his wings clipped. Pre-delegation authority to SACEUR was curtailed, the European commander became

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68 The counter-force/no cities nuclear posture associated with flexible response, and used to justify American nuclear control, was the part of the doctrine most clearly associated with propaganda rather than policy. On the use of these ideas to secure American nuclear weapons see Trachtenberg, A Constructed Peace, pp. 315-321.

just another American General rather than a political figure, and General Norstad was removed from the position when he objected to the changes. 70

Moreover, the plans to make Europe an independent strategic entity were killed. Norstad’s plan for a NATO land based missile force that could make NATO a “fourth nuclear power” was rejected on the grounds that European nations could easily seize control of the weapons. And the Kennedy administration changed the MLF from a force designed to empower European independence to one with an American veto. The proposal lived on for years but it was a “debating trick” and a “fraud;” “not a real force, but a façade” aimed at promoting the illusion of European nuclear participation amidst the reality of American control over the weapons, and with it the European political environment. 71

Indeed, these changes all promoted American control over European policy. Kennedy worried that since the allies were “no longer dependent on the U.S. for economic assistance, the European states are less subject to our influence. If the French and other European powers acquire a nuclear capability they would be in a position to be entirely independent and we might be on the outside looking in.” But if America was going to defend Europe, it was going to call the military and political shots: Kennedy stressed “our inability to accept the notion that we should stay out of Europe’s affairs while remaining ready to defend her if war should come… We cannot and will not stand apart from these [policy] questions as long as our strength and will are committed to the defense of Europe against any Soviet attack.” 72

All the disputes surrounding nuclear weapons during the period were really just reflections of an unacceptable push for a politically independent third force. As Kennedy remarked about his recalcitrant allies, “if Europe were ever to be organized so as to leave us outside, from the point of view of these great issues of policy and defense, it would become most difficult for us to sustain our present guarantee against Soviet aggression. We shall not hesitate to make this point to the Germans if they show signs of accepting any idea of a Bonn-Paris axis. General de Gaulle really cannot have both our military presence and our diplomatic absence.” Seizing control of nuclear weapons cut off this possibility. Moreover, if America was going to permanently defend Europe, then she alone would decide whether to escalate to nuclear war. Bundy summed up the policy well: “We must not be pushed around by British, or French, or German propaganda, and we must be careful to frame our policies in terms of American interests and American leadership. We are bound to pay the price of leadership—we may as well have some of its advantages.” 73

CONVENTIONAL FOCUS. Furthermore, the positive liberal focus on ground forces provided more control on the battlefield. Such flexibility was useful for managing a military situation in Europe now envisioned lasting far into the future. The logic of a conventional ground force doctrine was undeniably attractive to the administration. “We attach the greatest importance to ‘raising the threshold’ beyond which the President might have to decide to initiate the use of nuclear weapons,” Rusk wrote, and it was essential to ensure that “nuclear capabilities as may be required to deter more massive Soviet aggression will not be automatically used in the

70 This follows the account in Ibid., Ch. 8. On changes to SACEUR’s authority see esp. pp. 298, 300-302, 309.
73 Ibid., 704; Bundy outline for Kennedy’s talk to NSC, January 17, 1962, DDRS 1991/3578.
event [conventional] forces become engaged against forces not themselves using nuclear weapons.”

With the United States in Europe deep into the future, it was also important to plan for multiple contingencies. The need for control over many potential situations was outlined from early in the administration:

It is essential that we adopt an insurance philosophy and hedge against uncertainty by buying alternative future options for our military capabilities. We must procure ‘lead time’ reduction, making decisions now to buy particular kinds of productive capability that we may never use. We must start development programs in the full realization that, because of changed and unforeseen circumstances, some may not be needed by the time they are completed. We must try to design our posture so that its effectiveness will not be seriously degraded by changes in objectives or circumstances.

In the environment of a long-term commitment, past plans for a massive conventional attack had to give way to preparing for the many less likely ways a war could proceed. It was “For this reason also we must avoid exposed strategic systems that depend for their survival on quick decisions that might have to be made in ambiguous circumstances.” The forward management of European affairs implied a need for flexibility and a range of military options.

This need for greater manipulation of the European battlefield led to a series of small but substantial improvements to American ground forces. These included modernization of major fighting vehicles, a reorganized division structure, increases in airlift and tactical air support, and improved logistics and supply within Europe. Combined with new analysis in the McNamara pentagon, these improvements created the belief that NATO could fight a conventional war without nuclear escalation for much longer than previously anticipated—perhaps for between thirty and ninety days, depending on the analysis. McNamara wrote that NATO conventional forces “are strong enough to keep [nuclear escalation] from being forced on us early. In any event, this decision should not be regarded as automatic.” NATO could not fight indefinitely under flexible response, but “The conditions for a sustained non-nuclear defense of Europe are now in sight,” a very different situation from the Eisenhower years.

Increased ground force capabilities were also valued for their political potential. Ground forces also promised to help spread and defend liberal values by reinforcing or building liberal regimes. Kennedy’s strong interest in counter-insurgency capabilities is well known—he sought to create a nation-building capacity that could help build democracy and liberal institutions in the third world. This kind of influence would enable America to expand the geography of the Cold War in defense of its values outside of Europe. As Kennedy grimly put it in advocating such measures, “The record of the Romans made clear that their success was dependent on their will and ability to fight successfully at the edges of their empire. It was not so clear that we were yet in a position to do the same.”

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74 Rusk to McNamara, February 4, 1961, FRUS, VIII: 24-27, quotes on 26 and 27.
75 McNamara to Kennedy, February 20, 1961, FRUS, VIII: 35-48, quotes on 37 and 39.
76 McNamara to Johnson, December 19, 1963, FRUS, 1961-1963, VIII: 565-587 details the American defense plans shortly after Kennedy’s death. Quotes on 586. On ground force and analysis improvements see Duffield, Power Rules, Ch. 5; Enthoven and Smith, How Much is Enough?, Ch. 4.
Counter-Arguments

Against the argument made in the two Cold War chapters, a pair of important alternative explanations might be advanced. First, it could be argued that balance of power alone is sufficient to explain changes in American grand strategy from 1945-1963. Specifically, rising Soviet capabilities explain early increases in American commitment, while the changing nuclear balance and the implications of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) explain the transition from buckpassing to balancing. Second, one might contend that economic explanations of some kind have purchase in the Cold War period. While general sectoral theories have avoided the Cold War period, more nuanced case studies have argued that American economic interests and ideas were important to understanding strategic change. In particular, one might contend that the sectoral make-up of the body politic permitted American commitments in the early Cold War, or that the rise of Keynesian economic doctrines is sufficient to explain the Cold War strategic change.

The Changing Military Balance. It is possible to argue that the military balance of power alone drove the character of American commitments in the early Cold War; versions of this argument have been made by historians and political scientists. In the early Cold War period, for instance, John Mearsheimer has argued that “no great power or combination of great powers existed in Europe” powerful enough to “prevent the Soviet army from over-running those regions, and therefore the United States had no choice but to check Soviet expansion.” For similar theoretical reasons, Dale Copeland asserts that “As early as mid-1945, American concern for the long-term rise of the Soviet state drove U.S. leaders to implement a vigorous and destabilizing containment strategy.”

Variation in the intensity of American commitments was driven by changes in the military balance, particularly the breaking of the American nuclear monopoly in August, 1949. As Marc Trachtenberg observes, “The strategy of building up American and allied power, especially the dramatic shift in late 1950 on the German question—that is, the opting for the rearmament of West Germany—clearly has to be understood in this context.” It was the massive build up of American nuclear power brought on by these decisions that laid the foundations for Eisenhower’s defense policy of nuclear pre-emption and the New Look. If war looked likely to come, “it might be dangerous to try too hard to avoid a showdown. Given the way the military balance was bound to shift, the United States would be well-advised to make its stand sooner rather than later.” American military doctrine matched its strategic capabilities and underwrote its political program.

It was the coming of nuclear parity, so the argument might continue, that caused the change in American grand strategy. Growing Soviet weapons production and delivery capability gradually eroded the American nuclear advantage. Once it became clear that America would inevitably suffer unacceptable nuclear retaliation in any war, Eisenhower’s plan for preemptive nuclear escalation became untenable. Moreover, the Berlin crisis and the Cuban missile crisis illustrated that both sides understood the realities of a MAD world—the need for caution, and the illogic of choosing to fight a nuclear war. Kennedy therefore changed to a conventional military

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79 Trachtenberg, History and Strategy, pp. 148, 147.
strategy more suited to strategic stalemate and which reduced the chances of accidental war. The resulting permanent commitment was thus not actually costly, because it was clear to the Kennedy administration that the Soviets were sufficiently chastened by MAD that they would never start a war on purpose. Balancing was just an admission of the nuclear age’s undeniable logic.\footnote{These kinds of arguments are common in, for example, the discussion of the Cuban missile crisis. See the examples reviewed in Marc Trachtenberg, “The Influence of Nuclear Weapons in the Cuban Missile Crisis,” \textit{International Security} 10, no. 1 (Summer 1985): 137-163.}

These kinds of arguments have real merit, consistent with the impact of the international system posited by TLFP. I have argued in Chapter Six that the threat of Soviet hegemony had a tremendous impact on American threat perception and quickly caused decision-makers to recognize the need for some kind of commitment to shape the balance of power. Furthermore, growing Soviet capabilities did indeed spur more intense commitments and served as an integrating force on American grand strategy, forcing policy-makers to come to terms with the inadequacy of several buckpassing schemes.

However, the rapid rise of Russian strength did not trigger a full commitment to Europe. Mearsheimer’s contention that “the United States had no buckpassing option, and thus it had to do the heavy lifting itself” is simply incorrect. The international system admitted, and American decision-makers perceived, two choices for containing the USSR: concentrated European power or forward deployed American power. The negative liberal administrations of the early Cold War spent most of their effort on behalf of the former option.\footnote{Mearsheimer, \textit{The Tragedy of Great Power Politics}, p. 323.}

The striking character of American grand strategy during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations is how early power realities were perceived compared to how later policy-responses developed. Admiral Leahy had argued as early as 1944 that the signal feature of world politics was “the recent phenomenal development of heretofore latent Russian military and economic strength—a development which seems certain to prove epochal in its bearing on future politico-military international relationships, and which has yet to reach the full scope attainable with Russian resources.” The OSS warned Truman in April 1945 that “Russia will emerge from the present conflict as by far the strongest nation in Europe or Asia—strong enough, if the United States should stand aside, to dominate Europe.”\footnote{Copeland, \textit{The Origins of Major War}, pp. 150-151.}

And yet, American diplomats spent the better part of two years trying to make an amicable settlement with the Soviets that would forestall American commitments, first under Byrnes until the reparations stop, and then again under Marshall’s initial policy before the ERP. When it finally became clear that the Soviets would not cooperate and that Western Europe would have to be rebuilt, considerations of Russian power meant American commitments increased. But they were focused on the creation of a third force, not the commitment of American power.

Similarly, the breaking of the American nuclear monopoly in 1949 yielded no policy dividends for a year. Truman, Acheson, and others remained completely opposed to German rearmament before the autumn of 1950, the most obvious step towards addressing Western conventional inferiority in light of new Soviet capabilities. American rearmament efforts, in the form of NSC-68, were put on ice before Korea, and American policy continued to focus on European integration in the form of the ECSC. Even after American diplomats reluctantly conceded that an American commitment to Europe would have to be made in order to facilitate...
German rearmament, they aimed at only temporary moves. American policy was based on the hope of the EDC, which could defend Europe after an American departure. This is not that growing Soviet strength had no effect; it certainly did. It is only to say that American the changing military balance was not fully determinative of American strategy, and in fact, was inhibited by ideological obstacles directing American strategy towards buckpassing.

The argument from the military balance is also flawed in its attempts to explain the transition from buckpassing to balancing. For one thing, both Eisenhower and Kennedy perceived a decisive American nuclear advantage until at least 1963. Kennedy in particular viewed this advantage as a wasting asset that justified a hard line during the Berlin crisis. So both Presidents viewed a nuclear first strike as tenable during their administrations, and neither felt compelled by the shadow of parity to change their strategy. 83

More importantly, both administrations spent considerable effort thinking about the coming of parity, but arrived at different solutions on the same facts. Of projected Soviet estimates, Eisenhower complained in 1958 that he “was sick to death of timetables; he had had experience with them for years, and they never proved anything useful.” In light of approaching nuclear parity, Dulles and others in the administration pressed for a more conventional defense. But Eisenhower led his own faction that favored retreating into a pure deterrence strategy, as he “did not believe that limited war was possible in Europe and thought that the NATO [conventional] shield could be symbolic.” The problem of nuclear plenty was deeply debated in the Eisenhower administration, but it did not change American military policy or its strategic posture. 84

The same information did help push the Kennedy administration towards flexible response. But surprisingly, Kennedy actually held precisely the views that would have made Eisenhower’s strategy viable: the belief that small numbers of nuclear weapons had big political effects. As shown above, Kennedy had deep fears that French or German nuclear weapons would provide them with political independence and a credible defense without American aid. He had the same view about China, arguing that “we will have a difficult time protecting the free areas of Asia if the Chinese get nuclear weapons,” presumably because America would be deterred from nuclear use and conventionally deterred by local inferiority. He also told the British that a small force of air delivered ballistic missiles “should be capable of deterring Mr. Khrushchev. He pointed out that twenty missiles in Cuba had had a deterrent effect on us.” Indeed, despite believing in the political possibilities of deterrence, Kennedy opted for more control and a balancing strategy 85

In short, the perception of the nuclear balance did not vary enough to cause the grand strategic change. Both administrations knew they possessed a first strike capability in the present, both feared about its erosion in the future, and both believed in the possibility of a deterrence strategy for the Europeans. But their fundamentally different kinds of liberal preferences led to two different reactions to the same beliefs: Eisenhower embraced deterrence and the devolution of nuclear capabilities to the Europeans, while Kennedy rejected them.

84 NSC meeting, January 6, 1958; Dulles-Anderson-McElroy meeting, October 24, 1959; in FRUS, 1958-1960, III and VII (1): 4-9, and 488-494 respectively, quotes on 7, 489. For the debate in the Eisenhower administration, see Ibid., pp. 183-188.
ECONOMIC EXPLANATIONS. Sectoral economic theories predicting partisan changes in grand strategy have avoided examining American grand strategy during the Cold War, and with good reason. However one codes American strategy during the period, it is quite clear that similar grand strategies were pursued across party lines. In this study, the obvious example is similar approaches of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. Nonetheless, other theories have emphasized the remarkable bipartisan coalition that came to support the historic departure of American Cold War commitments. Many—sometimes mutually contradictory—theories have contended this coalition was founded on economic roots. Other economic explanations have emphasized variation in acceptance of Keynesian economic doctrines as the critical element in American willingness to take on more foreign commitments. I address both possibilities below.

Many different theorists have stressed the “liberal internationalist” or “Cold War consensus” that came to dominate American politics in the late 1940s and 1950s. Peter Trubowitz and Charles Kupchan stress that a North-South alliance between outward oriented economic interests came to dominate the Democratic Party, and to a lesser extent, the Republican Party. As they put it, the “Northeast’s rising position in the world economy was increasing the region’s support for economic openness and giving it a direct interest in the prosperity and stability of Europe, its main export market,” while “The South’s export of raw materials was still the mainstay of its economy. Southern dependence on international stability and open markets readily translated into support for multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and the Bretton-Woods system, which promised to check aggression and prevent the spread of economic nationalism.” This bipartisan support was necessary to sustain America’s long-term strategy of power projection and international cooperation.86

Jack Snyder argues that American Cold War grand strategy was crucially supported by foreign policy logrolling caused by “the temporary stalemate between internationalist and nationalist economic interests in American society, and because the internationalist/nationalist cleavage cut across party lines.” The problem was that “On most issues the votes of moderate Republicans were needed to offset defections by significant numbers of southern Democratic nationalists.” In order “To maintain harmony within the Republican Party,” the economically outward oriented interests who dominated the Democratic Party had to make concessions to internationalist Republicans who “needed to win credit as people who could deliver on issues the [economically inward oriented] nationalists cared about.”87

Various hypotheses on the nature of these concessions have been offered. Snyder focuses on the addition of more “Asia-first” elements to American global strategy to appease a small group of China-lobby Republicans, whose hard-line anti-communist rhetoric was a politically useful tool for economically inward oriented Republicans more broadly. Benjamin Fordham argues that Truman tacitly conceded small business Republicans a domestic anti-communist campaign rooted in suppressing labor-unions. But under any hypothesis, American commitments could not have been increased during the early Cold War without bipartisan political support.88

88 Ibid., Ch. 7; Benjamin O. Fordham, Building the Cold War Consensus: The Political Economy of U.S. National Security Policy, 1949-51 (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998), Ch. 1. Thomas Christensen makes a similar argument, though he emphasizes the role of public opinion on Congress rather than cartels of economic
The biggest examples are the approval of the ERP and the Korean War build-up. The gap between the strident ideological tone of the Truman doctrine speech and its more limited objectives is often cited as they key to mobilizing Congressional support for the American commitment to Europe, particularly the Marshall plan. And in Gaddis’ words, the anti-communist rationale of the Korean war “was so serendipitous” for the implementation of NSC-68 “that some students of the subject have implied complicity on the part of American officials… in bringing it about.” Fordham basically alleges that Dean Acheson and other outward oriented hawks worked to bring America into the war exactly so as to ensure political cover for the European build-up. The purpose of the build-up was to solve the “dollar gap” problem in Europe, providing a ready source of foreign exchange for Europeans so as to buttress the international economic order and help Europeans buy American goods.\(^8^9\)

For certain, Congress had to provide funds for American foreign policy, and therefore each Cold War administration had to expend effort to obtain its approval of critical programs. No doubt, strong mobilizing rhetoric was used to rally the public and to form a bipartisan consensus in the legislature. But there is very little in the way of actual evidence that any administration was denied important goals it wanted, or ratcheted back objectives it would have otherwise sought, because of Congressional or public resistance. The first Truman administration thought the temporary and economic character of the ERP was a feature, not a bug. Truman made heroic efforts to keep down defense spending prior to Korea, even in the face of opposition from the military and administration hawks. Policy under Marshall was to focus on economic recovery and European integration, not American commitments.

Moreover, there is only modest evidence that Truman intended to raise defense budgets before Korea. Fordham emphasizes that Truman brought John Foster Dulles and Averill Harriman on board to help with the political management of NSC-68’s implementation, and shows how negative liberal leaning elements in the administration had been cleverly marginalized by Acheson and Nitze. However, he also concedes that Truman was publically proclaiming further Defense budget cuts in the months prior to Korea and thought the budget for NSC-68 “was definitely not as large as some people seem to think.” He had further put the document on lock-down and assigned it to die a slow death in an inter-agency committee dominated by fiscal hawks. On the most generous interpretation possible, Truman might have been prepared to fight a political battle for moderate increases in defense spending, which would have required bipartisan cover. Such a limited increase could not have solved the dollar gap, or served the economic interests alleged to be implicated in concerns about foreign exchange. More likely, is that NSC-68 had no chance of becoming government policy before Korea.\(^9^0\)

More damningly for economic explanations, American buckpassing policies actually hurt the economic interests they are alleged to have served. The heart of American strategy was the economic unification of Europe, which was founded on explicit discrimination against American goods. This was the core of a regional rather than a multilateral trading strategy: Europe’s markets would have low internal barriers to trade, much like trade between the American states, but would have a high external tariff protecting them from foreign competition and creating space for state industrial policy. As Federico Romero concisely summarizes: “the supranational

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\(^8^9\) Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, p. 107; Fordham, Building the Cold War Consensus, Chs. 3, 5; Snyder, Myths of Empire, pp. 279-296; Christensen, Useful Adversaries, pp. 49-58.

\(^9^0\) Fordham, Building the Cold War Consensus, p. 59.
institutions...embraced only a limited number of core countries; [their] sectoral policies reinforced, rather than transcended, national industrial plans; and the community could well have developed into an updated version of a cartel... the liberalization of trade and payments within the OEEC... entailed deep and durable discrimination against dollar imports... [and] an indefinite postponement of the return to multilateralism and currency convertibility.

American statesmen deliberately opted for European unification over a multilateral free-trading strategy, which ought to have been the priority of a sectorally driven outward coalition. Instead, America diplomatically supported the ECSC and then loaned it $100 million in start up capital—in other words, financing American export competitors. During the 1950s, the State Department repeatedly defeated the more economically focused Treasury and Commerce departments on matters of economic strategy. “In their [Treasury] view,” Romero argues, “the American national interest required a prompt end to discrimination against the dollar...[and] a more open system of trade and payments,” and so supported Britain’s return to Sterling convertibility and GATT liberalization. But these economic benefits were forgone. State “recognized that [strategic gains of regionalism] were well worth both the sacrifice of American exports and the temporary shelving of plans for multilateralism and currency convertibility.”

America thus supported the discriminatory European Payments Union and weighed in against premature Sterling convertibility. The State Department consistently won battles against Commerce in its desire to support the ECSC. And in supporting the EEC, as shown above, the State Department deliberately undercut the more liberal British alternative of a free-trade area. It also shelved GATT negotiations and debate on liberalization until the EEC treaty could be shepherded through protectionist European parliaments. Moreover, the discrimination against American money and goods was coupled with a greater opening of the American market to European manufactures under Eisenhower. In short, American statesmen crafted a strategy that negatively impacted both American exports and import competitors. Both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations disadvantaged their respective coalitions, and left economically preferable alternatives on the table. They did so because European integration “was vital to the security of the United States” and commercial issues “necessarily subordinate.”

Another possible explanation would emphasize the rise of Keynesian economic doctrines during the Kennedy administration compared with their absence under Eisenhower. Such theories encouraged a belief in simultaneous consumption and possession of the macroeconomic cake. Eisenhower, who took the standard orthodox view of balanced budgets, feared what permanent defense commitments abroad and their corresponding high defense budgets would do to the American economy. But the Kennedy administration adopted the Keynesian view that such prolonged government spending would stimulate demand and strengthen the economy. The resulting budget deficits were inconsequential, and could even be helpful during an economic downturn. Thus, Kennedy and the Keynesians who came after him saw no economic tension in a balancing strategy, while Eisenhower’s buckpassing was designed to eliminate just this tension.

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92 Ibid., pp. 107, 105.
93 Quotes from State Department in Ibid., pp. 106, 111. See also pp. 114, 107-109.
94 This argument is often associated with John Gaddis’ distinction between symmetrical and asymmetrical theories of containment. See, for example, Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, pp. 355-357.
This argument is true as far as it goes: economic doctrines did have an important influence on the grand strategies of both Kennedy and Eisenhower. However, there is good reason to believe that politicians adopt Keynesian views for normative reasons, rather than on the merits. That is, economic views are highly correlated with concepts of liberty, which is why they are included among TLFP’s indicators for measuring varieties of liberalism.95

Furthermore, Keynesian economics cannot explain the positive agenda abroad under Kennedy. While expansionist economic doctrines might establish a permissive condition for commitment abroad, they do not explain the American focus on managing European politics and protecting free trade and democracy in Europe. An unalloyed Keynesianism might allow a drift towards higher defense budgets and more ground forces. But the centralization of nuclear control, the promotion of the British Trojan horse in the EEC, and the virulently anti-third force views of the Kennedy administration have different roots—in positive liberty’s preferences for political control and liberal values abroad.

Other examples of the link between Keynesianism and foreign policy expansion should lead us to be wary of its causal power. It has often been speculated that the Truman administration’s conversion to Keynesian doctrines under Leon Keyserling was a key facilitator of NSC-68 and subsequent American commitments. Keyserling had supposedly “persuaded Truman to endorse the eventual feasibility of a $300 billion gross national product” through economic management designed to “expand the pie, not argue over how to divide it.” But as we have seen, Keyserling had not convinced Truman prior to Korea that defense ceilings could be raised or that unbalanced budgets should be accepted in principle. Indeed, most historians now agree that “there is no evidence that Truman had abandoned his fundamental view that protracted deficits were not only dangerous, but positively immoral.” As Michael Hogan puts it, “The Keynesian revolution did not disturb so much as a hair on his neatly combed head” and he turned to the new economics out of “expediency” rather than “conviction.” Economic doctrines have tended to be adopted in order to facilitate strategic decisions, not the other way around.96

Conclusion

The decade between Eisenhower’s assumption of the Presidency in 1953 and Kennedy’s assassination in 1963 saw the climax of the Cold War. Given the potentially violent conclusion to the confrontation, the thirty-year length of the dénouement that followed almost seems reasonable. A period that began in tension and escalated towards war over high geopolitical stakes, concluded in a status-quo peace that made Europe something of a strategic backwater. The world had changed, and so had America.

Measurements of potential power and observations of American diplomacy alike reveal a similarity between the Eisenhower and Kennedy periods. Both administrations feared Soviet power; both administrations worried over American credibility. These common fears are obvious in a number of common policies. Each administration took a similar line on the Berlin crisis: America was willing to compromise on many substantive issues, but was unwilling to let


American credibility or West European industry remain threatened. Both administrations understood that Europe required a (perhaps temporary) defense from Soviet aggression, and designed military policies to bring it about. And while the administrations differed on European integration, their diplomacy with the Western allies was driven by an attempt to generate a desired European response to Soviet pressure. In short, the geopolitical threat of Soviet power forced both administrations to commit American power to Europe’s defense in an attempt to contain the Soviet Union.

However, Eisenhower and Kennedy differed on how to do so. The Eisenhower administration preferred a buckpassing strategy. Like their predecessors in the Truman administration, Eisenhower and his lieutenants viewed the American commitment to Europe as temporary, and sought to build an independent power complex in Western Europe that could bear the primary burden of balancing against the Soviets. To this end, Eisenhower sought to build the foundations of power in Europe on a supranational basis: economically in the EEC; militarily in the EDC, the NATO nuclear stockpile, and MLF; and politically in a vision of an integrated and independent Europe that he would not compromise with either the British or the Soviets.

The Kennedy administration chose a balancing strategy: it made the American forward commitment permanent, in order to better manage European politics. Kennedy ceased the strong support for European integration displayed under Eisenhower, and instead tried to use European institutions to divide and conquer the allies. This made Kennedy far more receptive to British participation in Europe, viewing Britain as a Trojan horse who would represent American interests, and far more willing to make the compromises with the Russians that could bring détente in Europe. Indeed, America was eager to guarantee West Germany’s non-nuclear status to the Soviets, because a major motivation for the new American strategy was to ensure that there would be no independent European foreign policy. To this end, Kennedy sought to centralize control of nuclear weapons through a new military doctrine, and crush Franco-German attempts to cooperate outside the NATO alliance.

These differences in grand strategy were rooted in fundamental differences in philosophy. Eisenhower’s pre-presidential statements clearly reveal a man steeped in the negative liberal tradition that long dominated American history: focused on individual rights, concerned about excessive political centralization, fiscally conservative, and opposed to government intervention in the economy. And indeed, fears about the impact of foreign policy on American liberties animated the Eisenhower buckpassing strategy. The Eisenhower administration was worried about the costs of a long-term diplomatic commitment to Europe, and was particularly concerned that defense policy might damage the free-enterprise economy, fleece the taxpayer, and require conscription. The threat of a regimented garrison state that trampled individual liberties in the name of collective security was omnipresent. These rationales led to a military strategy that emphasized standoff forces, relying on quick escalation with comparatively cheap nuclear weapons, and envisioning a transition of conventional responsibilities to the Europeans.

Kennedy had a much different political worldview: he accepted the positive liberal assumptions of the New Deal. Kennedy was concerned about the decadence of individualism and the necessity of economic security, in favor of the centralization of government power, held expansionary fiscal views, and supported government management of the economy. He therefore had few of Eisenhower’s concerns about the costs of foreign policy, seeing no need to secure Western Europe on the cheap. He did, however, display positive liberal concerns about democracy and free-trade abroad. One of the motivating fears driving the Kennedy approach on
European integration was the possibility that without an American and British presence, European initiatives would only lead to the nationalism that had twice torn the continent apart. Europe had to be delicately managed in order to protect it from itself: a third-force would threaten democracy and bring-about autarchy. A focus on ground forces buttressed this bid for diplomatic hegemony. The permanent commitment of troops in Germany made NATO’s hegemonic role palatable to the Germans, and promised capabilities to promote liberty in the third world.
Chapter Eight

Conclusion: American Grand Strategy, Past and Future

I have attempted three tasks in executing this study. First, I have sought to conceptualize grand strategy as an object of inquiry, understanding it as a state’s vision for the international configuration of power and its mechanism for realizing these preferences. Second, I have integrated propositions deduced from ideological and power political paradigms into a new theory of American grand strategy, which I term a Theory of Liberal Foreign Policy (TLFP). Third, I have tested this theory on the puzzling variation in American grand strategy towards the European great powers from 1914-1963, which has previously resisted a unitary interpretation. In so doing, I divided the entire period into five cases and compared TLFP to the strongest available competitors in each era. Each empirical chapter has used congruence testing and process-tracing to assess TLFP’s validity.

This chapter has four parts. First, I summarize the argument of the study. Second, I use the comparative method to highlight TLFP as the motor of major changes in American grand strategy over time. Though no comparison can be perfectly controlled, the observation of a single country’s behavior in a single empirical domain plausibly holds a series of perturbing factors constant. I compare the five cases in a manner designed to isolate change on one of TLFP’s variables and illustrate the results this variation brought about; this also serves to summarize much of the congruence and process-tracing evidence from the case studies. Third, I assess the power of alternate explanations. Finally, I draw lessons from the study for the future of American foreign policy.

The Argument

The argument I offer this study can be summarized in several short pieces. I begin by explaining my synthetic approach to theory building, rooted in the empirical and theoretical puzzles of American foreign policy and international relations theory. Next, I review the concept of grand strategy and how it can vary. I then proceed to outline the two concepts of liberty within the liberal tradition, my measurement scheme for charting their variation, and the effect these norms have on preferences for American foreign policy. Subsequently, I present several insights from balance of power theory that also influence American strategic choice. I conclude the argument by integrating the liberal and realist propositions into TLFP and detailing the theory’s outcome and process predictions.

MOTIVATION AND APPROACH. My approach to theory development has been synthetic rather than competitive. I take for granted that realist and ideological theories have much to tell us about world politics in general and American foreign policy in particular. However, variation in American grand strategy over long periods of time is anomalous for existing theories, and America is an outlier case with extreme values on both geopolitical and ideological variables. Rather than stage a contrived battle between only partially armed theories destined to end in a bloody draw, it seemed more fruitful to take advantage of the peculiar aspects of the American case to refine and integrate work from existing paradigms into a single model.

Not only does this approach create a powerful lens for studying a puzzling case, it establishes a theoretical baseline from which further research can proceed in cases where ideological and power political variables take on a range of values. Moreover, it advances some
long-standing intra-paradigmatic debates by examining them within the particularly vivid context of extreme values. Realists have often disagreed on how much power states seek and the strategies they will use to pursue it. Theorists of liberal ideology have identified a consensus liberal view of international politics, but also identify two ways in which it has been applied by liberal statesmen. TLFP produces a novel answer as to what drives variation in the application of liberal strategies, while also integrating realist insights. Finally, the American case is intrinsically interesting from a policy perspective. As the leading state in the international system, American grand strategy going forward is likely to greatly affect the future of world politics, and it is well worth understanding the theoretical underpinnings of its posture.

I have argued that the primary requirement for a theory of American foreign policy is its ability to explain when the United States will make costly commitments abroad and when it will retrench. That is, any useful theory will need a motor that explains variation, specifying a “propulsive force” and a “retractive force” that drive variation in the American posture. Because existing theories either do not specify these forces or face empirical anomalies, a new theory is required to adequately capture the changes in American behavior.

IV: GRAND STRATEGY. I claim that such changes are best understood in terms of grand strategy: a state’s plan for managing the balance of power. This is not an explicit plan or any individual policy, but rather a pattern that emerges from the sum of all high-level policies and describes a state’s over all posture in world politics. Grand strategies are comprised of a set of preferences for acceptable and unacceptable international power constellations, as well as a mechanism for how these preferences will be obtained. In general, grand strategies feature a trade off between cost and control: postures which provide more influence over the balance of power tend to be more costly, and vice-versa.

I thus arrange grand strategies on a continuum of increasing degree of power management and delineate distinct grand strategies on the continuum by their mechanism. Four ideal type grand strategies can be identified, running from lesser to more intense involvement in managing international power configurations: non-entanglement, buckpassing, balancing, and preponderance. These strategies can be measured by inferring their existence from elements common to all grand strategies: threat perception and response; diplomatic policy; and military policy. By examining how these elements interact, we can infer a state’s preferred power configurations and the strategic mechanism by which they will be achieved. Explicit statements on these issues by the statesmen who executed the policies are also useful evidence for coding grand strategy.

IV: CONCEPTS OF LIBERTY. The core innovation of TLFP has been to root changes in American grand strategy to changes in the content of the liberal tradition. I contend that there has always been an important ambiguity at the heart of liberal thought: whether freedom is to be understood as a negative concept prohibiting interference or constraint, or as a positive ability to act or exercise abilities on behalf of valued goals. In domestic politics, negative liberty is associated with opposition to coercive power of the state, while positive liberty is more supportive of using the state to provide the capacities and pre-conditions for effective action.

Concepts of liberty can be measured by examining the discourse of presidents and other foreign policy-makers before their time in power. Three substantive categories of expression are especially germane to making these measurements: explicit philosophical statements; attitudes towards the centralization of power; and views about the fiscal and economic role of the state. By surveying the preponderance of evidence across these categories, individuals and
administrations can be assessed to lie to a greater or lesser degree within the ideal typical categories of negative and positive liberty.

Competing concepts of liberty have been the subject of domestic political debate since the inception of the American Republic. This debate has gone through, very roughly, three phases. Before the twentieth century, negative liberty was the dominant understanding of freedom among American elites. By the mid 1960s, positive liberty was dominant among the national security class and today underpins the philosophy of both major political parties. In between, competing interpretations of liberalism struggled mightily with each other in American domestic politics. This struggle had major implications for American involvement in international politics.

LIBERAL PREFERENCES. In foreign policy, advocates of negative liberty will usually prefer less intense strategies of power management, in order to avoid the creation of a constraining and coercive central state needed to execute more ambitious postures. Negative liberty therefore acts as a retractive force on American commitments. Negative liberals will respond to fewer threats, attempt to reduce strategic costs, avoid alliances and use them for burden sharing, and prefer standoff forms of military power. For psychological reasons, negative liberals will protect their central liberal norm of avoiding a large state by denying the need for its existence—they will acknowledge few threats of any kind and insist that international liberalism will spread best under its own power.

Partisans of positive liberty will favor more intense strategies of power management, in order that liberal values might be spread abroad and American rights vindicated. Positive liberty is a propulsive force: positive liberals will perceive more threats, seek greater control over world politics, favor alliances as instruments of political influence, and take a special interest in ground forces. Positive liberals have no psychological need for an optimistically biased assessment of threats and will therefore be more influenced by traditional liberal fears of encroaching international illiberalism. They will, however, seek to deny that they are trapped in a world of power politics and war. Instead, they will affirm that the American state has the capability to vindicate its values abroad and move the international system towards its natural liberal order, in a manner directly analogous to the way the American state intervenes to advance effective liberty at home.

IV: SYSTEMIC INFLUENCES. These propositions are combined with insights from balance of power theory to form TLFP. I argue that America’s geographic advantages are such that it is extraordinarily secure. Its statesmen do not feel geopolitical pressures the way European leaders do and under most circumstances America “can take as much or as little of the war as it will.” The one exception is the presence of a potential hegemon in Europe—a state so powerful that it could potentially conquer all of Europe’s industrial power and then devote its undistracted attention to the Western hemisphere. The presence of such a state generates forces pushing American strategy towards the center of the power management continuum: statesmen will have a strong incentive to oppose potential hegemons before they conquer Europe, but at the same time, the resistance of other states to being dominated will also usually inhibit American preponderance. In addition, the international system will also serve as an integrating force in American grand strategy. Though leaders are prone to deny trade-offs and avoid hard choices, strategic fantasy crashes hard against power political reality. Interaction with the international system will, over time, force statesmen to rationally adjust their ends and means towards one of the ideal type strategies.
The presence of potential hegemons can be ascertained by assessing the relative economic potential of the European great powers, their standing military might, and qualitative assessments of their military quality. A potential hegemon will far surpass its leading competitor on one or more of these indicators and will exceed the strength of plausible coalitions.

TLFP’s Predictions for Strategic Outcomes. Together, the independent variables of TLFP generate a set of ceteris paribus expectations about the grand strategy the United States will adopt. If no potential hegemon exists, the retractive force of negative liberty will push America towards non-entanglement, as American leaders attempt to reduce to a minimum the costs to liberty associated with an active foreign policy. But if positive liberty is dominant instead, American strategy will be propelled forward to greater commitments, as statesmen seek to provide the foundations for liberal societies abroad, vindicate the rights of Americans in world politics, and secure the United States from illiberal threats. Whether these commitments will take the form of balancing or preponderance will depend on the size of America’s relative power advantage and the reaction of European states. Positive liberal ideals will tend to push towards preponderance, usually through some liberal organizational scheme effectively privileging American power, but the international system will tend to resist such outcomes, pushing American policy towards balancing.

If a potential hegemon is present in Europe, the natural proclivities of both liberalisms will be restrained. Negative liberals will understand that America must make commitments to meet the geopolitical threat, but will seek to shift the burdens to others through buckpassing. Positive liberals will see no need to economize on security and will also see opportunities to advance liberal goals on the margins, opting instead for the greater influence of balancing.

TLFP’s Process Predictions. Of course, all things are not always equal. The social world being a complex place, factors beyond the motor forces of TLFP’s model can sometimes affect the course of American grand strategy. Fortunately, TLFP also posits a set of causal processes that should be evident in American foreign policy decision-making if the model is correct. If these processes are consistently observed they strongly substantiate the theory, since they are in many respects unique predictions we would not expect to hold if some other factor were doing the work.

When negative liberty is present we should expect to find a distinctive set of anti-statist and non-interference rationales driving policy choice. We should see a general desire to reduce the costs of foreign policy and a diminution of perceived threats: liberal ideological fears will be minimized and only very powerful states will be worrisome. Cost aversion should also be expressed in an opposition to alliances and military spending. If negative liberals take on international commitments, they should highlight the burden-sharing functions of such engagements. If military forces are built, the emphasis should be on stand-off forces rather than ground forces.

Conversely, if positive liberty is dominant, a general emphasis on protecting and promoting liberal values abroad should be observed. With no psychological need to reduce threats, fears of illiberal ideology and smaller concentrations of power should produce more concern. Positive liberals should seek more control over the balance of power, favoring alliances, international organizations, and military power as tools for doing so. Diplomatic connections will be valued mostly as a means of influencing the policy and general orientation of other states, even at the expense of added costs. Militarily, ground forces will receive special attention because of their greater ability to influence political outcomes and alliance commitments.
When potential hegemons appear, statesmen should be found fearing their capacity to conquer Europe and even their possible penetration of the Western hemisphere. These fears should push leaders to exert more control over the balance of power, even at added costs, and even against other retractive forces. Furthermore, we should see the influence of the international system exert an integrating force on American grand strategy over time. Statesmen have political and psychological incentives to avoid hard choices and deny the necessity of value trade-offs, particularly between cost and control. They will tend to believe that their low cost policies can provide all the control they need. But if ends and means are poorly adjusted, grand strategies are likely to fail. As statesmen confront the hard realities of the international system, they will be forced towards the integration of policy ends and means, approaching more closely one of the four ideal type grand strategies.

Comparative Analysis

This section compares American strategy in the five cases studied in order to isolate the causal effects of TLFP’s variables. As the empirical work amply reveals, these cannot be considered fully controlled comparisons: other possible variables of interest do move over time and even occasionally perturb American strategy. In truth, the experimental logic of controlled comparisons is almost never fully realized in social analysis, a point developed at length by John Stuart Mill when he formalized their use in the nineteenth century.¹

Nevertheless, the comparative method is useful in this context. For one thing, a great many other potentially important variables remain constant. American national culture, the character of its party system, its basic regime type and institutional arrangements, its geographic location, and its status as the leading economic power in the system are all more or less invariant. By contrast, the balance of power abroad and the character of liberal ideology at home both do change, but rarely together, making comparisons potentially useful. And having just studied the cases to be compared in depth, we have a good sense of what potential perturbing variables might be and how they might confound the analysis. I note the areas where this seems possible in the following section on alternate explanations.

I proceed in two parts. First, I compare eras with similar balances of power but different dominant concepts of liberty; I then hold eras with similar concepts of liberty constant while comparing across the structure of the system. I find that changes in TLFP’s variables are responsible for change in American grand strategy in the manner expected by the theory.

LIBERALISM IN ACTION

In this section I compare American grand strategies in eras without a potential European hegemon and then in eras with a potential hegemon. I find that changing concepts of liberty in the White House led to different approaches to treating similar strategic problems, in the manner predicted by TLFP. Positive liberals had more demanding visions for the balance of power in Europe, favored more commitments in order to shape that balance, and used those commitments for influence over the orientation of others. Negative liberals faced the same problems with less ambitious power configurations in mind, minimized American commitments, and used those

¹ John Stuart Mill, A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive (London, England: Harper and Brothers, 1874), Bk. VI.
commitments as a means to shift costs to others. Both types of administration were ultimately driven by a vision of the liberal gains their strategy would secure, either at home or abroad.²

NO POTENTIAL HEGEMON. Woodrow Wilson and the interwar Republican administrations of Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover all faced European power constellations without a potential hegemon. Before the Great War, European power appeared balanced, with Germany possessing a modest economic advantage over Britain and military equality with the Entente; prior to American entry the war looked to be a stalemate. After the war, all these administrations perceived variations on a devastated and chaotic Europe, but one without an aggressive leading power. What is more, Wilson and his Republican successors shared similar strategic perceptions and ideological beliefs. All parties considered America to be more or less immune from geopolitical threats. All shared the same broad liberal outlook, hoping for a peaceful, democratic, and economically open Europe, and finding the causes of European instability in its illiberalism and power political ways. But Wilson and the Republicans of the 1920s responded in very different ways to similar international circumstances.

Wilson was simply unwilling to tolerate European anarchy on a permanent basis. From the very beginning of the Great War, he was thinking in terms of a unipolar Europe managed by a collective security apparatus, led by benevolent American power. Only such a centralized power configuration could promote “the development of constitutional liberty in the world.” Indeed, Wilson’s envisioned League of Nations would both bolster and grow liberal regimes and be supported by them, in a mutually reinforcing system. And only an end to European illiberalism could ensure that militarist and autocratic powers would not one day threaten the United States, although even with a German victory, Wilson did not anticipate this result in the short term.

Wilson understood that securing a unipolar League capable of managing European power would require a major American commitment. Though he perhaps never realized quite how extensive such a commitment would have to be, his positive liberal goals nonetheless pulled him towards an extensive set of military investments and diplomatic engagements. These were especially remarkable given their departures from American tradition. He built the first peacetime army of any real size since the Civil War before entering the European conflict. Once he realized that his strategy of neutrality and peace without victory was doomed, he chose to utilize conscription to deploy a massive land army to Europe rather than fight a limited naval and financial war.

Whether or not Wilson’s commitments could have ever led to real American preponderance is an open question because his policies were never realized. But the fact that the envisioned mechanics of collective security were fanciful should not obscure the great importance Wilson placed on the League or the forward commitments he was willing to make on its behalf. The League was the method by which liberalism would expand and make progress in world politics. “We have said that this war was carried on for a vindication of democracy,” Wilson argued in Paris, and “if we were ready to fight for this, we should be ready to write it into the covenant.” To give the League a chance to operate, he was willing to commit America to a separate entangling alliance with France, to allow a potentially enduring French occupation of the Rhineland, and to place a division strength American force there as a tripwire. These forward commitments of political and military assets would have placed America in the center of European power politics during the 1920s.

² Unless otherwise footnoted, any quotes that follow are reproduced from the empirical chapters.
Thus, when faced with a malleable distribution of power in Europe, Wilson was drawn to a grand strategy of preponderance by his liberal aims. When forced to choose between cost and control, he consistently took on more commitments rather than reduce his goals. Wilson had a genuinely unipolar vision for the future of the European politics; his forward commitments achieved a balancing posture before he left office.

The Harding administration rapidly disassembled this posture, and the interwar Republicans were all content to choose non-entanglement over any costly connection with Europe. They, too, confronted a continent rent by political turmoil and economic distress that threatened their basic liberal hopes. But the interwar Republicans’ vision for the balance of power emphasized the distance of the American pole from Europe and a willingness to tolerate a number of power constellations. The 1923 French invasion of the Ruhr threatened civil war in Germany, general war in Europe, and the economic collapse of the developed world. The Harding administration’s reaction was that “each side would probably have to ‘enjoy its own bit of chaos’ until the disposition to create a fair settlement had been created.” Later, growing German power became worrisome, but American diplomats would not “ask the Krupp factories to go out of the business of making ploughs because, in war, they might make guns.” America would help where it could, but would not commit to shaping the balance of power. America’s twin strategic principles were: “Independence—that does not mean and has never meant isolation. Cooperation—that does not mean and has never meant alliances or political entanglements.”

The interwar Republicans relied on mechanisms of deterrence and non-interference to achieve a detached position. American defenses were minimized, but kept sufficient to defend the continent and the naval approaches to the Western hemisphere. The American position on the Rhine was liquidated as fast as political circumstances would permit. No French treaty was ever ratified; no neutered version of the League ever agreed upon. Such commitments as American statesmen would make had to be relatively costless—American diplomats negotiated the Dawes settlement, but were “not in a position to guarantee this financing or to assume any responsibility in regard to it.” Security commitments were out of the question: America did “not believe that the peace of the world or of Europe depends upon or can be assured by treaties of military alliance.”

Above all, the United States refused to forgive Allied war debts, which were “loans from individual American citizens rather than contributions from the Treasury of the United States.” There could be no settlement to the reparations tangle that would “transfer the burden of reparation payments from the shoulders of the German taxpayer to those of the American taxpayer.” The negative liberal ideals of the interwar Republicans privileged avoiding resource extraction over shaping the balance of power. Their philosophy sought “how to fully assert a helpful influence abroad without sacrificing anything of importance to our own people.” In practice, this approach meant that little influence was asserted in order that anti-statist values might not be sacrificed. The final result was a grand strategy of non-entanglement.

POTENTIAL HEGEMONS. The Truman and Eisenhower administrations both faced a brooding leviathan in the form of the Soviet Union, one whose power was growing rapidly and threatened to overwhelm a shattered Western Europe. The Kennedy administration faced the same threat, though of a somewhat lesser degree, as Europe had recovered and rearmed in the intervening years. Roosevelt faced a different and even more dangerous potential hegemon after 1940, a Greater Germany on the march. Each of these administrations was deeply concerned for the survival of Western Europe and about the implications of a European hegemon for American
security. And each administration also wanted a liberal Europe that was peaceful, prosperous, and economically open. The presence of a large geopolitical threat imparted some similarity to the strategy of all four administrations. Yet two distinct approaches are evident. The negative liberals of the early Cold War sought to recreate an organic European balance of power that could catch the buck and prevent Soviet hegemony. They were bookended by positive liberal administrations that desired the greater control of balancing and aimed at extensive forward commitments of American power.

Both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations envisioned the creation of a third force in Europe: an independent power complex that could balance Soviet power largely on its own. Fifteen years of military and diplomatic activity were devoted to building the political and economic foundations of this unit. The Marshall Plan's object was to rebuild Europe economically, "to combat not communism, but the economic maladjustment which makes European society vulnerable to exploitation." An economically integrated Europe would be a "third force which was not merely the extension of US influence but a real European organization strong enough to say 'no' both to the Soviet Union and to the United States."

American support for the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the European Economic Community (EEC), and other integrative projects were motivated by the same vision: to turn Europe into "a solid power mass." Dulles summed up his administration's enthusiastic support for the EEC: "with the common market Europe would be a third world force along with the US and the Soviet Union. If Europe does not have a common market, it will remain weak."

Other integrative projects paved the political and military route for a third force. The North Atlantic Treaty helped facilitate West German integration with what American diplomats perceived as a paper promise. The European Defense Community (EDC) was intended to be a truly European army "that the United States will be able to leave to the European nation-members the primary responsibility... of maintaining and commanding." The Multilateral Force (MLF), in its original form, was a similar idea but with nuclear weapons, seeking to turn Europe into an independent nuclear power. American diplomats hoped all of the above projects would have not just military and economic, but specifically political elements—they would create a European political consciousness and institutional structures for united action. For this reason, both Truman and Eisenhower emphasized working primarily with France and Germany to build the nucleus of the third force, because they did "not wish to see this progress retarded by British reluctance."

The basic mechanism of all these projects was free-riding: America would pass the buck to the third force in order to reduce its own costs. Americans saw Europe as "representing some kind of charge on the US which the American public is not prepared to carry indefinitely." European strength was in American interests because "weakness could not cooperate, weakness could only beg." As that strength was being built, both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations favored a nuclear heavy strategy that reduced overall American costs, especially in the form of ground force deployments. Both administrations concurred with Eisenhower's statement that "Our policy should be that our friends and allies supply the means for local defense on the ground and that the United States should come into the act with air and naval forces alone." And each eagerly anticipated a return to "a minimum military establishment and mobilization base that could be expanded promptly in case of need." These cost reductions would benefit American liberty at home by reducing taxes, avoiding inflation, and forestalling the approach of the garrison state. Soviet power had to be balanced in some fashion, but the
Truman and Eisenhower administrations preferred to forgo control in Europe in the hopes of reducing American commitments.

The Kennedy administration had an opposite set of preferences: it sought more influence over its Western European allies and accepted a permanent balancing commitment in order to obtain it. Rather than moving towards a withdrawal from Europe, Kennedy announced that “the United States will maintain in Germany ground forces equivalent to six divisions as long as they are required.” Rather than pursuing an organic European center of power, America now aimed not to “disturb the balance of power” already in existence, believing that “If this balance should change, the situation in West Europe as a whole would change and this would be a most serious blow to the US.” A series of forward commitments were made under Kennedy. A tacit deal was cut with the Soviets, protecting Berlin in exchange for an American guarantee of Germany’s permanent non-nuclear status. NATO moved towards a more conventional strategy of “flexible response,” with American ground forces modernized and assigned a new emphasis on stopping a conventional attack. And European institutions were encouraged—but as instruments of direction and control, rather than independence.

Indeed, the Kennedy administration denied the legitimacy of the entire third force idea, which “touched a very sensitive nerve. The concept that Europe could be the arbiter between the US and the Soviets was basically fallacious.” Britain was encouraged to join European institutions in order divide them: Britain was to “act as our lieutenant (the fashionable word is partner).” Kennedy reacted quickly to crush the beginnings of a nascent entente between France and West Germany, intervening in German politics and telling the West Germans they had to choose France or NATO, and that NATO operated under American aegis. The MLF was turned from a real proposal into a long-running comic opera, significantly altered to disguise the reality of European nuclear dependence with the façade of some kind of joint control. Kennedy bluntly described the aims of the American balancing posture: “we did not fear a third force would be neutralist. We were concerned, instead, about whether there would be a wholly separate, independent force unrelated to American responsibility and interest.”

At the heart of Kennedy’s strategic change was a positive liberal worry about the persistence of democracy and open-trading systems in Europe. The Kennedy administration felt that “both Germany and France have strong potential which would tend over the long run to make the EEC an inward-looking organization” and damned European “moves toward autarky and the third force delusion.” A British presence in Europe would strengthen the free-trading, open-economy forces on the continent. Moreover, individually, European “conceals within her body politic deep divisive forces. Only by diluting those forces within the larger caldron of Europe[an]” institutions could these political energies be prevented from destroying European liberalism. In short, a third force on the continent would either be an autarkic and possibly illiberal entity, or it would tear itself to pieces through illiberal impulses from within. This outcome had to be avoided as surely as a Soviet conquest of Europe. Permanent and costly American forward commitments were the key to managing both problems. Whereas fifteen years of American diplomacy had drawn back from this conclusion, Kennedy never blinked.

Though the specific power configuration in Europe was radically different under Roosevelt, after the fall of France it shared an essential character with the Cold War cases: a potential hegemon threatened Europe. Like Kennedy, Roosevelt found limited commitments unacceptable—German power at the center of Europe, even contained German power, was intolerable. After the fall of France he was advised by his military to abandon Britain and concentrate on defending American shores. But he decided instead to increase aid to Britain and
planned a military force “for other purposes... than the strict defense of the western hemisphere.” Lt. General Stanley Embick and other isolationist officers close to Roosevelt frequently militated against a full commitment to the British Empire, and even George Marshall thought that “we will not need a 4,000,000 man Army unless England collapses.” Roosevelt instead favored Admiral Stark’s analysis that German power would have to be utterly destroyed by a large ground army. He deliberately made a series of commitments designed to clear the domestic hurdles to that Army’s deployment: Lend-Lease, the undeclared war in the Atlantic, and ultimately, the provocation of Japan.

Roosevelt’s preference for a full American commitment to balancing is explained at least in part by his positive liberal beliefs. To be sure, the international system was sending a strong signal that the United States needed to prop up the balance of power in some way. But the historical debate over what, exactly, Roosevelt was doing; the presence of strong buckpassing voices in the administration; and the increased plausibility of a buckpassing strategy after the Soviets entered the war all show that the system did not fully determine American behavior. It is no accident the same military planning documents advocating the destruction of Germany also argued that “the possession of a profitable foreign trade, both in raw material and in finished goods” and “the establishment of regimes favorable to economic freedom and individual liberty” were critical national interests. It is no coincidence that an administration which had spent several years worried about expanding German autarky quickly went to work planning for a post-war world based on free-trade.

Like Kennedy after him, Roosevelt was not too concerned about pushing around European allies if it would lock in a liberal order: Roosevelt considered the post-war settlement “his particular preserve” and the Europeans “were to be told just where they get off.” So important was the post-war trading structure that Lend-Lease was used as a club against the British to pave the “way toward either cracking now or laying the foundations for cracking the Ottawa [Imperial Preference] agreements.” Was the man who talked privately of the importance of the four freedoms in negotiations with the British a year before deploying such rhetoric publically just kidding? Was he just placating Churchill when he wrote that the British economic deference would allow the Allies to “organize a different kind of world where men shall really be free economically as well as politically?” Such a conclusion is implausible. It is possible that any American administration would have found itself involved in the European ground war, though I believe that question open. But it is certain that Roosevelt’s liberal aims could only be achieved through such commitments.

SUMMARY. By holding the structure of the international system constant, it becomes obvious how different liberal ideals shape American foreign policy. Positive liberals tend to see more danger in the international system, whether from material or ideological sources. Confronted with similar situations, negative liberals downplay threats. Positive liberals push American commitments outward in search of influence, while negative liberals try to retract them in order to control costs. Alliances and ground forces form the heart of positive liberal

3 Recall from Chapter Five that this was no boilerplate language—Marshall thought the addition of liberal interests were “purely political” and protested that they were “out of place in this paper.” Embick and his cohorts were livid. One planner raged that such goals amounted to “the imposition of our own ideology upon the world.” But if the language was political, so were the planning documents, which were drawn up at Roosevelt’s request and tailored to his interests.

grand strategies, since they help provide control over the balance of power. Negative liberals prefer more distant political connections, burden-shifting, and stand-off forces. The international system plays a major role in the foreign policy of both negative and positive liberals, but the two ideologies interpret its demands in different ways.

GEOPOLITICS IN ACTION

I now compare administrations with similar ideological valence but different geopolitical circumstances. I find that geopolitical forces had a profound effect on how similarly oriented statesmen made policy. As TLFP predicts, the presence of a potential hegemon provided a very substantial incentive for American leaders to make commitments propping up the balance of power. In the same vein, the more dangerous the balance of power, the more quickly American strategy integrated its political and military ends and means. When geopolitical threat was less severe, statesmen could persist with flawed strategies for greater periods of time and could also pursue more ambitious liberal goals of one kind or another.

POSITIVE LIBERALISM. The administrations of Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and John Kennedy were all importantly influenced by positive liberalism. These ideas oriented American grand strategy outward in the service of vindicating liberal values, albeit with different emphases among administrations. But each administration was broadly interested in protecting democracy, open economies, and American trading rights. Each leader sought to promote peace through using American power to expand liberalism. The impact of the liberal influence, though, turned on the character of the balance of power.

The Wilson administration had the most malleable balance of power to work with: initially, a stalemated war in Europe, and after the war, a shattered continent eager for help. It does not surprise, therefore, that Wilson’s vision was the most grandiose. From the first guns of August, he had decided that “No nation shall ever again be permitted to acquire an inch of land by conquest,” and “there must be an association of nations, all bound together for the protection of the integrity of each, so that any one nation breaking this bond will bring upon herself war; that is to say, punishment, automatically.” Wilson never really abandoned these goals. Even as the realities of power politics made themselves clear at the Paris Peace Conference, he fought hard to win positive guarantees of territorial integrity in the League covenant and harsh sanctions against violators of the treaty. Wilson valued these as integral to the collective security system and paid dearly to get them; if they do not impress the geopolitically minded it is only because geopolitical forces pressed weakly on American minds in 1919.

The lack of major systemic pressure during the era of the Great War allowed Wilson to get by with a disintegrated grand strategy, one whose liberal aims far outstripped America’s diplomatic and military means. Wilson’s idea that biased neutrality would somehow help secure European acceptance of an American dominated League was the stuff of liberal dreams. Yet America dawdled through three years of buckpassing because statesmen in the grips of fantasies can maintain them at length when not confronted with systemic reality. Interestingly, Wilson’s belated realization that the Allies were playing him for a sucker did cause a more coercive position towards them and a more even-handed overture towards Germany. But like the Godfather, Wilson’s offer to Germany was nothing. Wilson had vague promises. Germany had tangible submarines. It is hard to tell whose judgment was objectively “worse,” but the Kaiser at least had a semi-plausible theory of victory.

Even after unrestricted submarine warfare was launched, Wilson labored for seven weeks to keep his buckpassing strategy alive. Of the major American statesmen, only Lansing
entertained any fears of a German victory, and only occasionally. The rest of Washington was convinced of eventual, and probably imminent, Allied triumph. America went to war, not for fear of geopolitical dangers, but in pursuit of liberal opportunities. It was only the obvious disintegration of his faux-neutral posture that led Wilson to the conclusion war could not be avoided: he could not fight a naval and financial war without becoming obviously partisan. If the League of Nations was to be kept alive, Wilson would have to bring it into existence at the peace table himself, a process that was facilitated by the influence of a massive land commitment.

All that said, once in Europe, the balance of power did have an integrating influence on American strategy. To construct the League, Wilson was forced to make commitments he would have preferred not to make. That he did not shrink from them underscores his positive liberalism; that he was forced to confront the choice is the work of geopolitical reality. Against his preferences, Wilson committed 200,000 troops to police a fairly harsh armistice, in return for making the League the top agenda item in Paris. To gain French acceptance of the Treaty he agreed to extraordinary departures from the American tradition: an explicit alliance, a tripwire occupation force, and a semi-permanent occupation of the Rhineland. Furthermore, he was forced to reckon with the possibility of democratic backsliding in Germany and agreed to disassemble large elements of German power. Wilson’s grand strategy was a dream castle whose increasingly concrete balancing foundations were forced on him by power political realities.

Roosevelt and Kennedy both pursued somewhat less ambitious liberal goals in more constrained geopolitical environments. Roosevelt faced the more fluid geopolitical environment of the two, even after the fall of France. He was interested primarily in ensuring an open world economy and hoped, for a time, that it could be obtained through negotiations with Hitler and political settlements in Europe. After the fall of France, Roosevelt quickly realized that to guarantee an end to European autarky, America would have to make large and costly commitments: German power would have to be smashed, new economic arrangements negotiated, and some kind of political system created in Europe. The creation of a nine million man army and the invasion of Europe was no mean feat; nor were the complicated diplomatic and political maneuvers required to gain American entry into the war. But Roosevelt did not seek Wilsonian preponderance, and he was vague on exactly how much of an American commitment he envisioned after the war. Roosevelt strategy aimed to vindicate liberal values, but the system focused his attention on the most immediate problem: destroying the wehrmacht.

Kennedy had the least ambitious goals of the positive liberals and the most geopolitical constraints—he sought to maintain the liberal status-quo in Western Europe in a relatively stable bipolar system further pacified by growing nuclear arsenals. The Kennedy administration was deeply conscious of the limits Soviet power placed on American behavior, and vice-versa, hoping to negotiate a mutually acceptable settlement. But an independent European pole would only gum up the works. The prospect of an autonomous and potentially nuclear armed Germany was clearly behind much of Moscow’s aggressive behavior in Berlin, and in truth, that prospect was no more acceptable to Kennedy and his lieutenants. Even if a third force could be formed, it was more likely to be malignant than useful: there was a strong possibility that it would become autarkic and inward focused, or that it might rip itself apart with illiberal divisions in trying to compete with the Soviet Union. Fortunately, the system permitted a simple solution—a permanent American commitment and a bipolar balance of power.
Roosevelt and Kennedy also had balancing strategies with more ends/means integration than Wilson, again with Kennedy's greater geopolitical constraints producing the more coherent posture. Once the Germans ruled most of Europe, Roosevelt rapidly moved towards greater commitments and abandoned the hope that open trade could co-exist with Nazi power. American grand strategic commitments were probably over-extended before its entry into the war. But this strategic disintegration had domestic political roots. Public and congressional restraints resisted balancing commitments, which meant Roosevelt had to stretch limited resources over two theaters; indeed, he ultimately needed help from American overextension in the Pacific theater to clear the domestic hurdles to full intervention against Germany. In a sense, this moderate disjunction between ends and means was made possible because buckpassing was still an option: Roosevelt's domestic opponents could deploy effective arguments. Still, just as notable is the speed and adroitness with which Roosevelt switched strategies while maneuvering around considerable domestic obstacles. Increasing integration in American grand strategy was due to the strong signal being sent by the international system.

Kennedy's balancing strategy was very well integrated from the day he took office. The system gave him very few options: he could balance the Soviets with either American or European power. He never had any intention of leaving Europe or handing the reins over to a third force; indeed, the international friction during the period was largely due to the Soviet failure to accept power realities for several years. Kennedy's diplomacy may have enraged the Europeans, but it served its purpose: the EEC was turned from a potential nucleus for power political action into a talking shop for economic issues; the MLF shifted from a real force to a strategic farce; nuclear weapons were taken out of the hands of the Germans for good; and all Western Europe was made to understand that America was the master of NATO. It is probably true that Kennedy's conventional orientation towards military issues did not advance as far as it might have, though American doctrine would evolve in this direction over the course of the Cold War. Even so, Kennedy's own assessment of the European situation well summarizes the power of structural constraints: "it is regrettable that there are such problems with and in Europe because today's struggle does not lie there, but rather in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. The whole debate about an atomic force in Europe is really useless, because Berlin is secure and Europe as a whole is well protected. What really matters at this point is the rest of the world."

NEGATIVE LIBERALISM. The interwar Republicans and the early Cold War administrations were all pervaded by negative liberal ideas, though the intervening revolution in American domestic politics ratcheted down their intensity in the second post-war period. These domestic changes also gave each administration a different focus on the types of liberal values to be preserved and the locus of the international threat to those values. Still, each negative liberal administration shared an emphasis on preserving the liberty of American citizens: protecting them from the interference of the government and restricting the state’s size and scope. The international system became a key determinant of how much, and how well, negative liberty could be preserved.

The interwar Republicans faced the least dangerous balance of power during the entire study, and it is unsurprising that they had the most opportunity to indulge their negative liberal priorities. Their disarmament on land is surprising, even given American standards, but the interwar Republicans felt defense budgets were "first and primary obstruction" to prosperity. Kellogg hit the structural role on the nose: "our detached position and our geographic isolation from those areas of the world where conflicting territorial or political issues have led to the maintenance of large standing armies" was the permissive factor allowing American land
armament to be "voluntarily reduced to the minimum." The same is true of the fanatical American devotion to collecting war debts. While the sums involved were in no sense trivial, they held the key to political stability in Europe. The interwar Republicans saw repayment as little less than a natural right, and though willing to compromise on the total amount of interest, were unwilling to budge on the principal, or the principle, at stake. That they could take this position owed to the quiescent nature of the balance of power: "this country may enjoy a great deal of prosperity even when very unsatisfactory conditions prevail abroad."

Truman and Eisenhower faced a very different world and were forced to concede state-building of which Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover would have never dreamed. A national security state was constructed, large proportions of GDP devoted to defense, and conscription maintained. The Soviet threat was responsible. As Eisenhower put it, "If all of Western Europe fell into the hands of the Soviet Union and thus added its great industrial plant to the USSR’s already great industrial might, the United States would indeed be reduced to the character of a garrison state if it was to survive at all." To preserve as much of traditional American life as possible, some commitments would be needed.

But these commitments did not need to be permanent or exorbitantly costly, which led both administrations to a series of efforts aimed at constructing a European super-state. Eisenhower was thus citing a real factor, but also being somewhat disingenuous, when he justified these integrative efforts by arguing that "as far as he was concerned personally, the Russian menace alone would provide sufficient justification for this course. It reminded him of the story of the man who was asked why he did not go to church any more. He replied that there were seven reasons, the first of which was that he had been thrown out and the six others did not really matter.” The unmentioned six reasons in these cases were the preservation of American anti-statist values, and they certainly mattered in the fifteen years of American buckpassing.

The balance of power also exerted more integrating pressures on the Cold War administrations than the interwar Republicans, though all the negative liberal administrations did a fair job of matching ends and means. In some sense, American strategy in the 1920s was disintegrated, since each administration preferred a stable and liberal Europe but made very few commitments to bring one about. Because the European power constellation was not yet radically unbalanced, America could get by with this disjointed policy for twelve years before it collapsed. But in another sense, the interwar Republicans got remarkable mileage out of the modest commitments they were willing to make. The virtually costless American role in the Dawes and Locarno negotiations really did help create a brief period of peace, stability, and increasing prosperity in Europe. Hoover’s efforts to save the system collapsed in part because he was unwilling to sacrifice negative liberty on its behalf. He was ultimately comfortable with this choice. Even during the Great Depression, the American economy produced a great many fiddles, which interwar Republicans were content to play as Europe burned.

The pressure of the international system is much clearer in the strategy of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. The fifteen years after the Second World War saw generally increasing commitments by the United States, as elements of the buckpassing strategy proved inadequate and had to be replaced by new schemes. Once it became clear that European industry was going to be down and out for some time, Soviet non-cooperation became more threatening, and the Marshall plan was instituted to help rebuild a third pole. After the Soviets gained a nuclear capacity and apparently instigated aggression on the periphery, America rearmed and permanently committed troops to Europe. After the EDC failed, the Eisenhower administration fell back on the EEC, nuclear sharing, and the MLF. The continued succession of plots and
plans for buckpassing shows the resilience of negative liberty as a motive for American strategy, but it also underscores the integrating pressure of the international system.

SUMMARY. By holding concepts of liberty constant, the impact of the international system on American grand strategy is clear. When a potential hegemon is present in Europe, statesmen have strong incentives to make commitments and will do so quickly, often against other countervailing forces. For the same reason, political ends and means tend to get integrated more swiftly into coherent grand strategies when power is radically unbalanced. Policy must be changed quickly to avoid disaster. On the other hand, when power is more balanced abroad, American leaders can commit or not commit at their pleasure. There is much more space to indulge liberal preferences, and strategies can remain disintegrated for longer periods of time. Liberalism pervades American foreign policy, but the international system shapes its scope for influence.

Alternate Explanations

In this section, I address alternate variables that might have plausibly disrupted the comparisons just discussed. I do so by summarizing the evidence from the “counter-arguments” sections of the five cases. I address economic, bureaucratic, institutional, and realist explanations for strategic change.

I find that existing bureaucratic theories have little support, largely because they lack the necessary variation over time to explain strategic change. They also leave few signatures in the policy-making process that would lead us suspect them of exerting great influence. Economic arguments have sufficient variation to predict change, but over-predict variation in American strategy while under-explaining actual variation. Broadly institutional theories, emphasizing the importance of the separation of powers and public opinion, clearly have exerted influence on the course of American commitments. But they have done so in an erratic and idiosyncratic manner, while often being overridden by the power of other variables. Finally, some defensive variant of structural realism is plausibly consistent with many of the observations examined in this study. However, this is because a purely structural argument must trade heavily on the under-specification of its independent variable, the underdevelopment of its core logic, and the under appreciation of process evidence from American strategic decision-making.

BUREAUCRATIC THEORIES

Bureaucratic theories of American foreign policy are most commonly used to explain disintegration and failure in American grand strategy. They lack a theoretical motor positing when and why American commitments expand and retract abroad. As an invariant cause, bureaucratic politics poses few problems for the comparisons above. This study has examined the broad family of bureaucratic explanations in the two cases where they are most often invoked: American non-entanglement in the 1920s and the road to war in 1941. Even in these areas of strength, bureaucratic explanations provide only limited traction in illuminating the character of American foreign policy.

It is often alleged the American strategy in the 1920s was the product of pushing and hauling between various weak bureaucracies, many of which had been penetrated or replaced by private financial interests. The result was America’s economic expansionism but political isolation, a foreign policy that served Wall Street but ultimately ended disastrously for the country. However, the interwar Republicans were more than capable of political involvement
when they thought it was judicious—though that was rarely enough. Still, American diplomats took control during the Dawes negotiations to dictate a settlement against the interests of American bankers and in favor of American preferences for Europe’s geopolitical structure. That these commitments were extremely mild was the product of ideological reluctance and adroit diplomatic exploitation, not bureaucratic incapacity, turmoil, or abdication.

Organizational politics are also used to explain American over-extension in the Pacific under Roosevelt and the resulting war with Japan in 1941. Roosevelt was a capricious and undisciplined decision maker, so the story goes, and left the implementation of critical aspects of American strategy in the hands of feuding bureaucracies. The result was a strategy where inadequate American resources were stretched over two theaters; one that ended in an unintentional Japanese war when hawks gained control of policy at the crucial moment. The documents tell a different story. Roosevelt understood and was intimately familiar with the military details of his policy; he ordered or at least tacitly approved all major military planning and naval deployments. He also understood the logic of the situation in the Pacific, but deliberately switched to a highly coercive policy in the summer of 1941. American means were not adequate to the balancing strategy Roosevelt pursued, but this disintegration was the result of domestic obstacles. On nearly every matter of strategic importance, Roosevelt was calling the shots and made the final decisions. Organizational feuding was his servant, not his master.

SECTORAL ECONOMIC THEORIES

Sectoral economic theories have theoretical horsepower in abundance. Their motor lies in changing coalitions of economic sectors which cause the propulsion and retraction in American grand strategy. Sectors that have economic interests in the European core will tend to support more committed strategies in the hopes of keeping peace blooming and business booming. Sectors that do not have such interests will see such commitments as a waste of time and money. Competing sectors will find their political expression in the American party system. In most theories, the Democratic Party is ascribed the outward looking interests, due to an agricultural, financial, and large industrial political base, with the Republican party representing inward looking interests of labor-intensive industry, non-competitive agriculture, and small business. With the exception of Republican victory in 1921, these variables remained constant when American strategy shifted, making it unlikely that coalitional patterns perturb the comparisons above.

Sectoral theories face numerous empirical problems. To begin with, they over-predict American strategic change: American grand strategy does not shift every time partisan control of the White House does. In this study, the major example is the transition from Truman to Eisenhower during the early Cold War. The supposedly outward looking party was replaced by the supposedly inward looking party, both of whom pursued the same strategy—one which consisted of biasing European institutions against American trade! It is also worth noting that Republican and Democratic administrations exchanged power throughout the late Cold War, but each retained essentially the same balancing strategy initiated under Kennedy, regardless of partisan stripe.

A second problem is that sectoral theories under-explain observed variation in American grand strategy. Intra-administration variation is opaque to such theories, since without some kind of shift in economic preferences or the economic spill-over effects of American policy, strategy should remain constant. The most sophisticated of the sectoral theorists, Kevin Narizny, essentially admits that he cannot account for Wilson’s decision to go to war in 1917, and he does
not even try to explain the choice of a ground intervention over a naval and financial war. The timing of American shifts to buckpassing and balancing in the run-up to World War Two also occurred within a single administration representing the same set of interests. ⁵

Most importantly, sectoral theories are at odds with the evidence from the strategic policy-making process. Wilson chose to tacitly support the British blockade even though it infuriated his southern agricultural base. He also said publically that foreign trade was not very economically important for American prosperity, noting that “If you take the figures of our commerce, domestic and foreign included, you will find that the foreign commerce... does not equal 4 percent of the total. Now, is 4 percent creating the 96 percent?” This is, to put it mildly, a very odd position for the leader of the outward oriented economic coalition to take. ⁶

The inter-war Republicans were certainly hesitant to make costly commitments to Europe. But all of the energy behind their attempts at European stabilization came from an interest in free trade and open financial flows supposedly represented by the opposite party. Hoover justified these interests in traditional internationalist language arguing that without “the products we exchange, not a single automobile would run; not a dynamo would turn; not a telephone, telegraph, or radio would operate.” The supposed economic interest of the Republican Party in peripheral expansion was manifested through naval disarmament, another odd position for such interests to take. Narizny claims that Republican administrations were constrained by the national debt, but their decision to pay it off so aggressively was a free choice, and one made for ideological reasons. It seems unlikely that the coalitional shift occurring in 1921 impacted the comparisons above, since the political parties seemed to have acted differently than sectoral theories posit.

During the Cold War, the Truman administration’s commitments were made reluctantly, with deeper involvement corresponding to changes in the balance of power, not changes in economic interests. And both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations encouraged the formation of European cartels and economic discrimination against American merchants. They did so in the hope that this would lay political foundations for a third force and facilitate American withdrawal from the continent—the interests of outward oriented sectors be damned.

Keynesian additions to sectoral economic theory gain only modest traction at the expense of theoretical coherence. Kennedy was the first American president who actually accepted Keynesian doctrines. Such views did, to a certain extent, serve as a permissive condition for increasing defense spending and accepting a more expansive strategy. But they had little impact on the policies at the heart of Kennedy’s European strategy: nuclear centralization, institutional restraint of Western Europe, and the attack on the third force. This strategic absence results from Keynesianism’s lack of a propulsive force for commitment abroad. Expanding American commitments may have been permitted by a new understanding of economic means, but they were driven by positive liberal motives.

Among other presidents, Roosevelt and Truman (after Korea) were operational deficit spenders, but were not influenced by Keynesian ideas. Indeed, Truman deployed these ideas for political purposes, and only under protest. As Michael Hogan puts it, “The Keynesian revolution

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⁵ Kevin Narizny, The Political Economy of Grand Strategy (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 138, where he admits that “it is quite possible” that none of the competing economic explanations from the historical literature “alone would have been sufficient to make [Wilson] ask for a declaration of war,” but that they might still be viewed, “at least indirectly,” through his sectoral prism.

did not disturb so much as a hair on his neatly combed head” and he turned to the new economics out of “expediency” rather than “conviction.” Roosevelt neither cared much about balanced budgets nor accepted the Keynesian theory justifying unbalanced budgets. Yet during this period, American strategy shifted rapidly towards more commitment at several points. The international system and ideological aims provided the propulsion in American strategy, not new theories of what the United States could or could not afford.

INSTITUTIONAL THEORIES

Scholars have sometimes pointed to the separation of the legislative and executive branches of American government, and their openness to penetration by public opinion, as key factors in determining American foreign policy. On the surface, though, these are constant features of the American political context, which makes it difficult for them to explain variation in American grand strategy. Moreover, intuitively, these factors seem more likely to serve as a “drag” on American foreign policy, rather than a “push.” That is, they have an easily understandable retractive force, but a vaguer basis for a propulsive force, and no readily identifiable clutch with which to change gears. It may be possible to construct an institutional theory with adequate variation to explain American strategic change, but I am not aware of any existing effort. The evidence of this study shows, I believe, that any such theory would meet empirical difficulties, and I have not been inspired to make the attempt. Even so, institutional factors clearly have some bite and could potentially impact the controlled comparisons just discussed.

In general, the evidence from this study shows that institutional opposition, public opinion, and other repositories of “traditional American isolationism” exert a slight drag on American foreign policy, but one that decision-makers can overcome when they are even modestly motivated. Wilson did have some concern for public opinion and some anti-militarist worries, but he also scorned the idea of cowering before the public and was not afraid to build up the American military or commit it abroad. He proved able to deftly manipulate the public over the Zimmerman telegram and during two years of brinksmanship over German submarines.

Similarly, there was certainly congressional and public opposition to major concessions on war debts and further armament during the 1920s. But the interwar Republican administrations largely shared these sentiments, and rarely came into conflict with them. Where they did disagree on specific matters, the executive tended to coerce the legislature into doing its will. Congress outlawed debt settlements with the terms that Harding and Coolidge negotiated, legislation which they blithely ignored in favor of presenting Congress with a fait accompli. And though Congress consistently resisted defense spending, the interwar Republicans occasionally thought it wise to spend more on the Navy or Air Corps—which they did successfully, over some congressional objections. If the public cared, the New Era Republicans didn’t notice.7

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7 Though this study has not treated institutional factors in its examination of the Cold War cases, the results would look much the same. For certain, decision-makers in all three Cold War administrations studied cared about public and congressional opinion, and worried that it might restrain them from making needed commitments. But neither the Congress nor the public restrained the executive from anything of importance it wanted to do. In fact, the much heralded “liberal internationalist consensus” was the product of adept congressional management across several administrations. See Charles A. Kupchan and Peter L. Trubowitz, “Dead Center: The Demise of Liberal Internationalism in the United States,” International Security 32, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 7-44.
The eccentric conclusion to Woodrow Wilson’s diplomacy was clearly one case where institutional division mattered: the Constitution required ratification the Versailles Treaty by two-thirds of the Senate; it also requires periodic elections to the upper chamber, which swung a number of seats towards the Republican opposition by narrow margins in 1918, giving them control of the body by two votes. Republican control of debate allowed Henry Cabot Lodge to organize a coalition of Senators around reservations to the treaty and the numbers game for ratification made this position the pivotal one.

But none of this explains why some version of the Treaty was not ratified. Lodge’s political position was weak, since there were many “mild reservationists” who were willing to compromise. The treaty itself was popular, as was the French alliance and even the occupation of the Rhineland. It was Wilson’s unwillingness to compromise, abetted in the end by a personality altering stroke, which killed the treaty while he was president. His insistence on an all or nothing outcome allowed a small group of “irreconcilable” opponents of the League to swing their votes between defeating Wilson’s treaty and defeating Lodge’s reservations. Moreover, it was by no means a forgone conclusion that some form of the Treaty couldn’t have been ratified in the early 1920s. After all, the American commitments to Europe were what really mattered, and these commanded popular and congressional support, at least for a time. It was the election of Harding—a staunch opponent of the League and of American commitments abroad—which sealed the fate of Wilson’s strategy.

In the end, a number of contingent and unusual factors combined to influence American strategy from 1919-1921. Though this perturbs the comparison between concepts of liberty under different structural circumstances, the very combination of factors involved makes it unlikely the League fight was decisive. Harding himself toyed with ratifying a neutered version of the treaty in order to appease the public, but not caring to protect the actual commitments embedded in Wilson’s strategy, he decided it wasn’t worth the fight. A different Republican nominee in 1920 or a Democratic victory might have produced a different outcome. However, domestic political factors applied clear and consistent pressure to Roosevelt’s foreign policy in the 1930s, serving as a major impediment to American commitments. Public opinion was uniformly opposed to a full commitment to the European war, though as circumstances progressed the public was more willing to tolerate risks. Both before and after the disasters of 1940, Congress frequently bludgeoned Roosevelt’s preferred foreign policy, causing him to lose key votes of repeal on the neutrality acts, to spend substantial time and effort rallying Congressional support on issues like Lend-Lease, and narrowly failing to defeat Roosevelt on other important issues. These political forces nearly capsized Roosevelt’s strategy and caused him to trim his own sails. The diplomatic record is replete with Roosevelt’s decisions to avoid pushing American commitments too far and his concerns over public and congressional reaction, especially regarding ground forces.

Even so, Roosevelt was able to manipulate and overcome these constraints as systemic pressures became more intense. In 1939, he was willing to go to the mattresses over an unbalanced rearmament plan designed to aid Britain and France rather than take the more politically easy tack of focusing on American defenses. After May 1940, a series of measures brought America ever closer to war in the Atlantic: support for the British, Lend-Lease, and the policy of undeclared naval war. Finally, in the summer of 1941, Roosevelt went all-out towards provoking Japan and accepting over-commitment across two theaters, likely hoping that a Pacific War would also allow him to enter the anti-Nazi conflict through the back door. Roosevelt was able to execute most of these measures on his own discretion, but a few required congressional
approval, or at least non-interference. When the stakes were highest, institutional forces were not strong enough to restrain an executive bent on making commitments.

STRUCTURAL REALISM

Geopolitical forces obviously had a tremendous impact on American grand strategy towards Europe, a fact taken into account in constructing TLFP. It is possible, however, to construct a plausible explanation for changes in American posture based entirely on structural variables. Such a theory, though vaguely defined at points, has superficial empirical appeal. I outline and critique this approach below.

A committed structural realist might concur with TLFP that America's geographic position gives it an enormous defensive advantage, one that provides no incentive for commitments abroad as long as robust multipolarity holds in Europe. However, a structural realist might allege that the threat of a potential hegemon is so great that anytime multipolarity appears to be failing—any time it looks like there may be a major power war—offshore powers will look to prop up the balance of power in some fashion. Such states are likely to try expending as little effort as possible at first, which means buckpassing is the first choice option. But as buckpassing fails, and multipolarity falls apart, states like America will have to balance, at least until multipolarity can be restored.

On the surface, these predictions appear to correlate with much of the variation in American grand strategy. The start of World War One, so the story would go, signaled that America needed to at least buckpass to hedge against German victory, which it promptly did. After three years of continued aggression, and an Entente that looked like it needed help to stay in the game, America balanced. Having achieved its aim of restoring multipolarity, it sensibly returned home. Once it became clear that Hitler was threatening to start a major power war, statesmen started to buckpass again in order to hedge against a German victory. But this time multipolarity collapsed in spectacular fashion, and America was drawn into balancing again. The second act of the European civil war destroyed multipolarity forever, though the initial generation of American statesmen was unaware of this fact. They therefore spent a lengthy period attempting ever more innovative ways to buckpass. Still, bipolarity was at hand and Kennedy finally bowed to its logic, perhaps because imminent parity in nuclear weapons made its rigors less costly.

The first thing to note about this explanation is that it partakes heavily of structural realist indeterminacy—it omits discussion of its key independent variable, the character of failing multipolarity. Without more specification about the nature of its independent variable, it cannot provide a consistent theoretical answer to several important questions. First, what distributions of power cause America to move from non-entanglement to buckpassing? In 1914, it apparently took a system-wide war. In 1937, Hitler had not yet begun his aggression, but Roosevelt was already reaching for influence to bolster the European balance. What distributions of power cause America to move from buckpassing to balancing? In 1917, a stalemated war in Europe was enough. It took the collapse of France in 1940, plus another year and a half of dithering. And from 1945-1960, buckpassing continued in the face of bipolarity until Kennedy somehow woke up to the truth. None of the power distributions that correlate with strategic change are obviously all that similar, and an extended analysis of the economic data increases rather than decreases the puzzle.

Second, a full development of the core logic underpinning the purely structural realist explanation seems at odds with American behavior. Theoretically, massive wealth and
geopolitical distance seem to lead to an inference that America ought to wait until the last possible minute to commit to bolstering the balance of power. After all, the whole idea of the theoretical appeal to potential hegemons is that America can afford to free-ride, and will desire to do so, until a power appears that might be able to overcome America’s enormous defensive advantage. This logic ought to predict late, and probably failed, buckpassing, followed by balancing. Yet the three cases of buckpassing all occurred quite early. It would seem that America’s giant moats make it feel incredibly secure, right up until there is any kind of disturbance in Europe, at which point American statesmen begin to worry about a long string of falling dominoes building a bridge across the Atlantic.

Furthermore, once buckpassing has begun, ought not America’s defensive advantages incentivize continued buckpassing as long as possible? Why would a purely anti-hegemonic America commit before it becomes clear that multipolarity cannot be maintained without American troops on the ground? Isn’t the most likely trigger for balancing the partial collapse of multipolarity? This condition held in 1940, but Roosevelt then took eighteen additional months to get into the war, demonstrating that even then a buckpassing strategy still had possibilities. It did not hold at all in 1917 or 1961.

Even granting, for a moment, that the Entente was in the midst of collapsing in 1917, nothing about the situation forced Wilson to make a large ground commitment—particularly seeing as his insistence on an independent American Army led that commitment to be postponed and operationally less significant. A naval and financial war would have worked just as well to end the submarine threat to Britain and prop up the Allies in the trenches. And during the Cold War, the possibility of multipolarity was growing more robust as time moved forward: Europe was growing rich, and nuclear weapons were decreasing the relevance of Soviet industrial and conventional advantages.

Third, the structural realist explanation is at odds with what we observe in the process of American decision-making. The implication of a theory based entirely on America’s huge defensive advantage is that American commitments ought to be propelled by fears that its advantage is about to erode precipitously. We ought to observe decision-makers at least worried that the balance of power is about to collapse. Again, Roosevelt is the best case for a purely structural explanation. Even before the fall of France, it is possible to find him expressing concern about Allied prospects in a European war.

However, Roosevelt also frequently talked in private along the lines that “France could [not] penetrate the German frontier. It would cost France a million men to do this. Neither could Germany overcome the Maginot line... Russia cannot strike effectively at Germany across Romania. Neither could England be effective” on land. Indeed, his entire policy of helping the Allies through air rearmament was based on the premise that the defense held the advantage in Europe, and that therefore any war would be one of bombing, economic blockade, and starvation. After May 1940, a major change in threat perception occurs, but even then, Roosevelt’s administration provided him with ample arguments that American security rested only on the preservation of the British home islands, the Royal Navy, and the Red Army.

From the moment Wilson decided to buckpass until the day he asked Congress for a declaration of war, he believed the Allies were going to win the war. On February 15, 1917, Wilson “was not in sympathy with any great preparedness,” arguing “that Europe would be man and money poor at the end of the war.” Most of the major events supporting the argument the multipolarity was failing in 1917 occurred after America joined the fray: the French Army did not mutiny until May, the Bolshevik revolution was nearly eight months in the future, and
Caporetto did not occur until late October. The March mutiny of Russian troops and Kerensky’s corresponding revolution occurred before American entry, but were interpreted in a positive light. Unrestricted submarine warfare had begun, but Wilson showed no sign of worrying that it was a major problem. Most of official Washington agreed with these assessments. Indeed, a leading American general noted in mid-1917 that the Army “did not assume that the Entente Allies were in such a condition” as they turned out to be, and that “our knowledge of what seems to be the real situation began to clarify shortly after the arrival of the English and the French missions” in April and May, 1917. American commitments under Wilson were simply not motivated by a fear of an eroding defensive advantage.

In the late 1960s, Eisenhower and Kennedy shared a similar view of the European balance of power: America had a decisive nuclear advantage in Europe, but it was a wasting asset. Eisenhower “did not believe that limited war was possible in Europe” while Kennedy thought that very small European nuclear forces “should be capable of deterring Mr. Khrushchev. He pointed out that twenty missiles in Cuba had had a deterrent effect on us.” In short, nuclear weapons were game changers; even in small numbers that made aggression extremely difficult. The difference between the two administrations was that MAD was an outcome of great rejoicing for Eisenhower, “since the NATO [conventional] shield could be symbolic.” For Kennedy, MAD was a matter of deep concern: “As soon as the French have a nuclear capability… we have much less to offer Europe,” Kennedy argued, and “if we are not vital to Germany, then our NATO strategy makes no sense.” The irony of America’s fifteen year struggle to buckpass is that it had finally found the solution to its eroding defensive advantage right as it opted to change strategies. The Kennedy administration was no more concerned, and probably even less concerned, about the European balance than Eisenhower.

All of this is simply to say that structural conditions alone do not explain American strategy. The international system sent a powerful signal that could not be ignored from 1940 through the end of the period covered here. Moreover, the international system served as an integrating force for American strategy and a permissive condition for liberal aims, even when there was no potential hegemon. Given the “difficulty” of the American case for geopolitical theories, one must conclude that this study gives them increased credence, and that it demonstrates just how powerful a factor the international system can be. But there is much more to the story of American grand strategy.

The Future of American Grand Strategy

I conclude this study by using TLFP as a tool for speculating on the future of American foreign policy. Such an exercise must be approached with caution, for two reasons. First, TLFP’s empirical domain of European great power politics does not appear likely to play as dominant a role in future world politics as it has in the past. Rigorously adapting TLFP’s expectations for other areas would probably require some adjustments to account for important factors not considered in this study. Second, the future values of TLFP’s independent variables cannot be estimated with any precision. Power trends and political thought have surprised observers in the past and are likely to do so again.

Even so, an uncertain lens applied to unfamiliar terrain can still bring important features into focus. Moreover, I believe we can predict with confidence that American grand strategy will critically impact world politics in the decade to come. If for no other reason, trying to anticipate America’s future course is a worthy enterprise. I approach this task in two parts. I
begin by using TLFP to interpret the recent past history of American grand strategy in Europe, in order to establish a basis for thinking about the current values of TLFP’s variables and the present character of American grand strategy. I then propose two types of foreign policy problems the United States is likely to face in the coming decades, and their potential outcomes if TLFP’s variables remain at their present values. I also consider ways in which TLFP’s variables might change, and the effects these changes might have.

TLFP AND POST-COLD WAR FOREIGN POLICY

I hope that the reader will accept, for the sake of the argument, the following propositions. First, with the collapse of the Soviet empire, the threat of a European potential hegemon disappeared. America was left with a massive power advantage over a weak multipolar system—a situation different in degree, but not in kind, from the position it held after the First World War. Second, American presidents in the post-Cold War era have shown few inclinations towards negative liberal ideals. Certainly, none of the centralizing fears and distrust of economic interventionism expressed by Coolidge or Harding are anywhere evident, and even the more restrained worries of Eisenhower seem largely absent. I grant that negative liberal rhetoric is still strikes a powerful cord in American culture, and that it can often be heard during election season. But it seems to be in eclipse among the American elite—policy-makers from both parties appear to have accepted a large and growing centralized state involved in the management of a mixed economy.

I therefore posit that the positive liberal ideals historically accompanying these trends were present in the two Bush administrations as well as those of Clinton and Obama, though a serious investigation of this claim would require a great deal of evidence. Given the diminished power constellation of Europe, TLFP would expect positive liberals to pursue a grand strategy of preponderance. Depending on the extent of American superiority and the degree of resistance from the system, the strategy might or might not be pressured back towards balancing. What have we observed?

American grand strategy in Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall appears to be a model strategy of preponderance. America has not only remained the dominant European great power, but it has expanded its political reach through its command of NATO. Four important policies reveal this trend.

First, the conclusion of the Cold War saw the United States support the expansion of NATO to include a re-unified Germany. To obtain these ends, Washington played diplomatic hardball with the Soviets, forcing Moscow to accept American terms as though it had “suffered a reversal of fortunes not unlike a catastrophic defeat in war.” The Americans were no less stern with the Germans themselves: the conditions for reunification were that “Germany would continue to rely on NATO for protection…. The Germans would thus forego pursuit of a purely national defense, including the development of their own nuclear weapons.” President George H.W. Bush pithily summarized American attitudes: “What worries me is talk that Germany must not stay in NATO. To hell with that! We prevailed, they didn’t. We can’t let the Soviets snatch
victory from the jaws of defeat.” There was only one pole left in Europe and neither the Germans nor the Russians would be allowed to think otherwise.⁸

Second, during the 1990s, NATO expanded eastward to the borders of the former Soviet Union, threatening Moscow’s security and assuming responsibility for states that were strategic liabilities. America supported this policy for positive liberal reasons: to secure liberal values in Eastern Europe and to protect them in Western Europe. Undersecretary of Defense Walter Slocombe defended the policy by arguing that “We have the possibility to build a system in Europe—and indeed the entire world—organized on the model of... liberal market democracies living in peace with their neighbors.” President Clinton publically remarked that “I came to office convinced that NATO can do for Europe’s East what it did for Europe’s West: prevent a return to local rivalries, strengthen democracy against future threats, and create the conditions for prosperity to flourish.” The logic was similar to that employed by Kennedy and Wilson: without a security umbrella, Eastern Europe would be torn with illiberalism and strife; such “instability” might even “spill over” into the West European core and trigger illiberal impulses there. The future was better for all parties if America expanded its position as hegemonic manager of the system.⁹

Third, NATO expanded its mission to include putting out fires along the European periphery, which culminated in two wars against unpleasant regimes in the former Yugoslavia. Ethnic Serbian leadership in both the Bosnia and Kosovo wars was perceived as brutal and illiberal, a fit target for reform with U.S. power. The conflicts were also tied to larger grand strategic concerns. As President Clinton wrote, “If the [Dayton] negotiations fail and the war resumes, there is a very real risk that it could spread beyond Bosnia, and involve Europe’s new democracies, as well as our NATO allies.” Furthermore, war would disrupt the economic relationships that had led to a prosperous market economy in Europe and lowered restrictions on American commerce. Defending the Kosovo intervention in terms reminiscent of Roosevelt, Clinton noted that “If we’re going to have a strong economic relationship that includes our ability to sell around the world, Europe has got to be key.... That’s what this Kosovo thing is all about.” Wars on the European periphery were caused by illiberalism and threatened to upset the liberal order that Washington had been protecting and expanding. Intervention was the obvious solution.¹⁰

Finally, America worked diligently to ensure that NATO maintained its position as the hegemonic security institution on the continent. Washington worked hard to squash the potential emergence of any independent poles of military power, most notably in its reaction to the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). The ESDP, and especially its Rapid Reaction Force, threatened to produce an autonomous military capability in Europe outside American control. Rather than accept the potential for reduced American costs, the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations reacted with unremitting hostility. Both administrations sought to divert European efforts towards a separate response force within NATO. They also laid down principals stating that America could only accept a European force that did not diminish NATO’s

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role, duplicate NATO's capabilities, or discriminate against NATO members outside the EU. In short, NATO was to have the right of first refusal on any security issue, and rival organizations would exist only at its sufferance. It is not surprising that the Europeans have apparently decided an ESDP is more trouble than it is worth.\(^\text{11}\)

**TLFP AND THE FUTURE OF WORLD POLITICS**

The American grand strategy in after the Cold War Europe logically follows from TLFP's variables, which plausibly hold values that would predict a strategy of preponderance. What does this bode for the future of American foreign policy? Here I look at two areas outside of TLFP's domain, but relevant to the future course of international relations: great power politics in Asia and American intervention in the developing world.

The development of great power politics among the rising powers of Asia will be contingent, in part, on what role America decides to play. How will an economically powerful China interface with other states in the region? Will Asia become a bipolar or multipolar system? What course will regional rivalries take, such as those on the across the Sea of Japan? To what extent will Asian politics become institutionalized, and what will be the nature and scope of those institutions? American strategy will importantly influence the answers to those questions.

Similarly, the economic change and political stability of the developing world will be shaped by American choices. Will the United States continue to prioritize political democracy and economic freedom as essential goals of its foreign policy? Is it likely to engage in further attempts at regime change in the Middle East and Southwest Asia? Will the American military continue to focus on counter-insurgency operations and how likely are such campaigns in the future? How will the problem of international terrorism emanating from the developing world manifest itself?

If the predominance of positive liberty among the American security elite continues to be combined with unrivaled American power, TLFP predicts that American grand strategy will continue on its post-Cold War course for quite some time. In both Asia and the developing world, the United States is liable to pursue an expansive and expensive foreign policy. Though point predictions about foreign policy are probably beyond the ken of any social science theory, this study suggests some general answers to the questions above.

The United States is likely to remain heavily engaged in Asia and will be a potential source of friction in Asian politics. Positive liberal statesmen will probably perceive threats to liberal values in Asia in the absence of American political influence. They are likely to see reduced American engagement as an invitation for illiberal forces in China, and perhaps even Japan and South Korea, to cause trouble. Under current conditions, Washington is therefore likely to pursue and increase its diplomatic engagement in the Pacific. Militarily, American naval dominance is likely to lead to a quiescent security arena in the short term, but statesmen will be tempted to look for ways to project power and influence onto the mainland. America will pursue institutions to the extent that it believes they can provide a source of control over its allies and will accept increased costs and risks to do so. Washington's traditional "hub-and-spoke"

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system of alliances in Asia developed in part to ensure a predominant American influence over politics in Northeast Asia, and will continue to be valued by diplomats for that reason.\textsuperscript{12}

But the degree to which Asian states are willing to tolerate such control will be a major influence on America's posture in the region. As geopolitical insights indicate, there are always strong incentives to resist pressures that infringe on national sovereignty. There have been growing signs of resistance to American hegemony in Japanese politics, although their future is highly uncertain. Furthermore, China's rise is leading to the development of institutions within Asia that America is unlikely to dominate. Such an eventuality will increase both the American reliance on its traditional alliance system and the tensions that system causes. Fortunately, the potential for catastrophic blunders of the sort Europe saw in the twentieth century is lessened—Asian geography provides neither an easy route for conquest nor an easy outlet for an American foothold. Still, a strategy of preponderance is sure to involve America reaching out for more political control, with resulting pushback.\textsuperscript{13}

American diplomats will also continue to pursue democracy and free-markets in the developing world and will occasionally find excuses to use become militarily involved in the internal politics of other states. Barack Obama's recent adventure in Libya is a good example, and likely to remain typical. The potential to impact the development of liberal institutions abroad will be strongly tempting to positive liberal statesmen. They are also likely to believe that illiberal regimes produce conflicts, and that those conflicts will spill-over and affect liberal institutions in other places. Such threats will give additional incentives to act. Whatever the opinions of the American military, American statesmen will likely remain interested in counter-insurgency capabilities and will find reasons to use them. The threat of terrorism will be explicitly connected to the absence of liberalism, and to the potentially transformative power of ground forces. In short: get ready for more of the same.

If present conditions persist, history will not repeat itself, but it will, as is said, rhyme. However, it is not clear that American power will remain unchallenged, nor that positive liberty will remain the elite consensus forever. Two plausible sources of geopolitical and ideological change are apparent, and either of them could provide sources of restraint on American foreign policy.

First, if China's rapid economic growth continues, it may well become a kind of peer competitor to the United States, providing some of the effects of a potential hegemon. This could create pressures for a grand strategy of balancing rather than preponderance; a China interested in playing a global role could discipline American foreign policy across a range of areas. Consider the evolution of the bipolar structure in Europe—after Kennedy accepted a permanent American presence in Germany, Europe was locked into the kind of stability predicted by structural realist theory. Competition ensued, to be sure, but core issues were handled with discipline and prudence on both sides. A Chinese peer competitor would not have identical results, and could potentially lead to increased competition in the periphery, but it might also provide a source of restraint on American commitments currently lacking.


Second, American ideology might very well evolve in a negative liberal direction—ideas are hard things to kill. The recent rival of libertarian rhetoric under the “Tea Party” umbrella points to the persistence of individualist, de-centralist, and laissez-faire sentiments in American culture. The movement has also been intermittently associated with calls for a restrained foreign policy, especially among new congressmen, although the Tea Party’s commitment to these ideas is certainly open to question. This study has shown, however, that a committed ideologue in the White House can accomplish a great deal—it is not implausible that a genuine Tea Party sympathizer might secure a major party nomination and win the Oval Office. Indeed, I would speculate that presidential elections are key mechanisms for ideological revival and renewal. The diffuse negative liberal sentiment currently seen in parts of the American electorate could very well find influence in American foreign policy through its impact on party competition.

But even if the Tea Party is just an ideological vessel for populist reaction, there are larger forces within the American body politic that may revive some form of negative liberalism. America will face, eventually, a severe fiscal crunch: it supports a large welfare state and a large military with a low tax base and high debt. Working out the painful compromises necessary for fiscal sustainability is liable to involve ideological entrepreneurship. Such ideas will probably have to justify ratcheting back state power and authority, even if only modestly. American culture suggests that political ideologies are likely to be expressed in liberal terms, and American political discourse could well begin to see a fusion of classical negative liberal tropes with more modern expectations about the state. As this study has demonstrated, once an ideology is in place it can have a powerful effect. The political movement that is able to manage America’s fiscal crunch may be imbued with the ideological resources that independently move America towards less commitment abroad.

All of the preceding is, of course, just speculation. The larger point is that TLFP has provided real leverage in explaining past American behavior and plausibly helps explain the recent expansion of American grand strategy. Neither geopolitical nor ideological forces have gone away, whatever their present values. If American grand strategy is going to change, TLFP’s variables will likely be involved in some fashion.
Acknowledgments

Gentle reader, if you have happened upon these acknowledgments by chance, be forewarned: what follows does not conform with professional standards. It is likely that most of those who read these acknowledgements are named in them and are thus already aware of my unmatched professionalism in all things.

Acknowledgments are usually a fitting capstone to a finely-honed piece of research. Austere and reserved, they acknowledge the many intellectual debts an academic accumulates during the process of writing and thinking. Understatement, brevity, and occasionally a touch of dry wit are the calling cards of such notes, following the character of the refined manuscript they preface. Perhaps some day I will write such a manuscript and display a similar aesthetic in recognizing my obligations. But a dissertation is different, and a glance at this one will confirm that understatement and brevity are not my strong suits. I tend towards the grandiloquent and baroque; the lyrical and overdrawn; and chiefly, the lengthy.

More importantly, I cannot contain my gratitude in the spare high modernist style commonly used for these remarks. I came to graduate school when I was twenty-two years old and leave having just turned thirty. For eight years I have lived with this project in one form or another, or more accurately, it has lived with me. During that period, my character has evolved, my outlook has changed, and I have even matured a little—though this last point is in dispute. Above all, I have grown-up. I have done so with the help and sufferance of the many people mentioned below, an eclectic group whose intellectual capabilities are exceeded only by their irrational affection for me and unequaled sacrifices on my behalf. In short, I acknowledge here the deeply personal debts of a man shaped, changed, and renewed. The intellectual achievement—such as it is—of this dissertation is only a proxy for the more meaningful process that underlay it.

I begin at the top. Sadly, I will never be a professional athlete or a famous musician. But that doesn’t mean I can’t incongruously thank God in a moment of fleeting temporal triumph. I suspect that the heavenly host remarks more upon my frequent impiety than the completion of my thesis, but nonetheless, it certainly took the efforts of a vast spiritual army to see me through to the end. I envy those strong enough to pass through the turmoil of writing on their own. For me, it took faith. I thank the triune God for giving me courage, strength, understanding, joy, and hope during times of deep troubles. Quærum tu solus Sanctus, tu solus Dæminus, tu solus Altissimus, Iesu Christe, cum Sancto Spiritu: in glória Dei Patris. More glibly, unlike everyone else mentioned below, I cannot reasonably excuse my creator from the errors that remain in this manuscript. If you don’t like the product, ultimately, you will need to take it up with Him.

My family has always been the backbone of my life. I have been blessed beyond reason in being born to John and Lynn Green, whose love, support, and constant encouragement have shaped this manuscript and molded my life. Both of them read most of the chapters and caught a shocking number of errors; likewise with managing my adolescence. If this thesis is readable, or my personality tolerable, it is because of them. My father deserves special recognition for inspiring me to intellectual inquiry, introducing me to political debate, and teaching me how to write. Alas, that I have not yet learned how to edit. Not least of all, a more cheerful, loyal, and loving sister than Darcy Green I cannot imagine. She knows there’s better brothers, but I’m the only one that’s hers.

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Of course, education at a graduate level is done more through a community of fellow
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What more can I say? Like my prose, my cup runneth over. For no good reason, I have found myself surrounded by outstanding mentors, friends, and colleagues. They have made me whom I am, and this thesis what it is. Sadly, there weren’t working with very good material: the
many errors of fact, interpretation, and argument that remain are my own, and reflect poorly on my essential character. But if there is merit to be found herein, it is a testament to their efforts.

B.R.G.

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