WHEN LIBERALS WERE HAWKS:
LIBERAL INTERNATIONALISM, THE REPUBLICAN RIGHT, AND THE COLD WAR

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Maybe what the Democrats need post-9/11 is exactly what they rejected after Vietnam.

Peter Beinart, Editor of the *New Republic* (2004)[1]

During the 1960 presidential campaign against Vice President Richard Nixon, Senator John Kennedy criticized the Eisenhower administration for allowing a communist revolution to succeed in Cuba. "He saw the conditions," Kennedy said of Nixon's visits to Cuba, "he talked with the leaders. He knew what our aid program consisted of. But his only conclusion, as stated in a Havana press conference, was his statement that he was 'very much impressed with the competence and stability' of the Batista dictatorship." Kennedy did not mince words. "Major policy issues such as Cuban security is made at the highest level," he said, and the party in power "must accept the responsibility for this disaster."[2] Democrats claimed that Fidel Castro's triumph was symptomatic of an administration that was so consumed with balancing budgets and cutting taxes that they allowed national security to fall by the wayside. "If the President had shown more backbone and courage earlier," said one delegate at the Democratic Convention, "we wouldn't be in the fix we are in in Cuba…."[3]

These accusations were not that surprising. As more Republicans abandoned bipartisanship in the early-1950s, Democrats had responded in kind. This paper is based on the second chapter of a history that I am writing about national security politics since WWII. The first chapter of the book focuses on the period between 1949 and 1952 when a new generation of hawkish Republicans turned into a serious political force. Younger Republicans like Richard Nixon, Barry Goldwater, and James Burnham broke from the

isolationist traditions of the GOP. They gained ground on Democrats through issues such as “Who Lost China?”

Between 1949 and 1964, national security was a classic example of how partisan competition could become fierce and intense even when there was a strong consensus over basic policies and ideas. Sometimes in American politics, differences of degree and emphasis are the ones that generate the most heated political fights. During the Cold War, the widespread acceptance of the strategy of containment and multilaterialism did not prevent Republicans and Democrats from highlighting their differences on the campaign trail and using relatively minor distinctions (from an international perspective) to hammer away at their opponents.

The Republican Right rejected the liberal claim promoted in WWI and WWII that broad public sacrifice was a prerequisite for achieving national security. The Republican Right argued in the 1940s and 1950s that the U.S. could rely on a strong air force and high-tech weaponry as the main components of military strength, along with professional soldiers rather than draftees. Asia, they said, rather than Europe would be the continent where the battle with communism would be resolved. Willing to cede power of the president, the Republican Right was still insistent on defending congressional authority. Finally, the Republican Right considered aggressive domestic surveillance to be more important than civil liberties. Often dismissed by historians as a fringe force that had limited impact on mainstream politics in a “liberal era,” the Republican Right had inflicted substantial damage on their opponents.

Long before ground troops entered into Vietnam, the Republican Right had weakened the political standing of liberal internationalism, the dominant force in national

politics before 1949. Liberal internationalism was an ideology supported by Democrats and internationalist Republicans who called for a strong national security state as well as for a robust social agenda. Proponents of liberal internationalism were the architects of America's WWII and Cold War policies. During the 1940s, liberal internationalism commanded strong support among politicians in the executive branch, northern Democrats and some Republicans in Congress, and powerful interest groups. Liberal internationalism called on citizens to sacrifice in order to protect security. Liberal Democrats likewise accepted the need to increase taxes to finance national security operations while maintaining domestic programs. Whereas liberal internationalism concurred that aggressive surveillance programs were essential to protecting America, they also strongly valued civil liberties and individual rights. More so than the Republican Right, proponents of liberal internationalism stressed the need to operate through international institutions as well as to combine diplomacy with military power.

When bipartisanship shaped most domestic policy deliberations in the 1950s and 1960s, this chapter shows how national security moved in the opposite direction. Within Congress, national security quickly turned into a political football. After the Republican Right abandoned the bipartisan model of Senator Arthur Vandenberg and President Harry Truman, Democrats responded after 1953 by unleashing forceful attacks on the national security policies of the GOP. Through accusations about Cuba as well as the "bomber and missile gap," many Democrats marginalized the Republican Right as extremists, depicted Republican leaders as fiscal zealots who were willing to sacrifice national security for lower taxes and balanced budgets, and popularized the image of a hawkish Democratic Party.

As Eisenhower attempted to promote the same kind of centrism in national security that was effective with domestic programs, Democrats developed their own version of “Who Lost China?” Based primarily in Congress, Democrats aiming toward the center of the electorate proved to be successful at countering the Republican Right. They linked liberal internationalism to a partisan rather than bipartisan political strategy. While Eisenhower won reelection to the White House in 1956, Democrats caused considerable damage to the image of the GOP on national security and improved their position in the legislature.

While liberals strengthened the standing of Democrats, the Republican Right remained alive and well. Well into the 1960s, most Democratic leaders, such as Lyndon Johnson, were convinced that they needed to take the threat from the right seriously.

The result was that national security had become a politicized and partisan issue by the mid-1960s. This created an explosive environment for policymakers who were dealing with national security issues. The pressure from this environment was an important factor that pushed many Democrats, including Lyndon Johnson, into supporting a disastrous military venture in Vietnam that ultimately shattered the political standing of liberal internationalism.

HOW REPUBLICANS STUMBLED

Rather than concede victory to Republicans after the 1952 election, Democrats fired back. The opportunity came early in Eisenhower’s administration with conflicts over executive power, anti-communist investigations, and budget cuts. Republicans found themselves susceptible to attack despite an enormously popular president. While championing the ideas of liberal internationalism, Democrats searched for appealing

issues that raised potent questions about the Republican commitment to an aggressive national security agenda.

The first opportunity for Democrats occurred when Eisenhower agreed to an armistice in Korea on July 27, 1953. The truce ended the bloodshed but left Korea divided along the thirty-eighth parallel. Many conservatives saw the agreement as a defeat for the Asian anti-communist agenda since the administration essentially accepted the pre-war status quo. Senator William Knowland went so far as to predict that the next step would be for the U.S. to grant Communist China a seat at the UN Security Council (Eisenhower had refused to affirm that he would permanently oppose their inclusion on the basis that the U.S. needed to maintain maximum flexibility in case conditions changed).[4] "I am disgusted and shocked," Knowland said, "we will lose all of Asia within four years and the balance of power will have overwhelmingly shifted to the Soviet Union and their satellites."[5] With conservatives in his party griping, the end of the Korean War offered Democrats an opportunity to highlight the "softness" of the GOP. If the truce had been designed by former President Truman and Dean Acheson, Senator Paul Douglas quipped, "there would have been cries throughout the country to impeach them."[6]

Democrats also exploited Republican divisions over executive power. In 1953, Ohio Republican John Bricker sponsored a constitutional amendment stipulating that Congress needed to pass legislation before United Nations treaties would have any effect in the U.S. The amendment also empowered Congress to regulate international agreements that were not formally treaties. Many southern Democrats supported the amendment since it would curtail the ability of an international human rights measure to

have an impact on civil rights conditions domestically. Bricker received support from a majority of congressional Republicans and southern Democrats, conservative organizations (such as the American Legion and the Daughters of the American Revolution), as well as rightward leaning newspapers.[7] There were many legislators in the Midwest, such as Illinois Republican Charles Halleck, who were under intense pressure from the local media to limit their support for foreign intervention.[8] Eisenhower opposed the amendment on the grounds that it would hamstring the president's ability to enter into needed treaties. The amendment, he said, "could have series effects in peace, and could approach disaster in time of war or threatened war."[9] Senator Alexander Wiley, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, warned the amendment would tie the hands of the president as he attempted to fight the Cold War.[10] Wiley said that Eisenhower needed to stop the "saboteurs, malcontents and goldbricks" that were harming their party.[11] Secretary of State John Foster Dulles insisted that no compromise was possible.[12]

To combat Bricker, Eisenhower was forced to rely on Senate Democrats. Through a series of legislative maneuvers, Minority Leader Lyndon Johnson convinced his colleagues to vote with the administration in order to make Republicans appear as the obstructionists. The final version of the amendment came one vote short of the two-thirds needed to send it to the states for ratification. It was only killed when opponents grabbed an intoxicated West Virginia Democrat Harley Kilgore, carried him into the chamber, and propped him up so that he could vote no.[13] As a result of the debate, Democrats were able to resurrect the charge that Republicans were isolationists intent on denying presidents the necessary institutional power to combat communism. In general, many younger

conservatives believed that Eisenhower's alliance with Senate Democrats had pushed him too far toward liberalism.[14] Highlighting GOP divisions such as these was an explicit Democratic strategy. "When Democrats felt that President Eisenhower was acting in the national interest," noted the Research Division of the Democratic National Committee, "they have supported him against the members of his own party—and have often saved the day for him."[15]

The third opportunity for Democrats to regain ground on the GOP occurred in 1954 when Senator Joe McCarthy overplayed his hand. Upon entering the White House, Eisenhower initially refrained from taking action against McCarthy even though he personally disliked the senator. Eisenhower sensed that a direct confrontation would only benefit the senator who had depended on media attention to advance his cause. At the same time, the president did not want to undermine McCarthy's broader anti-communist crusade since he and most Republicans agreed with the basic objectives. Thus, the president had preferred to limit himself to working behind-the-scenes to constrain McCarthy.

But this strategy ended in the summer of 1954 when McCarthy announced that his Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations would look into allegations about communist spies in the Army. "This guy McCarthy is going to get into trouble over this," Eisenhower said during a meeting with his staff and Illinois Senator Everett Dirksen, "I'm not going to take this one lying down . . . my friends tell me it won't be long in this Army stuff before McCarthy starts using my name . . . He wants to be President. He's the last guy in the world who'll ever get there, if I have anything to say."[16] The president's frustration with the senator reached a new peak. Like Senator Bricker and his

amendment, the president felt that conservatives in his own party were distracting Republicans from winning issues, preventing Congress from passing legislation, and creating the impression that the "leadership in the Republican Party has switched to McCarthy and that we are all dancing to his tune."[17] Furious with the accusations leveled by the senator, Army officials charged that McCarthy and his top staffer Roy Cohn had obtained special treatment to help their friend, David Schine, avoid the draft. North Dakota Republican Senator Karl Mundt chaired hearings into the accusations which lasted for twenty-two days and attracted huge television audiences. Democrats were not as restrained with McCarthy as in previous years. Senator Stuart Symington (MO) called the senator irresponsible and reckless. When McCarthy charged that Symington, a likely contender for the Democratic presidential nomination, was searching for campaign material, the senator responded: "I think you are furnishing enough as it is, Senator."[18]

Throughout the televised hearings, McCarthy looked terrible. By this time, he was drinking heavily. His appearance became the subject of jokes by television comedians such as Jackie Gleason and Milton Berle.[19] The biggest setback to McCarthy took place on June 9 when the Army's special counsel Joseph Welch denounced the senator on television. Following the hearings, Republican Ralph Flanders (VT) proposed censuring McCarthy for the damage that he had caused the Senate. On December 2, the Senate censured him by a vote of 67 to 22. Every Senate Democrat voted in favor of the censure, as did several Republicans.

The final blow to Republicans centered on Eisenhower's concern with deficit reduction. Soon after he was elected president, Eisenhower had become concerned about the high levels of government spending that resulted from the Korean intervention. The

president was influenced by the arguments of Secretary of Treasury George Humphrey, who warned that inflation and deficits were as great, if not greater, threats than the military capacity of the Soviet Union. The president told the National Security Council that the nation confronted two major threats: the Soviet Union and the economic costs of defending the free world.[20] Inflationary pressures caused by deficits, he said, could unsettle social relations by weakening the dollar. "We can only combat communism," the president explained, "in the long term if our economy is healthy."[21] Within the GOP, the president faced pressure from Senator Taft to make steeper defense cuts in order to allow room for tax reductions. In one uncomfortable meeting with Taft and administration officials on April 30, 1953, the senator attacked the president for spending as much as Truman. Taft assured the president that within a year GOP leaders would start lobbying for further tax reductions on the grounds that it would be essential for retaining control of Congress. Taft questioned the competence of the National Security Council, which had recommended the current spending levels. Yet at the same meeting, Senator Knowland warned Eisenhower that excessive cuts in military spending would allow Democrats to attack the GOP. Eisenhower agreed that they needed to stop the upward trend of expenditures to prevent a Democratic victory in 1954. But the president defended the personnel of the NSC and said the proposed budget would not harm Republican chances. He refused to endanger national security with a spending proposal that was inadequate to the job.[22]

Yet the president was also sympathetic to Taft's point. He acknowledged to his Cabinet that they were dealing with the "near impossibility" of obtaining budget cuts "in the face of the psychology of the country which insists on maintaining the great

obligations contracted in bygone times of peace, and also approves huge defense expenditures." There was a fundamental contradiction he said between the "Republican philosophy of a free economy" and the levels of federal spending that had been normalized.[23]

Seeking to resolve this contraction, on January 12, 1954, Eisenhower introduced a defense strategy entitled "The New Look" that promised to reduce the size of the armed forces and cut down on conventional weapons while investing more heavily in the nuclear arsenal. The administration insisted that the best way to avoid war in the modern age was to scare the Soviets through the threat of nuclear annihilation. Equally important to his motivation was the belief that it was cheaper to focus on nuclear weapons. The president said the nation had no use for "needless" standing armies and should emphasize better trained troops that were smaller in number.[24] Tactically, the president believed that nuclear weapons had rendered conventional warfare obsolete. Long-range bombers and guided missiles were now the weapons of choice. "We have no D-Day to build for," the president said.[25] Realizing that Democrats would attack the administration's proposals, Republicans urged him to stress his own expertise as a military leader and highlight the strategic rationale behind the decision.[26] Eisenhower exclaimed that "if anyone thinks I am trying to take unnecessary chances for the security of this country, they're just nuts. I get sick and tired of hearing about people who are trying to make politics out of something they don't know about."[27]

As his advisors predicted, Eisenhower's interest with defense cuts opened the GOP up to Democratic attack. When Congress passed the budget in the summer of 1954, Senator John Kennedy warned that reductions to the Army budget were dangerous. "It is

the height of folly," Kennedy said, "to reduce our strength when the Soviets are increasing theirs…."[28] In June, Senators Henry Jackson (WA) and Clinton Anderson (NM) sent the president a letter stating that the U.S. was falling behind the Soviets in the production of inter-continental ballistic missiles. The program to create these missiles, which were capable of carrying nuclear war heads across continents, began in WWII. Truman had allocated minimal funding to the program as a result of expenditures for Korea. In addition to Jackson and Anderson, the journalists Stewart and Joseph Alsop wrote numerous columns on Soviet technological advances. The president responded by recommending to the National Security Council that missiles should become a top priority.[29]

In July 1954, Democrats blamed the New Look when the French announced that they were withdrawing from Vietnam and allowing Ho Chi Minh's communist forces to rule the North. At a campaign event, Senator Johnson sarcastically said that "American foreign policy has never in all its history suffered such a stunning reversal. We have been caught bluffing our enemies . . . Today it is Indochina, where brave soldiers have fought and died in a French fort with an unpronounceable name while our own attention has been distracted . . . Tomorrow Asia may be in flames. And the day after, the Western alliance, which the Democrats so painstakingly built up brick by brick, will be in ruins."[30] Adlai Stevenson called the pullout a "sorry sequel of all the foolish, boastful Republican talk about liberation of the enslaved nations, about unleashing Chiang Kai-shek, seizing the initiative, a new look on foreign policy, no more little wars as in Korea, and, finally, that threatening talk by the Secretary of State and the Vice President about massive atomic retaliation which scared our allies half to death, if not our enemies . . . the 'New

Look' collapsed at the first test."[31] Some Republicans made the same argument. Senator Knowland, who was becoming a thorn in the side of the administration, called Vietnam the "Far Eastern Munich," a term that Eisenhower officials tried to prevent him from using.[32] Knowland's statements left the president wondering "whether he is a Republican leader or what."[33]

Democrats regained control of Congress in November 1954 with a 48-47 advantage in the Senate (one Independent) and a 232-203 lead in the House. The day after the election, Eisenhower told his Cabinet that bipartisanship, especially in the area of foreign policy, would be required.[34] He blamed the Republican loss of Congress on the "died-in-the-wool reactionary fringe" of the GOP, namely Senators McCarthy and Bricker, as well as domestic policy conflicts.[35] He said the party was divided between "Progressive Moderates and Conservative Rightists." Republicans, he believed, needed to become identified with the former group in order to convert Democrats to their party and win independent support. "If we could get every Republican committed as a 'Moderate Progressive' as opposed to McCarthy's cohort," the president believed, "the Party would grow so rapidly that within a few years it would dominate American politics."[36] The president said he had decided to stop working with the "radical Right Wing of the Republican Party" and "fight them right down the line" for the next two years.[37] He and his advisors were furious in February 1955 when conservative Republicans held a rally in Chicago to focus on "what must the Republican Party do in 1955 to preserve the Republic and itself." Senators Dirksen and McCarthy were two of the featured speakers. While White House officials did not think the rally would hurt Eisenhower, it could

easily alienate independent voters who would reject that type of conservative Republican agenda.[38]

Now that Democrats had full control of Congress, they departed from Johnson's flirtation with bipartisanship. Dean Acheson, still battered from his years at the State Department, came out swinging in 1955 with a book entitled *A Democrat Looks At His Party*. Reminding readers that "in 1950-52 the ferocity of the Republican attack knew no limits," Acheson boasted that Truman had insisted on balancing national security imperatives with his concern for budget cuts. In contrast, Acheson wrote, "the present administration appears to be acting upon the belief that fiscal considerations must be the governing ones."[39]

Senator Symington served as the point man in Democratic attacks in 1955 and 1956. He seemed to be the perfect man for the job. During his time as Secretary of the Air Force under President Truman, Symington had been an avid proponent of air power.[40] In 1952, Symington won election in Missouri to the U.S. Senate. He upset the isolationist incumbent James Kern. On June 25, 1953, during Symington's first speech on the floor, he condemned the administration for focusing on budget cuts at the expense of national security. As a result of cuts to the air force, Symington stated, "there is now no date in the foreseeable future when the United States will have reasonable security against atomic attack by the great and growing Soviet Air Force and submarine fleet."[41] In his first assignment on the Government Operations Committee, Symington worked closely with two hawkish Democrats: Senators Jackson and Kennedy. Symington even accused the Defense Department of being dishonest in its assessments of Soviet strength.[42]

Symington's power increased after the 1954 elections. Richard Russell, the new chair of the Armed Services Committee, stacked his panel with Democrats who were hawkish on defense. Most of his choices were senior Democrats, including Harry Byrd, Lyndon Johnson, and John Stennis. But Russell also placed two younger legislators on the panel who he saw as up-and-coming stars: Symington and Jackson. In 1955, Symington chaired hearings to determine whether the U.S. had "lost control of the air" to the Russians.[43] He attempted to turn air power into a mainstream Democratic issue. The Air Force capitalized on the hearings to lobby the administration for higher funding than the civilian leadership would accept.[44] Eisenhower and his top advisors met with Republican Senators Leverett Saltonstall and James Duff—both of whom were on the Symington committee--to explain that the president thought trying to match the Soviets soldier for soldier and weapon for weapon would result in economic suicide. General Pearsons warned Eisenhower's team that the Department of Defense had to be prepared to respond to charges emanating from the hearings so that the investigation did not "get away from us."[45]

Symington, Jackson, and Clinton Anderson warned that CIA intelligence estimates about Soviet weapons were wrong. "We have a history of under-estimation," Jackson said.[46] The Defense Department released data in May indicating that the Soviets had made significant gains in air power by building heavy jet bombers and all-weather fighters.[47] "Despite efforts to suppress discussion of the subject," Symington warned, "and despite the confusion of official utterances, evidence continues to pile up that Communist air power is moving up to us in offensive striking power, production and technology. The warning light is on."[48] Democrats such as Senators Albert Gore, (TN)

Kennedy, and John McCormack (MA) complained that the administration was putting "tax reductions ahead of the armed strength which America, as the leader of the free world, must have in order to inspire the confidence of other free nations."[49] The issue fostered an unexpected alliance between northern liberals and southern conservatives who otherwise found themselves at odds.[50] Democrats even received support from military leaders who were frustrated by the ongoing spending reductions.[51] The journalist William White observed that "Democrats, for the first time, were successfully challenging the President on a matter involving military judgment."[52]

In contrast to the GOP, liberals argued that economic growth could produce enough revenue to finance defense and social programs without straining the Treasury. Liberals in this era placed less emphasis than Republicans or southern Democrats on fiscal restraint.[53] As the Americans for Democratic Action explained in response to the budget debate: it was "dangerous nonsense . . . to say that this country, with its great riches and enormous productive capacity, 'cannot afford' the kind of national defense that is most likely to protect us against Communist aggression . . [the] over-riding issue before the American people today is whether the national defense is to be determined by the demands of the world situation or sacrificed to the worship of tax reductions and a balanced budget."[54]

In February 1956, Republicans accepted that Democrats would spend the remainder of the legislative session attacking the administration for under-funding the missile program. Nixon quipped that he was certain the missile program had been on a "starvation diet" long before Eisenhower came into office. He promised to resist playing politics with the issue until he was forced into doing so by Democrats.[55] A frustrated

Eisenhower warned his administration that the nation could "choke itself to death with military force as well as protect itself."[56] He warned: "there is no defense for any country that busts its own economy."[57]

Especially frustrating to Eisenhower was the fact that he could not boast about the administration's most aggressive national security initiatives since they were conducted secretly through the Central Intelligence Agency. In 1953, the CIA helped topple the democratically-elected government of Iran. In 1954, the agency assisted a coup in Guatemala. But these were initiatives that, by their nature, remained classified.

As if the Democratic attacks were not damaging enough, Eisenhower simultaneously came under criticism from the Republican Right who wanted him to take stronger stand in Asia.[58] In August 1954, Chiang Kai-shek relocated 73,000 troops to the islands of Quemoy and Matsu. On December 2, Eisenhower agreed to sign the Mutual Defense Treaty with the Nationalist Government. In January, Communist China announced that they sought to liberate Taiwan. Although Eisenhower warned against such action, Communist China bombed the nearby island of Tachen on January 10. Congressional Republicans demanded that Eisenhower should respond through force. The Joint Chiefs of Staff supported the use of nuclear weapons to defend the Nationalists. Secretary Dulles told congressional leaders that the U.S. needed to maintain their stand despite weak support from European allies.[59] But Eisenhower refused to bomb mainland China even though he faced pressure from Senator Knowland and his allies. Knowland had taken over as Republican leader when Robert Taft died in 1953. Eisenhower wrote General Alfred Gruenther that "Knowland has no foreign policy except to develop high blood pressure whenever he mentions the word 'Red China."[60] The president did not say

what he would do if the communists moved on Quemoy and Matsu. Knowland proposed a resolution that would grant the president the authority to respond militarily. “Those damned little offshore islands,” the president joked, “sometimes I wish they’d sink.”[61] The resolution, which allowed the president to defend Formosa and other islands in the vicinity, was primarily intended to warn the Chinese of how serious the U.S. was about defending the islands.[62]

The Formosa Resolution was historic given that Congress explicitly granted the president the authority to take military action solely on his discretion and without legislative consultation. The resolution constituted the second step in the expansion of presidential war-making authority that began when Truman sent troops to Korea without a formal declaration of war. Congress passed the resolution by huge margins: 83-3 in the Senate and 410-3 in the House. A handful of critics, such as Oregon Senator Wayne Morse, opposed the measure for granting the president the power to enter a “preventative war.”[63]

Although Eisenhower never resorted to military action, the controversy aggravated the rifts that existed within the GOP over national security. Senator McCarthy complained that “the Administration has abandoned all hope and intention of aiding the liberation of China.”[64] Knowland emerged as a hero to fellow conservatives. He published an article in the *National Review* on November 15, 1955 that called for a policy of liberation. Right-wing organizations floated his name as a presidential candidate.[65] Naming him as one of the ten most powerful members of Congress, the *New York Times* wrote that Knowland “is a man with an unquestionably sincere mission to harden our policy toward Asian communism….”[66] While Democrats used the bomber and missile

issue to strengthen their hawkish credentials with the public, they were capitalizing on Republican divisions over Formosa to brandish the GOP as a "War Party" hell-bent on military conflict.[67]

Conservative Republicans and Democrats were attacking Eisenhower as he failed to fulfill Republican promises to move beyond the policy of containment. In October 1956, the Soviets crushed a civilian uprising against the communist regime in Hungary. After internal deliberation, the administration decided against responding. Eisenhower realized that any type of military action could escalate into war. The decision constituted a huge blow to the claims that Eisenhower had made in 1952 about seeking liberation for those who were living under communist oppression. Senator Knowland wrote Dulles that "the abandonment of the Eastern European Countries to the Soviet Union or to Communism of a more local variety is not an acceptable solution."[68] Democrats pointed to Hungary as evidence of the shortcomings of the New Look. They said that it revealed the hypocrisy of the Republican "policy of liberation" which had been sold as an alternative to containment. As one Democrat wrote, a scan of the names of Republicans who favored "the 'policy of liberation' reveals that it is studded with the most intransigent hard-core isolationists in the House of Representatives—men who are considerably to the right of Senator Taft, who belong rather in the Chicago Tribune School of foreign policy . . . these members of Congress have [pointing to legislators such as Clarence Brown of Ohio and Clare Hoffman of Michigan], with almost complete unanimity, voted against the whole bipartisan foreign policy program to build collective security against communism during the past five years . . . they have an almost perfect record for opposing everything which would help to bring about the liberation which they

now so piously claim they are seeking."[69] Yale's Eugene Rostow urged Adlai Stevenson in his re-election bid to put "the Republicans on the defensive on the great issue, Ike's passivity in allowing the Communists to alter the balance of power, to weaken our alliances, to gain in the uncommitted areas, and to grow faster than us in economic, military, and intellectual strength."[70]

Before 1957, Eisenhower remained enormously popular despite these attacks from the left and right. Most important, Democrats did not find a candidate who was able to take advantage of these issues to overcome the president's popularity. In 1956, Eisenhower coasted to re-election. He received 457 electoral votes and 57.4 percent of the popular vote, while Stevenson only obtained 73 electoral votes and 42 percent of the electoral vote. However, Eisenhower became the first president in 108 years who did not win either chamber of Congress. In a conversation with Nixon, the president blamed divided government on "those damned moss-backs and hard-shell conservatives," who were holding the GOP back.[71]

THE SPUTNIK EFFECT

A few months after the election, Symington's subcommittee kept up the pressure by releasing a report on American air power. It claimed that the "vulnerability" of the U.S. to attack had increased over the past decade because Russia had developed a stronger air force while the U.S. maintained an inadequate "defense warning system." According to the report, the Air Force did not have the technology needed to make full use of strategic air bombers.[72] The two person minority, Leverett Saltonstall (MA) and James Duff (PA), rejected the conclusions as unduly pessimistic and overly partisan. Editors at the *Wall Street Journal* said that "the danger in these hair-raising reports is that the United States

might succumb to the temptation to play this numbers game—even, as some of its more exuberant proponents advocate, go into deficit financing in order to produce a vast additional quantity of military machines that in all probability would end on the junk heap."[73] While Republicans dismissed the report as partisan, the media devoted extensive coverage to the data in the publication. Symington flooded the airwaves to speak with reporters.[74]

Refusing to be intimidated by such warnings, during the summer of 1957 the president continued his campaign to achieve budget cuts. Speaking to the National Security Council in July, he said that many missile programs duplicated each other and that government needed to decide on the best "all-around" projects since the U.S. could not afford everything.[75] He also told his Cabinet that without defense cuts, large deficits would create the economic conditions that socialism needed to take root in America. Looking at the projected $53.7 national security budget for the upcoming fiscal year, a frustrated president asked his advisors: "How far do we have to go before we convince Russia!"[76]

But these concerns were drowned out on October 4, when Americans learned that the Soviets had sent the first satellite into outer space. The news arrived two months after the Soviets announced that they had completed a functional intercontinental missile. Sputnik played directly into Democratic warnings that the U.S. had fallen behind in the race to maintain military superiority. Only a few months earlier, Eisenhower admitted that there would be a tremendous "psychological value" if the Soviets launched the first missile—even though he did not believe that missiles would supplant airplanes, where the U.S. maintained a distinct advantage.[77] As one official told the National Security

Council, “while we could not permit ourselves to be panicked by the Soviet achievement” the success of the satellite was nonetheless significant because “if we lose repeatedly to the Russians . . . the accumulated damage would be tremendous.”[78] ADA’s Robert Nathan warned that Sputnik represented “the Soviet challenge to the free society in all its respects….”[79]

Senator Symington claimed that Sputnik had confirmed his predictions. Soon after the news was announced, the senator charged that Eisenhower was responsible for this failure. In response to a presidential statement that nothing more could have been done, Symington asked “how can the President tell the American people, and the people of the Free World, and the Communists, that he doesn’t ‘know what we could have done more,’ when for purely fiscal reasons, he has recently approved cutbacks and slowdowns and fiscal limitations in all fields of our national defense….”[80]

On October 5, Symington urged the president to call Congress into special session to deal with the situation. Seeking to contain the investigation into America’s alleged inadequacy, Senator Russell convinced Lyndon Johnson to chair hearings through the Defense Preparedness Subcommittee. Russell wanted to prevent Symington from gaining too much media exposure given that he was expected to be Johnson’s toughest competitor for the Democratic nomination in 1960. Johnson had reason to take charge. The Majority Leader’s assistant, George Reedy, told his boss that “the issue is one which, if properly handled, would blast the Republicans out of the water, unify the Democratic party, and elect you President . . . Eye [sic] think you should plan to plunge heavily into this one.”[81]

Meanwhile, the administration struggled to minimize public concern. On October 9, Eisenhower promised that Sputnik would not have serious military consequences.[82] The president explained that the U.S. maintained superiority as a result of technology such as the B-52 bomber.[83] On October 11, Vice President Nixon pointed to studies demonstrating that missile production had suffered more under Truman than under Eisenhower. He predicted that if Sputnik turned into a partisan battle, "we can tear them to pieces."[84] During a meeting of the National Security Council, Secretary Dulles characterized the satellite launch as part of a broader propaganda effort by the Soviets to demonstrate the superiority of communism to underdeveloped nations. As Nixon warned that the administration needed to be proactive as they became the target of congressional criticism and investigation, the president asked NSC members to keep re-stating that they already had a good plan in place and were going to stick with it regardless of recent events.[85] Nixon sent a detailed letter to reporter Arthur Krock which rebutted charges made by Symington. Krock published the information in *The New York Times.* Symington responded with his own memo attempting to show how Nixon was mischaracterizing the data about missiles. Krock published the senator's side of the debate as well.[86]

Yet the problems for Eisenhower increased on November 4 when the Soviets launched a second satellite into space. On that day, the Gaither Commission informed the president that the U.S. had fallen behind in missile production. Eisenhower had assembled this top secret commission earlier in 1957 with the intention of evaluating civilian defense programs. But a change in the commission's personnel in the summer of 1957--when Robert Sprague replaced James Gaither--produced a shift in focus from

civilian defense to missile production. On November 7, the commission reported on its findings to the National Security Council before the information became public. According to former Secretary of Defense Robert Lovett, reading the report was "like looking into the abyss and seeing Hell at the bottom."[87] Eisenhower was not convinced by their conclusions. He told NSC members that it was important to avoid panicking though they could also not afford to be complacent. To stress the economic costs of a massive escalation, the president asked committee members if they were prepared to advocate economic controls to finance such an ambitious program.[88] The president saw the report as a political problem, not a substantive national security concern.[89] When later in the evening he addressed the nation to assure citizens that the missile issue was under control, polls revealed the public response was negative and Democrats were gaining ground.

Throughout these weeks, Eisenhower refrained from making public the most compelling evidence which suggested that Democrats were wrong: photographs from secret U-2 reconnaissance flights indicating the Soviets were exaggerating their missile capacity. Eisenhower did not disclose the pictures for fear of undermining the classified program.

Senator Johnson, calling Sputnik a disaster "comparable to Pearl Harbor," began his subcommittee hearings into missile production on November 25.[90] Although Johnson promised to conduct the hearings in bipartisan fashion, the atmosphere heated up quickly. Symington, who served on the panel, proved impossible to control. When CIA Director Allen Dulles told the senators behind closed doors about classified information revealing the Soviets were ahead in certain types of weapons programs, Symington shared the data

with reporters.[91] The president was frustrated that he could not prevent leaks about the report from reaching the media.[92] The existence of the Gaither Commission itself became a subject of contention. On November 26, the White House reluctantly confirmed that there was a commission.[93]

When Johnson's subcommittee requested a copy of the report to use in their hearings, the president refused to release it on the grounds that it would jeopardize national security.[94] Democrat Thomas Hennings (MO) complained that "withholding of information from the public and Congress unfortunately seems to have become rather commonplace in recent years, so it really shouldn't surprise anyone that the Administration insists on keeping secret a document as embarrassing and explosive as the Gaither Report is reputed to be."[95]

In the middle of this controversy, the U.S. attempted to launch its first satellite on December 6. Only seconds in the air, the missile exploded. U.S. officials were humiliated.

By late December, newspapers working with leaked information were providing readers with detailed descriptions of the Gaither report. In *The Washington Post*, Chalmers Roberts wrote that the Gaither Commission report "portrays a United States in the gravest danger in its history. It pictures the Nation moving in frightening course to the status of a second-class power. It shows an America exposed to an almost immediate threat from the missile-bristling Soviet Union.[96] The editors of *The New York Times* lamented that the nation had lived in a "fool's paradise" as a result of its "refusal to face the realities of the dangerous world in which we live. We have underestimated the Russians, the Communist Chinese, the Nasser Egyptians and other opponents of our free

way of live . . . We have lived in a state of pampered luxury, while our enemies gathered strength against us."[97] While the U.S. Information Agency found that Sputnik had little overall effect on worldwide opinion of the U.S., it had caused a decline in confidence in American superiority in scientific and military research. In France and Britain, the proportion of people who thought that Russia was militarily superior to the U.S. exceeded those who believed the reverse.[98]

In January 1958, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund released a study with similar warnings to the Gaither report. The study, which emanated from a panel that included prominent figures such as Nelson Rockefeller, Arthur Burns (former chief economist for Eisenhower), Henry Kissinger, Henry Luce, Edward Teller, and Robert Anderson (former Secretary of Treasury), said that the U.S. needed to increase defense spending by $3 billion per year. Warning of "national complacency," the report stated that "we can afford what has to be done to assure our security; indeed that we cannot afford less." Programs that were critically important to national security, the report said, "suffer from insufficient funds."[99] Although the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee produced a nonpartisan document that refused to pin blame on the administration, they also reiterated the basic analysis laid out by Gaither and Rockefeller, namely that the U.S. was lagging behind the Soviets in ballistic missiles and space exploration. Democrats making these charges had reason to believe them to be true since they were based on public testimony and official statements by top government officials, studies produced by respected defense experts, and intelligence briefings and reports that came from congressional committees.[100]

The president temporarily slowed down Democratic momentum by calling for higher levels of defense spending. On January 31, the successful U.S. launch of a satellite into outer space also helped to boost confidence in the nation's scientific operations. In February, Johnson's advisors informed him that the public no longer cared about the issue. According to Jim Rowe, "you have gained all you can on space and missiles." George Reedy added that "the public had begun to calm down and the Buck Rogers serials had played themselves out."[101]

However, the missile crisis soon returned. The Democratic Advisory Council attacked the president. Headed by Paul Butler, the Council aimed to reinvigorate the Democratic Party. The DAC invited Dean Acheson to chair a committee charged with generating exciting ideas about foreign policy. Working with Paul Nitze, the author of NSC-68, Acheson's group published a series of hawkish booklets and pamphlets that warned about Eisenhower's failure to keep up with the Soviets. In one publication, the Council complained that the administration had made "the fundamental error of placing fiscal objectives and domestic political considerations ahead of the Nation's security . . . As supposed budgetary pressures have become more intense, the Administration has increasingly starved our national defense."[102] Moreover, the president opened himself up again to hawkish attacks when he began negotiations with the Soviets over a Test Ban Treaty.

In the summer of 1958, *New York Times* reporter Hanson Baldwin published a book that focused on the missile lag. Joseph Alsop wrote a series of articles in the *Washington Post* that issued similar warnings and dismissed administration claims that the threat was exaggerated. On August 29, Symington sent a letter to the president,

following a briefing from Director of the CIA Allen Dulles about missiles. The senator warned that his expert data (his main source of information was Thomas G. Lanphier, Jr. a WWII veteran who was vice president of the Convair Divison of General Dynamics in San Diego) contradicted what the Director had told senators during the hearing. Symington reported that his data suggested that between 1958 and 1964 the missile capacity of the U.S. would be so limited that the nation would be susceptible to political pressure and military intimidation from the Chinese-Soviet alliance.[103] A group of scholars from the RAND Corporation wrote a report that depicted a devious Soviet Union willing to initiate a devastating first strike.[104] RAND's Albert Wohlstetter rejected the premises of Mutual Assured Destruction, namely that U.S. nuclear capacity would prevent the Soviets from attacking. He urged the government to start planning for higher levels of defense spending in order to develop a second-strike capacity against the Soviets (which meant being able to strike back *after* being hit by nuclear bombs). Wohlstetter called for accepting the viability of limited nuclear wars. This would allow the government to make believable threats without calling for total nuclear attack.[105] Even Secretary Dulles privately agreed that the U.S. could no longer tolerate serious doubts by foreign leaders about whether officials would use their full arsenal. As the nuclear deterrent lost its effectiveness (as with Hungary), the U.S. needed to spend on alternative weapons. The budgetary implications, Dulles admitted to his colleagues, were enormous.[106]

Democrats sensed that the weapons controversy would be an effective campaign issue in 1958. "There has been a noticeable quickening of the fear people have over growing Russian power," pollster Louis Harris reported in his study of the electorate in

Massachusetts, “this is cumulative, stemming in part from the apparent weakness of the western alliance, but has also resulted from the well-publicized advances of the Russian’s in missiles and jet aviation and their political inroads into the Middle East.” There was great concern among voters that previous investments in defense were not paying off. As a result, it seemed that the “surest fire area of political advantage for Republicans in the Eisenhower era—foreign policy—has now lost its vote-getting prowess.”[107] Many Republicans were furious when the Secretary of Defense chose to travel around the world in October, right as Democrats were intensifying their attacks on the Republican defense establishment.[108]

Democrats described the “missile gap” with unprecedented specificity. Senator Kennedy compared the current situation in 1958 with Europe in 1940 when “the Germans achieved victory not because of the overall scale of her military force relative to France’s and Britain’s but because of her development of a new blitzkrieg technique built around mobile tanks and dive-bombers.”[109] Sounding more like a mathematician than a politician, Kennedy explained that the “deterrent ratio” was a mathematical formula constituting the sum of the striking power of the Soviet Union, the adequacy of American defenses, and the vulnerability of American retaliatory power being no greater that the sum of the retaliatory power of the U.S., the adequacy of Soviet defenses, and the vulnerability of the Soviet Union and its tolerance for destruction. After reviewing the data, Kennedy concluded that the deterrent ratio would be working “heavily” against the U.S. between 1960 and 1964. “The facts must be faced,” he said, “our peril is not simply because Russian striking power during the years of the gap will have a slight edge over us in missile power—they will have several times as many: intermediate range missiles to

devastate our own country, installations and government; and history's largest fleet of submarines, and possibly long-range supersonic jet bombers to follow up this advantage."[110]

In the 1958 congressional elections, Democrats won 64 Senate seats and a 282 seat majority in the House. Many freshmen were determined to move the party in new directions in hopes of regaining control of the White House. While domestic policy had been the focus of most campaigns, these Democrats intended to carve out a distinct Cold War agenda, following their campaign of hammering away at Eisenhower's leadership on national security.

Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson launched more hearings into national security with the hope of reinvigorating interest in the issue before the presidential election, for which he hoped to run.[111] "It is high time that we ceased being victims of a budgetary fetish. We should determine our defense needs in the light of the threat. Then we must find economically sound ways to meet those needs—by expanding our economy, and, if necessary, by providing more funds through additional taxes," Jackson said in a speech at the National War College. His hearings focused on the National Security Council. Although the hearings were allegedly focused on the machinery and procedures through which presidents formulated national security policies, the discussions quickly revealed that substance, not procedure, remained Jackson's top concern. Some of the questions that Jackson asked, for example, included why the NSC failed to consider the psychological impact of allowing the Soviets to be first with the ICBM and the first to orbit a satellite and why the NSC downplayed the implications of imposing budget ceilings on defense spending.[112] The majority counsel for the committee, Ken Mansfield,

told the administration that witnesses felt the NSC controlled the major departments with an "iron grasp."[113] Henry Luce, the conservative editor-in-chief to *Time* magazine, testified that the nation needed to show more determination to win the Cold War. Former State Department official Robert Bowie said that the government had not committed enough money to defeating the Soviets.[114] While Jackson took on the NSC, Symington continued to challenge administration estimates about missiles. Symington went so far as to threaten to release classified data, saying that Vice President Nixon was not telling Americans the truth.[115]

Eisenhower, faced with these attacks, stood his ground. In January 1959, Secretary of Defense Neil McElroy released formerly classified intelligence estimates that suggested the Soviets were not superior in intercontinental ballistic missiles. He called predictions that the Soviets would have 300 combat ICBM's ready by 1960 "exaggerated."[116]

Eisenhower and his administration spent most of his final two years in office fighting against the Democratic Congress to achieve a balanced budget, making this quest a defining issue for his presidency.[117] When confronted with Democratic attacks, the president reiterated the point that "you can't provide security just with a check book. You've got to be prepared to live with a series of Berlins for the next forty years. If these people decide to push another $3 billion into the budget every time Russia tries to push, they might as well go all the way to a garrison state. They certainly ought to provide the taxes to support it even as they do this, if only they had the courage." The president even cited Lenin to remind the GOP that the goal of communism was to bankrupt democracy.[118] Senator Dirksen tried a different tact. He attempted to refocus public

attention on the "time lost by the Truman Administration" on the production of missiles, which he said was the "real handicap." Eisenhower had been forced to "catch up" from behind.[119]

THE 1960 ELECTION

The missile controversy, layered over Eisenhower's negotiations with the Soviets for a test ban treaty and the successful communist revolution in Cuba in 1959, allowed Democratic candidates to position themselves as hawks in 1960. Discussions of the missile gap accelerated in January when the Pentagon announced that it had revised its intelligence estimates. By basing their analysis of Soviet missile production on what they thought the Soviets would do, rather than what they had already done, Pentagon officials explained that there was no missile gap.[120] Pentagon officials sent out a "truth squad" of speakers to meet with politicians and journalists to counter the claims of Democrats.[121] All of the Democrats competing for the presidency denounced the administration for having adjusted the figures to shore up its defense credentials. Johnson said it was "incredibly dangerous" to undertake these kinds of revisions purely for political purposes.[122] Symington stated that "the intelligence books have been juggled so the budget books may be balanced . . . ."[123] Kennedy warned that Republicans were "gambling with our survival."[124] Thinking about his campaign for the White House, Vice President Richard Nixon told the Eisenhower that he and all the other members of the Cabinet needed to take a more proactive stand in responding to these Democratic charges.[125]

After Kennedy defeated Symington, Humphrey, and Johnson in the primaries, he ran as a Cold War hawk against Nixon. In addition to Kennedy's proposals for

accelerating economic growth and supporting programs such as medical care for the elderly, Kennedy argued that only a Democratic administration could reestablish American dominance over communism. The senator was convinced that national security was central to the election.[126] In Ohio, for example, polls revealed that in foreign policy, "decaying U.S. prestige in the world is the number one issue."[127]

Besides the missile gap, Kennedy and other Democrats castigated Eisenhower for failing to prevent the communist revolution in Cuba. Kennedy said that "during the eight years that he has been presiding, our security has declined more rapidly than over any comparable period in our history—in terms of defensive strength and retaliatory power, in terms of our alliances, in terms of our scientific effort and reputation . . . Never before have the tentacles of communism sunk so deeply into previously friendly areas—in Iraq and the Middle East, in the Congo and Africa, in Laos and Asia, and in Cuba, ninety miles off our shores, and elsewhere in Latin America."[128] During the campaign, Kennedy proposed that the CIA should work with insurgents to overthrow Castro. Chester Bowles, who had agreed to serve as Kennedy's foreign policy advisor, told the senator to stress that a Democratic president would never have allowed Castro to come to power so close to American shores and that the Republican administration had to be held responsible for the "Cuban 'disaster', the Cuban 'blunders,' the Cuban 'catastrophe'…."[129] Ridiculing Nixon's tendency to boast about his foreign policy experience—and aiming to undercut the vice president's potential advantage--Kennedy quipped that "Khrushchev has not been impressed, deterred or confined in his efforts to build a Communist empire."[130] Following one of the famous televised debates, where Kennedy's appearance was much more effective than his opponent, Louis Harris reported that Nixon's advantage on

foreign policy was not as decisive as when the campaign started since "Kennedy seems now to have blunted the 'get tough with Russia' issue."[131] Nixon was livid because he could not reveal the secret operation that was being planned by the CIA to invade Cuba. Instead, Nixon had to sit on his hands as he was depicted as timid about using military power. He warned that Kennedy's proposals would result in war by instigating Soviet intervention.[132]

Although Kennedy officials would later admit that a missile gap had never existed (insisting, though, that the charges were based on the very best intelligence that was available at the time), the accusation served its purpose.[133] The charges played into the revitalization of liberal internationalism in the late-1950s as Democrats joined Republicans in politicizing national security and placing the issue at the center of electoral competition.

Kennedy won a narrow victory with 49.7 percent of the popular vote and 303 votes in the Electoral College. Nixon won 49.6 percent of the popular vote and 219 electoral votes. Democrats retained control of Congress. The only bright spot for Republicans, which boosted their confidence for 1964, was that Nixon had done well in the South. He won about 48 percent of the southern vote and five Republicans running in gubernatorial races increased their votes by 105 percent above the level of 1956 (over 1 million votes).[134]

ROUGH WATERS

During his inaugural address, Kennedy stressed his commitment to fighting communism, warning that "the enemy is the Communist system itself—implacable, unceasing in its drive for world domination." During his first year, Kennedy supported increases in

defense spending and called for major investments in conventional weapons and the armed forces.

Many Republicans (as well as some senior Democrats) saw the charismatic president as a pompous, young, and inexperienced individual who had succeeded only because of his family connections and wealth. They felt the same way about cabinet members who exhibited self-confidence that often came across as arrogant.[135] Kennedy's claim to be a Cold War hawk struck many conservatives as a blatant attempt to steal the thunder from the Republican Right by making promises that Democrats would never fulfill.

Over the next three years, the Republican Right worked to undercut his appeal on national security. Kennedy faced a number of opponents at the grass roots level. One was the California-based businessman Robert Welch, who founded the John Birch Society in 1958. With over 100,000 members, the Birch Society maintained a strong presence in the sunbelt. In those parts of the country, anti-communism was the glue that held middle class citizens together who identified with the right.[136] Another thorn in the president's side was Fred Schwartz. In 1961, Schwartz and the Christian Anti-Communism Crusade organized an event at the Hollywood Bowl which 15,000 people attended and millions watched on television. Additionally, a group of conservative radio talk show hosts--including Clarence Manion, Fulton Lewis, and Dan Smoot--attracted loyal listeners who enjoyed hearing them rail against the administration's failures to stand up to the Soviets. Conservatives also enjoyed a vibrant period of book publishing that revolved around companies like Regenry.[137] Observing these developments, sociologist Daniel Bell noted

that "the 'radical right' emerged into quick prominence on the American political scene."[138]

The threat from right-wing activists was at the center of a major national security scandal in 1961. In April, Senator Fulbright began hearings into allegations that a conservative think tank had sponsored speakers to deliver talks to U.S. soldiers. General Edwin Walker, a veteran of WWII, Korea, and a member of the John Birch Society, justified the events as fulfilling the requirements of NSC-68 and another directive which stipulated that troops needed to be educated about the threat of communism.[139] During these presentations, however, speakers attacked the administration's foreign and domestic policies.[140]

Fulbright's investigation pushed him into direct confrontation with the Republican Right.[141] Senator Bridges condemned the Arkansan for attacking a patriot like Walker. Senator Goldwater criticized the "radicals in the White House" for coordinating the harassment.[142] In June, the Secretary of the Army rebuked Walker. Kennedy and McNamara agreed to have the General step down from his command and conducted an investigation into the right-wing network with which he was associated.[143] For conservative Republicans, Walker was a hero. The Manion Forum (Clarence Manion's popular radio program) became an arena for attacking the Democrats. Senator Thurmond appeared on the show to say that there was a "concerted conspiracy to intimidate persons in this country who speak and warn against the Communist menace." Republican Texas Senator John Tower went on the air to argue that "at a time when we are engaged in a life and death struggle with the Communist conspiracy to be firm in the face of Khrushchev's

threats with military force, and with an adequate military operation, we certainly cannot allow civilians to dictate to the military what their training methods should be."[144]

During Kennedy's first year in office, conservatives found many reasons to criticize the president. Most famously was the Bay of Pigs. On April 17, 1961, the CIA invasion of Cuba became a disaster. In a poorly executed operation using Cuban exiles, 114 operatives were killed and 1,189 were captured by the Cuban government. At first, most Republicans stood by the administration. But by the summer, the criticism intensified. Senator Tower said that the time had come for the U.S. to occupy Cuba.[145] On June 11, New York Representative William Miller accused the president of having "rescinded and revoked" a plan by the Eisenhower administration which would have provided the Cuban exiles with air cover during the invasion. Calling this decision a "tragic mistake," Miller said that when Kennedy "failed to support the Cubans with American naval forces, American supplies and American air cover, that's when the invasion failed."[146] The Bay of Pigs fiasco discouraged Kennedy from authorizing military operations in Laos, where communists had taken control in 1960. In response, Arizona Republican John Rhodes warned that "many of the old Acheson appeasers' have reappeared on the scene still befogged by the notion that softness is the best reply to Soviet aggression…."[147] *Time* magazine concluded that "as John F. Kennedy closed out the first 100 days of his administration, the U.S. suffered a month-long series of setbacks rare in the history of the Republic. First came the Russian's man-in-space triumph. Then the shockingly bungled invasion of Cuba where, according to Douglas MacArthur, 'chickens are coming home to roost' from the Eisenhower years and Kennedy was "in the chicken coop."[148] Adding to these struggles, Kennedy had a terrible meeting with Soviet

Premier Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna. Khrushchev treated the president dismissively and threatened to craft a peace agreement with East Germany. When James Reston asked Kennedy about the meeting, the president called it the "worst thing in my life. He savaged me . . . . He thinks because of the Bay of Pigs that I'm inexperienced. Probably thinks I'm stupid. Maybe most important, he thinks that I had no guts."[149] Kennedy was so shaken that he called for a significant boost in civilian defense funds, the expansion of the military draft, as well as the creation of a more flexible armed forces better capable of non-nuclear warfare in Europe. Conservatives were not appeased by this response.[150]

To be sure, some successes provided Kennedy with confidence. Most important was Berlin. In August 1961, Kennedy resisted pressure to use troops when the Soviets constructed a wall separating East and West Berlin. From the time that Khrushchev had proclaimed his intention to sign an agreement with East Berlin in June through the construction of the wall in August, Americans waited nervously, worried about the possibility of nuclear war. Companies that made survival goods in case of nuclear attacks experienced a massive surge in sales.[151] Although American and Soviet soldiers faced off against one another throughout August, Kennedy allowed the wall to be built. In return, Khrushchev said he would not seek a treaty with East Berlin. The press hailed the resolution as a triumph for Kennedy given that he was able to prevent world war at a moment of great tension. Kennedy speechwriter Ted Sorenson boasted to fellow Democrats that "the Wall stands more as a communist admission of failure, than a threat to three basic Western rights in West Berlin: the presence of our troops, access and self-determination for the people."[152] If Republicans attempted to accuse Democrats of having appeased communism, Sorenson noted, "we point to our defense buildup and our Berlin

stand and introduce them to those Republicans who are complaining about the Reservists being called up and the budget not being balanced."[153] Several studies indicated that Republicans would not be able to make use of the anti-communism issue as in the past since the public was generally pleased with how Kennedy had handled the Berlin crisis.[154] In March 1962, advisor Richard Scammon informed Kennedy that polls showed the "prospects are rosy" for Democrats in the midterm elections. The evidence suggested that the party should benefit from a "considerable increase" in the House.[155] Going into November, Kennedy's pollsters found that foreign policy was the "sleeper" issue of the election which could "work decisively for Democrats across the land in the 1962 election . . . Kennedy has gone a long way toward eliminating the traditional GOP cry that the Democrats are on the one hand the party of appeasement and on the other, the party of war."[156]

CUBAN MISSILE POLITICS

The most dangerous political challenge to Democrats came when Republicans focused their attention on Cuba. Even in polls that indicated Kennedy's surging popularity, questions about Cuba always elicited negative responses about the president.[157] Unknown to the public, in June 1962, Khrushchev had begun to deploy missiles, military equipment, and personnel to Cuba in order to deter an attack on Castro and improve the Soviet position in negotiations over Berlin.[158] The Premier planned to reveal the deployment following the midterm elections. His intention was to convey Soviet superiority.[159]

There were some early warnings. In March, the *Miami News* published a story about plans for Soviet missile sites. South Carolina Democrat Mendel Rivers of the

House Armed Services Committee warned CIA Director John McCone in June that "four IRBM missile bases are ready in Cuba."[160] Within the White House, Attorney General Robert Kennedy and McCone repeatedly warned Kennedy that the Soviets were on track to install missile sites.

By July, Cuban refugees were informing government officials that the Soviets had undertaken a significant buildup. They explained that the type of personnel arriving to Cuba had changed. There were more well-built young men who looked like combat troops.[161] The only comforting news was that top intelligence estimates did not find evidence that the Soviets, "thus far," had delivered missiles to Cuba capable of being used in an offensive attack.[162]

The president worried that the revelation of these rumors could hurt Democrats in the elections. The summer of 1962 was shaping up to be a tough period. The economy had started to slow just as tension over civil rights heated up. Congress stalled on the administration's proposal to provide medical care to the aged. Despite his diplomatic victory in Berlin, Kennedy feared that Khrushchev intended to pursue a separate treaty with East Berlin. Although Khrushchev promised that he would not raise the issue until after the elections, Kennedy speculated that the Soviets might change their mind to test how his administration would respond to aggressive moves.[163]

Not only was Kennedy desperate to avoid a diminished Democratic majority, but he needed to increase the number of northern liberals within the party in order to blunt the power of the conservative coalition. The president said to General Douglas MacArthur, who thought that predictions of a Republican takeover of Congress were overblown, that as a result of the committee system, "the ability to prevent action now is

almost unlimited."[164] According to *Congressional Quarterly*, Congress only approved 44.3 percent of Kennedy's legislative requests in 1962, with many bills never leaving committee.[165]

On August 5, a U-2 reconnaissance flight discovered evidence of Soviet materials in Cuba. On August 14, Kennedy acknowledged to reporters that there was proof of large quantities of material coming to Cuba from the Soviet Union, as well as an increased number of technicians. But he said there were no signs of troop movements. Kennedy added that they were not seeing the kind of numbers that could facilitate an invasion of another Central American country. He assured reporters that the administration was examining the significance of the movements.[166] But privately the messages were troubling. On August 22, John McCone informed Kennedy that the situation "appeared more alarming to us than it did on August the 10th . . . What has happened is that a substantial number of ships have come into Cuba: 21 in July and some 17 in August. They've brought in substantial quantities of materiel, military as well as special electronic equipment, many large cases, which might contain fuselages of fighter airplanes or it might contain missile parts. We do not know."[167] That day, a CIA study concluded that "the step-up in military shipments and the construction activity once again provide strong evidence of the magnitude of the USSR's support for the Castro regime."[168] Cuban informants were consistently characterizing this as an offensive buildup.[169]

CIA reports were treated with a degree of skepticism by administration officials. Many in Kennedy's inner circle did not trust John McCone since he was a hard-line anti-communist Republican who had been brought into the administration to revive the

reputation of the CIA following the Bay of Pigs. Under Secretary of State George Ball suspected that the Director was trying to scare the president into a reckless invasion. On August 23, McCone left Washington to be married and to spend his honeymoon in France.[170] The day McCone departed, the president instructed the National Security Council to analyze the possible impact of surface-to-air (defensive) or surface-to-surface (offensive) missiles in Cuba and to study military alternatives that could be implemented if necessary.[171]

While McCone was away, the Defense Department obtained further satellite pictures from a U-2 flight, confirming that the Soviets were shipping material and technicians to the island, as well as defensive surface-to-air missiles (SAM). The administration accelerated its investigations into what could happen if the situation became worse.[172]

Throughout August, Republican Senators Kenneth Keating (NY) and Homer Capehart (IN) had been attacking President Kennedy for ignoring a growing crisis in Cuba. Although all the information from the informants and the CIA remained classified, these two Republicans placed the issue on the front pages of newspapers across the country. Keating had been elected to the Senate in 1958. The senator, who was widely-considered to be a serious presidential candidate, was relying on anti-communism to preserve his support among Republicans. He needed to remain liberal on domestic policy to maintain his electoral strength in New York State. Keating called on the president to insist that NATO members stop allowing their ships to deliver Soviet cargoes to Cuba. He called on the Council of Organization of American States to take action against Castro, who he called “a smoking grenade in the heart of the Western Hemisphere.”[173]

Keating, who was not up for re-election in 1962, ridiculed the president's distinction between offensive and defensive weapons: "Who is to say whether a weapon is offensive or defensive? It depends on the direction in which it is aimed."[174] Keating refused to share his sources, which made it impossible to confirm or disprove his allegations conclusively.[175]

Keating's counterpart was a different breed. A die-hard conservative, Senator Capehart had been an ardent opponent of Roosevelt and Truman's domestic policies. Although Capehart opposed the Marshall Plan and the creation of the U.N, over the years he had moderated his stance to support most of Eisenhower's foreign policies. Capehart was one of the Kennedy's administration's toughest critics following the Bay of Pigs. On May 15, 1962, he accused Press Secretary Pierre Salinger of "hobnobbing" with Khrushchev and his son-in-law in Moscow. The senator warned of the impressions other nations would have about American determination in the war against communism if Salinger was drinking "vodka and eating Siberian meat-dumplings with the world's head communist….."[176] If Capehart could win his re-election campaign against the charismatic Birch Bayh, he was poised to become a GOP power broker in the Midwest.[177] He decided to place "all of his eggs in the Cuban basket," according to House Minority Leader Charles Halleck.[178] When asked on his weekly radio show about which issue had caused the most "indignation and excitement" in Congress, he responded that "I don't think there is any question" it was Cuba.[179] Speaking in Indiana, Capehart asked "how long will the President examine the situation . . . until the hundreds of Russian troops grow into hundreds of thousands?"[180]

Concerned about his Republican opponents inside and outside the administration, the president told Marshall Carter, who served as the Acting Director of the CIA while McCone was on his honeymoon, that he did not want any of the U-2 information leaked to the media because it would turn into political fodder for the GOP and exacerbate tensions with Khrushchev. Given that the president did not think the photographs revealed any kind of serious offensive threat, he didn't see any need to share the data with the public. The president refused to believe that the Russians would take a chance by sending their nuclear weapons so far away. And once again, the early intelligence only revealed sightings of SAMs. These were non-nuclear anti-aircraft rockets that the Soviets had provided to a number of allies including Syria and Indonesia.[181] Decades later, archives would reveal that Khrushchev intentionally sent these to Cuba first in order to throw the administration off guard and use them to prevent air surveillance on the nuclear missiles. Walt Rostow, chairman of the State Department's Policy Planning Council, assured Kennedy in early September that "the Soviet military deliveries to Cuba do not constitute a substantial threat to U.S. security."[182] At the same time, just like Eisenhower, Kennedy wanted to be cautious since he hoped to avoid revealing the ongoing use of U-2 flights.

Yet the administration understood that they were sitting on a political powder keg. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Manning warned NSC Director McGeorge Bundy that "in the public mind missiles are missiles" and that "the presence of anything that can be termed missile installations on Cuban soil is certain to have heavy psychological impact on the American public, and on public opinion in the hemisphere and elsewhere . . . ."[183] Agreeing with the analysis, Bundy wrote the president that "any missile

deployment in Cuba will strengthen critics of the Administration's 'softness' on Cuba . . . the expectation is that any missiles will have a substantial political and psychological impact, while surface-to-surface missiles would create a condition of great alarm, even in the absence of proof that nuclear warheads were arriving with them."[184]

Kennedy sensed that he had to calm these political storms. Even though the administration did not have a plan of action, the president told Dean Rusk and McGeorge Bundy that he would invite "the leadership down here, the Republican, key gasbags and others," to update them on some of the information that he had about the surface-to-air missiles. By doing so, he hoped to undermine the Republican claims that the president was withholding information.[185] On September 4, the president met with a bipartisan group of congressmen in the afternoon. Marshall Carter, Curtis LeMay (the head of the Strategic Air Command) and Kennedy assured the legislators that, based on the information they had, the weapons in Cuba were not offensive. Richard Russell responded that the Cubans could turn "every bit of this stuff" into offensive use. Republican Senator Bourke Hickenlooper (IA) said he was concerned about "the argument that we're a paper tiger and the fomenting groups in Latin America say, 'See look what's happening 100 miles from the United states. They do nothing about it . . . we have nothing to fear, we can spit in their face, we can do this, that, and the other thing.'"[186]

Following the tense meeting, Kennedy searched for a middle ground. He held a press conference to announce that he would use "whatever means may be necessary" to prevent Soviet aggression. He also reminded reporters that there was no evidence that the Cubans had gained "significant offensive capability."[187] On September 6, the CIA

reported that it had found nine SA-2 surface-to-air missile sites under construction and eight patrol boats with short range surface-to-surface missiles.[188] The next day, Kennedy asked Congress for "stand-by" authority to call up 150,000 men from the Ready Reserve. He said there would be amphibious operations close to Cuba in mid-October.[189] When asked by a reporter if this request was a result of the situation in Cuba, Press Secretary Pierre Salinger said, "you can draw your own conclusion on that…."[190] On September 8, the CIA reported that a "completely reliable source" had told them of three more SAM sites under construction, bringing the total to 13.[191] Although the Senate passed the Ready Reserve bill within a week (without opposition), the measure became bogged down in the House. Republicans seized on the debate as an opportunity to criticize Kennedy. Clarence Brown said that the bill would not "impress the master of the Kremlin one bit."[192]

Kennedy's responses had not satisfied most Republicans, nor would they let the issue die. Some in the GOP claimed that Kennedy had agreed to a "horse trade" with Khrushchev: the Soviets had allegedly promised to refrain from further action in Berlin if the administration did nothing about their activities in Cuba.[193] Goldwater said that the "American people will not be satisfied with the President's reiteration of a 'do nothing' policy toward Cuba . . . We have before us today this humiliating picture: The Soviets pushed a huge military build-up on our Southern doorstep. Khrushchev warned the United States not to interfere. And President Kennedy holds a news conference and says military intervention by the United States cannot be either required or justified."[194] On NBC's *Today* show, Goldwater clashed with Democrat Vance Hartke (IN). When Hartke asked the senator whether "you mean you want to go to war over Cuba?" Goldwater said

"the Republican platform is not war but . . . we are not afraid to go to war if we have to cover Cuba."[195]

Other Republicans talked tough as well. Senator Dirksen and Representative Halleck called on Congress to issue a resolution that would "reflect the determination and clear purpose of the American people and will demonstrate to the world the firmness of this nation in meeting this problem…."[196] Richard Nixon, running for the governorship in California, proposed that Kennedy should implement a quarantine of Cuba in order to prevent the Soviets from shipping arms. Nelson Rockefeller, considered the likely Republican presidential candidate in 1964, also supported an extremely tough stance against Castro.[197]

On September 10, one day after a U-2 was shot down over China, Kennedy suspended most reconnaissance flights over Cuba. He was concerned that further embarrassing incidents would subvert negotiations over Berlin.[198] Poor weather conditions were also resulting in poor quality photos.[199]

According to McGeorge Bundy, "the congressional head of steam on this is the most serious that we have had . . . the immediate hazard is that the Administration may appear to be weak and indecisive." Barring military force, Bundy urged the president to provide an "aggressive explanation of current policy and of its justification." Bundy urged the president to explain that the Monroe Doctrine justified vigilance rather than "acts of irresponsible anger…."[200]

On September 12, Majority Leader Mike Mansfield informed the president that in the Senate Majority Policy Committee there was "a great deal of concern" over the "domestic-political" implications of the situation in Cuba. The feeling among senators,

Mansfield explained, was that a "'do-something' gesture of militancy' had become necessary. At their most recent meeting, Democrats had discussed a full array of actions, ranging from a quarantine of Cuba to an all-out war that might involve Russia. "There was some talk," Mansfield reported, "that those Democrats running for re-election in November would have to leave you on this matter unless something were done." While Mansfield supported the administration, he feared that "if public pressures on Democratic members now begin to lead them to engage in an attempt to outdo Republicans in militancy on Cuba, I am concerned as to where it might end."[201] On September 13, the CIA told Kennedy that there had been "no abatement in the Soviet build up" even though many reports were exaggerated.[202] At a press conference that day, Kennedy assured reporters that the shipments did not constitute a "serious threat" of any kind but that if Cuba interfered with the nation's security in any way, he was prepared to take swift action.[203]

To turn up the heat under Kennedy, Republicans proposed a congressional resolution that would authorize the president to use American troops in Cuba if necessary. Democrats responded by working with the administration to push for such a resolution as the House continued to debate the Ready Reserve bill. The president sensed that if he did not use tough language in the resolution, Republicans would build support in Congress for something "much worse."[204] Modeled after the Formosa Resolution, the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committee unanimously approved a resolution on September 19 which proclaimed that the U.S. would not allow Cuba to develop a military capability that threatened the nation.[205] Although Kennedy agreed to

support this version, congressional Republicans hoped to demonstrate that they were the party taking the initiative on this threat.[206]

With further evidence of a "significant increase" in Soviet involvement in Cuba as September progressed,[207] the administration became increasingly frustrated. They felt that Soviet leaders did not understand how the American political system worked and the pressures that the president faced from Congress. As the diplomat Charles Bohlen explained to the president, "the Russian mind does not have the foggiest comprehension of the American political process. They really believe that you are sort of the dictator of the United States and can do any damn thing you want . . ."[208]

On September 27, Congress passed a resolution stating that the U.S. was "determined . . . by whatever means may be necessary, including the use of arms" to make certain that Cuba did not pose a threat to American security." The House vote was 384-7; the Senate vote was 86-1. Democrats were able to hold back Republican efforts to make the language even stronger.[209] In the Senate, some Republicans had also called for a naval blockade of Russian arms shipments and a statement that the U.S. would take bold action if the Organization of American States failed to do so.[210] Castro went on television to warn that in America's Congress there "is a competition to see who can shout most . . . It doesn't matter to them that they play with the destiny of the world and play with war."[211] In a memo for the president, Lou Harris said "I have never seen the temper and mood change so drastically as this election outlook this fall since Labor Day. Back then, support for medical care was sharply off, the record of Congress looked dismal, and the strongest Kennedy asset going was foreign policy." One month later, "tensions are still high on foreign policy" because of international events and Republican attacks:

Americans were 38 to 62 against Kennedy's Cuba policy. The president, Harris reported, needed to persuade Americans that Republicans were "shooting from the hip" and that their "recklessness" was suggesting to foreigners that America was not really united in the Cold War.[212]

The political pressure to take action became so intense that on October 1 the administration contemplated a blockade of Cuba. McCone, since returning to Washington from his honeymoon, had been pressuring the president to renew U-2 surveillance flights. Reports had surfaced near the end of September of a possible medium-range ballistic missile site in Pinar del Rio Province.[213] On October 7, Senator Dirksen announced that Kennedy had made a "sorry record" on Cuba. "There is a mess in Cuba," he said, "a mess of our own making that began with the New Frontier…." Dirksen charged that the Soviets had completed eight missiles in Cuba, with sixteen more being built.[214] On October 9, the president authorized a new round of U-2 reconnaissance missions over the island.

The president took these issues on the campaign trail. In early October, he traveled to Indiana to lend his support to Birch Bayh's campaign against Senator Capheart. During one speech, the president warned that "these self-appointed generals and admirals who want to send somebody else's sons to war, and who consistently voted against the instruments of peace, ought to be kept home by the voters and be replaced by somebody like Birch Bayh, who has some understanding of what the twentieth century is all about." Kennedy asked how someone like Capehart with a "19th Century" voting record in the Senate could possibly benefit the state.[215] He said that Capehart's "rash and irresponsible talk" strengthened "our adversaries."[216] During a speech in Harrisburg,

Pennsylvania, Kennedy asked voters to prevent "a return to [the] deadlock and drift" of the 1950s.[217]

Republicans responded with equal vigor. On October 10, Keating announced that he had "fully confirmed" information that the "construction has begun on at least six launching sites for intermediate range tactical missiles." Keating warned that "my own sources on the Cuban situation, which have been 100 percent reliable, have substantiated this report completely . . . six launching sites are under construction—pads which will have the power to hurl rockets into the American heart land and as far as the Panama Canal Zone." By this time, the senator had delivered sixteen speeches that included complaints about the administration withholding information about the Soviet intervention in Cuba.[218] The speech on October 10 constituted the most direct challenge to Kennedy's statement that there were no missiles of concern in Cuba. Keating asked the administration to respond. The State Department denied the accusation.[219]

Keating's speech disturbed Kennedy, more than any of the others that the senator had made, given that it contained a level of specificity that was absent from previous statements. Keating's words, according to one senior CIA officer, "hit like a bombshell at the White House . . . [and] infuriated President Kennedy." The administration scrambled to find the source of the information. McCone personally asked Keating to "lay his cards on the table." Keating refused. The meeting disintegrated into an ugly verbal fight. Keating did not even show up for a second scheduled meeting.[220] On the same day that Keating delivered his speech, McCone had shown Kennedy photographs of Soviet ships carrying crates toward Cuba that his advisors believed might contain offensive weapon material.[221] According to McCone, "the President requested that such information be

withheld at least until after the elections as if the information got into the press, a new and more violent Cuban issue would be interjected into the campaign and this would seriously affect his independence of action."[222] During a speech in Boston on October 15, Eisenhower attacked the "dreary foreign record of the past 21 months." The press interpreted the speech as a formal decision by the Republican hierarchy to open this issue up in the campaign.[223]

Then the flood gates broke. On the morning of October 16, the CIA showed the president the first "hard evidence" in the form of aerial photographs of offensive missile sites in Cuba. These pictures were this was from the flight authorized on October 9, which had been delayed as a result of bad weather. According to presidential advisor Kenny O'Donnell, the president approached him in the morning and asked if he still thought all the "fuss" about Cuba was politically unimportant. "Absolutely," O'Donnell said as he assured Kennedy that "voters won't give a damn about Cuba." Kennedy then showed him the photos. After inspecting them with a magnifying glass, O'Donnell said that he couldn't believe his eyes. "You'd better believe it," Kennedy replied, "we've just elected Capehart in Indiana and Ken Keating will probably be the next President of the United States."[224] The president told his brother that "the campaign is over . . . This blows it—we've lost anyway. They were right about Cuba."[225] Most administration officials who saw the pictures knew that they only had a few days before the information became public. After all, Dean Rusk said, "Keating has already, in effect announced it on the floor of the Senate."[226]

The final U-2 photographs were delivered to the president at the same time that Republicans proclaimed they were going to focus the final weeks of the campaign on

foreign policy. William Miller, chair of the Republican National Committee, issued a statement on October 16--endorsed by Senator Goldwater and Representative Robert Wilson (CA)--that "we are distressed to note that Administration spokesman in their campaign speeches have studiously avoided forthright discussion of foreign policy. If we were asked to state the issue in one word, that word would be Cuba—symbol of the tragic irresolution of the Administration."[227]

By October 18, according to *Congressional Quarterly,* Cuba had emerged as the top campaign issue in a poll of congressmen and media editors. Out of 344 editors, 301 selected Cuba as the top issue. 155 out of 208 members of Congress made this same choice.[228] While the last set of photographs still remained a secret to the public and Congress, the president faced tremendous pressure from his own circle of advisors to authorize a military strike or invasion. Curtis LeMay stated that unless the U.S. responded militarily, the Soviets would read Kennedy's decision as a signal that they could do what they wanted without fear. Eisenhower told McCone that Soviet bases in Cuba were intolerable and he supported an all-out military action.[229] During one meeting of Kennedy's top advisors (EXCOM)—a top secret committee of senior policymakers who advised the president throughout these pivotal weeks--a Republican advocate of an air strike, Treasury Secretary Douglas Dillon, slipped Sorenson a note that said: "Have you considered the very real possibility that if we allow Cuba to complete installation and operational readiness of missile bases, the next House of Representatives is likely to have a Republican majority?"[230]

But Kennedy resisted the pressure to respond militarily. Throughout the EXCOM meetings, as LeMay chided the president and spoke to him in a demeaning fashion,

Kennedy resisted his push to use military force. Like President Truman with General MacArthur, Kennedy stood up to the pressure from the military. He proved that the civilian leadership could be successful, politically, when dealing with national security problems. Polls suggested that the president was on the right track. Soon after, Senator Goldwater told a reporter that if the president left it up to voters, "we'd be in Cuba tomorrow," George Gallup revealed that 63 percent of those polled did not agree with sending armed forces to Cuba.[231] Kennedy told one journalist that the first advice he intended to give to his successor as president was that their White House should avoid thinking that "just because they were military men their opinions on military matters were worth a damn."[232]

As he deliberated over whether to impose a blockade or authorize a military strike, the president continued to think about the political repercussions of the missiles. Given the political context of the past month, this crisis threatened to undermine all the momentum that Democrats had regained on national security since the missile gap debate. It could potentially trigger a revival of Republican power. Following one meeting about the missiles, Kennedy spoke with his brother and Ted Sorenson on the Truman balcony of the White House. Kennedy said that the crisis would harm Democrats because some voters would say that the GOP had been correct all along and that Kennedy was wrong. "Well," Sorensen said, "I guess Homer Capehart is the Winston Churchill of our generation."[233] If he ended up pursuing a more aggressive stand, Kennedy feared that he would open Democrats to charges that they were the "war party" willing to risk the nation's security.[234]

Notwithstanding his private fears, after October 16 Kennedy refrained from making a political issue of the crisis. The minutes of executive meetings reveal few discussions of political considerations as Kennedy and his staff deliberated over the options. Even while the president remained on the campaign trail (until October 20, after which he canceled all of his political events), he did not talk about Cuba.[235] Kennedy decided to announce a "quarantine" (which was not as strong a term as blockade) with the warning that there would be tougher action if the Soviets violated it. The quarantine only applied to offensive weapon equipment. The president did not propose any stringent enforcement measures.[236] In other words, the president wanted to maintain as much flexibility as possible to avoid an attack. To placate the two Republicans on ExCom, John McCone and Douglas Dillon, he rejected proposals to combine the quarantine with encouragement for negotiation over issues that included the removal of America's Jupiter missiles that were located in Turkey (the withdrawal of which would be seen as hostile toward NATO).[237]

Attempting to stop the Republican attacks, Kennedy instructed McCone to update Eisenhower about the new photographs and his decision to impose a quarantine. Following the meeting, on October 21, Eisenhower delivered a speech in which he stated that any foreign policy crisis should not be part of the election.[238] The next day, Kennedy personally called Eisenhower to explain why he had decided on a quarantine and to say that he anticipated the situation would intensify in the coming weeks. The president said that as the quarantine began, he would move troops from San Diego to Florida in case the "invasion business" was needed. The president said that if the Organization of American States agreed to his action, that would be good, but if they didn't, the U.S. would proceed

unilaterally. Eisenhower responded that the military option was the only "clean cut" way to resolve the threat. He disagreed with Kennedy that the Politburo would bring Berlin into the situation and doubted they would allow missiles to be fired in retaliation for a U.S. invasion, although he said—somewhat jokingly—that he would keep his staff "very alert."[239]

In the afternoon of October 22, the president briefed congressional Democrats and Senator Dirksen at the White House to provide them with a full report and to tell them that he was leaning toward a quarantine rather than military strike. The president instructed Air Force One round up senators and congressman from their respective states (Congress was not in session). He did not invite Senator Keating or Capehart.[240] During the meeting, Senator Russell told the president that "I think that our responsibilities demand stronger steps than that in view of this buildup here . . . We're either a first-class power or we're not." Russell predicted that the quarantine would give the Soviets an opportunity to make more "incendiary" comments which would ultimately lead to a broader war.[241] Fulbright thought the president should not make any announcements until he was prepared to invade. The senator called a quarantine the "worst of the alternatives" since it would force the U.S. to directly confront the Soviets rather than the Cubans.[242]

Later in the evening, Kennedy appeared on television to outline the situation to the public. The president proclaimed that a quarantine would begin the next morning. Vice President Johnson reported that Kennedy's speech was well-received in Congress. The vice president had watched with Russell and Fulbright and "the attitude was much better than was indicated here." Johnson felt that the president explained more clearly than in the private meeting how he would prevent the use of missiles against the U.S.[243]

Most of the foreign press was positive in its response.[244] More importantly, the Organization of American States voted unanimously to support the quarantine. General Lauris Norstad, the widely-respected commander of the U.S. and NATO forces in Europe who had been in charge during the Berlin crisis, wrote to congratulate the president about his decision. The General explained that the "failure to meet the challenge in Cuba after my clear and repeated warnings would have greatly increased the chance that Khrushchev would dare to move on Berlin."[245]

Americans watched on their television sets as Soviet ships slowly approached the quarantine. Many members of Congress asked the leadership if they could return to their homes to be with their families. As the news unfolded, citizens planned how they would evacuate cities in case of war. Although there were no reports of widespread panic (most of the newspapers tended to agree that the level of panic buying was far less than during the Berlin crisis in 1961), there was increased demand for transistor radios, family radiation kits, bottled water, and concentrated foods. Radio stations provided listeners with instructions on how to stock fallout shelters.[246] The Civil Defense office in Cleveland, Ohio received 150 calls about bomb shelters the day after Kennedy's address, compared to two the day before.[247] Most cities in California temporarily canceled their air raid drills.[248]

One of the most striking aspects of the response was how unprepared the nation was for an actual emergency, even after a decade of watching Bert the Turtle and building bomb shelters.[249] The civil defense program remained under-funded, under-developed, and limited in terms of what Americans had been willing to pay for to protect their families. When thousands of citizens turned up at civil defense offices in cities such

as Miami, Cincinnati, Richmond, and Cleveland, they encountered offices with overwhelmed staff.[250] It became clear that Congress had devoted meager amounts of money for bomb shelter programs and had relied on state and local officials to carry out these policies.[251]

At first, a number of Republicans promised to leave the crisis out of their campaigns. The president asked John McCone on October 23 to touch base with congressional hawks and testify to his tough mentality even though he was trying hard to avert any kind of military confrontation.[252] Keating announced that "the President's action will, to a degree, circumscribe political oratory . . . I shall not criticize him even if I think he is wrong. To that extent I think he has taken Cuba out of politics. If the price the Republicans must pay for his action is the loss of some seats or some votes, I think it's a pretty small price."[253] "So far as Cuba and the Soviet Russia are concerned," Eisenhower said, "in the weeks ahead we cannot be partisans."[254] According to Arthur Krock, "the issue which the Republicans sought to make paramount in the 1962 Congressional campaign was that President Kennedy had failed to 'do something' about the transformation of Cuba into a Soviet missile base. Hence this issue is now as 'dead' . . . the President killed it Monday night by 'doing something' indeed by an act, which by its nature assured the unified support of the American people."[255]

Yet the promises did not last for long. At the most extreme level, conservative groups staged a protest outside the White House. One sign read: "Appeasement is for Cowards" while another said "Damn the Missiles, Full Speed Ahead."[256] Missouri Republican Thomas Curtis, a member of the House Ways and Means Committee, described the confrontation as "phony and contrived for election purposes."

Representative Wilson lamented that the possibility of Republicans making gains in the elections had been "Cubanized."[257]

More common were Republicans who agreed to support the president but nonetheless questioned the timing of his announcement and speculated as to why Kennedy was only now doing what Republicans had been demanding for months. The leaders of the Republican congressional committees, for example, said that the president's actions in Cuba had a "distinctly political ring" given that they were occurring two weeks before the vote. In a weekly newsletter, the GOP observed that "the statement that it was only because the White House had just discovered the existence on Cuba of missiles capable of striking American cities sounded brazenly false inasmuch as this had been known for months…." The Republicans wrote that "those Democrats who so vigorously had opposed any kind of intervention in Cuba as 'jingoism,' 'war-mongering,' and 'rash' were faced with the prospect of completely reversing themselves . . . . "[258] Goldwater explained that "I hope there was no political motivation in the President's decision. But I can't get away from the idea that he didn't act until after he got out in the country campaigning and found that what I and a lot of others have been saying about Cuba was true…." William Miller asked why Kennedy had continued to criticize the Republican stand in Cuba in mid-October when he had secret information showing they were correct.[259]

The president and his brother acknowledged privately that they were vulnerable to these sorts of attacks. At a meeting of EXCOM on the morning of October 23, the Attorney General said that "what we are doing now is, in fact, closing the barn door after the horse is gone."[260] While the Department of State insisted Keating had been wrong

about the specific types of missiles that the Soviets been moving into Cuba, the president and his brother worried about how the events would look to the public. President Kennedy's main line of argument was that the evidence had been so shaky there would have been no way to obtain the support of OAS.[261]

In the end, the Soviets did not challenge the quarantine. Following some of the most tense days in American history, the crisis reached a peaceful conclusion. On October 28, the administration reached a deal with the Soviets. The U.S. promised that they would not invade Cuba and that the U.S. would secretly remove its missiles from Turkey after the midterm elections. The Soviets assured the administration that they would not reveal this part of the deal, realizing the problems it would cause with NATO as well as Republicans in Congress. In exchange, the Soviets dismantled their missile sites. According to Tom Wicker, "since 1952, when the frustration of the Korean War stalemate gave the Republicans the opening for attacking on this line, they have persistently pictured themselves as the party that knew best how to deal with Communists. Now, having gone as near the brink of war as the Republican Administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower ever did, with dramatic results, Mr. Kennedy and his party should have gone a long way toward scotching this recurrent issue against them."[262]

It did not take long for partisan forces to fully reassert themselves. After the crisis ended, Eisenhower boasted that Republicans deserved credit for having pushed the president to stand up to the Cubans.[263] The former president complained that "some people are forgetting the events leading up to the latest crisis and now see the President as a knight in shining armor chasing Khrushchev back to his lair in the Kremlin."[264]

Conservatives formed the Committee for the Monroe Doctrine, which criticized the president's decision to abandon the Monroe Doctrine by promising not to invade Cuba.[265] On November 1, Goldwater and Wilson told reporters that the president should answer eight questions about Cuba, including whether the no-invasion guarantee meant that the U.S. had accepted the permanence of communism in Cuba and whether the U.S. would abandon refugees seeking to liberate the nation from Castro.[266] Miller called for a congressional investigation into the failure of "intelligence agencies to advise the President more promptly of the medium-range missile buildup in Cuba."[267] On a Sunday morning talk show, Keating said that he was baffled as to why the administration had denied his charges in September and early October when they knew the information to be true.[268] Days before the election, Keating warned that the Cubans and Soviets were violating the agreement.[269]

But the attacks did not work. "Republicans may argue that the blockade was too little and too late," said *The Wall Street Journal,* "but they can no longer contend that Mr. Kennedy did nothing or is not succeeding so far."[270] The midterm elections were a success for Kennedy, and liberals in the Democratic Party. Democrats expanded their Senate majority by four and only lost four seats in the House. Despite the small losses in the House, the election marked the first midterm contest since 1934 in which the party in power was able to hold its numbers. Some of Kennedy's top critics on Cuba, including Capehart and Walter Judd, were defeated in upsets. Richard Nixon, who had advocated military action against Cuba, lost to California Governor Edmund Brown. Experts agreed that the resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis had undercut Nixon's campaign, which focused on the weaknesses of Democrats on anti-communism. Although the electoral

effects of the missile crisis were ambiguous and mixed, politicians and pundits gave credit to Kennedy's leadership for how well Democrats had performed.[271] "If the President was running for office in this campaign he'd even carry Maine and Vermont," said one Democrat.[272]

However given the political context of the period, the election did not provide Kennedy with much comfort. Kennedy was deeply concerned about the Republican resurgence in Texas, where conservative activists had mounted a ten-year campaign to build GOP strength. Republicans predicted they were going to achieve a "major penetration of the Southern Democrat's stronghold" in the next election.[273] Despite all the disappointments in 1962, Republicans were pleased that the party won three House seats in Texas. During a phone conversation, Democratic Governor John Connally, who defeated Jack Cox, spoke with the president about the growing presence of conservative Republicans. They were particularly concerned about Dallas. While Democrats had held firm in this election, Connally warned that Republicans were defeating southern Democratic state legislators and it was going to take time to catch up to the organization and financial strength from the "crusade" of the right.[274] Reading the results, Lou Harris concluded that southern Democrats were becoming more moderate and liberal, thereby leaving "a large vacuum" on the conservative side that Republicans were aiming to fill "to a larger and larger extent in 1964 and in 1966." Harris predicted an "ultra-right wing GOP in the South, based in the heart of the Goldwater spectrum."[275] Kennedy believed that despite the upward swing in his popularity as a result of Cuba, 1964 would be a "tough campaign." He warned that incumbent Democratic presidents (Truman, Wilson, and Cleveland) had encountered rougher contests than expected. He thought the 1962

elections showed the country was closely divided with Democrats only holding a slight advantage.[276]

Nor did Republicans give up on national security. In 1963, some Republicans charged that the president had covered-up or ignored CIA warnings while failing to authorize U-2 flights in the important weeks of September 1962. While John McCone provided shocking data to the president throughout August and September 1962, Keating said to audiences, "our Government kept busy denying everything."[277] Gerald Ford, who chaired the House Republican Conference and served on the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, said that the "whole situation has a peculiar odor." Reporters labeled the scandal as the "photo gap."[278] After the U.S. announced that they would dismantle the Jupiter missile bases in Turkey, Republicans charged (correctly) this was a result of a secret deal to resolve the Cuban Missile Crisis. Admitting that he could not prove the charge, Senator Hugh Scott (R-PA) said, "there may have been some kind of understanding . . . between Khrushchev and our President whereby before the election Khrushchev would remove the (Cuba) missiles and after the election we could abandon our bases along the Mediterranean." The administration denied the accusation. Under Secretary of State George Ball urged Republicans to stop their partisan attacks on Cuban policy.[279]

To make matters worse, Republicans and some southern Democrats said that Kennedy was ignoring another Soviet buildup in 1963. While the administration focused on covert efforts to remove Castro from power,[280] Senators Stennis, Goldwater, and Thurmond warned that large numbers of Soviet troops had moved into Cuba since the famous weeks of October. In his newsletter, Thurmond wrote that "hopes based on the

Soviet Union's show of removing its missiles are being shattered."[281] Keating told John McCone that he had reports of 35,000 to 40,000 Soviet personnel in Cuba and many more armored units than suspected. Keating produced a position paper that called for the removal of all Soviet-bloc forces, weapons, and military equipment, as well as the downfall of the communist regime under Castro.[282] "I do not think the people of the United States have been told all the facts," Keating announced in February, "I don't think the Congress has a sufficient knowledge of the facts as a whole."[283] He said that the Soviet buildup had "turned the island into a base for subversion and terrorism throughout the Hemisphere."[284] Thurmond challenged the veracity of the administration by saying there were at least double the number of troops than Kennedy acknowledged.[285] The administration rebutted the charges. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara delivered a televised speech on February 6, interrupting popular shows like the "Three Stooges," to show pictures confirming that offensive missiles had been removed.[286] The following day, McNamara wrote Keating a letter arguing that, while he did not want to engage in "partisan debate" on such an important issue, the senator's statements about Soviet medium range sites in Cuba were "incorrect."[287] A Senate investigation, conducted by a committee that included hawks like Symington, Jackson, Thurmond, and Goldwater, reported that most of the charges about Cuba were unfounded.[288] But their findings did not stop the Republicans attacks.[289] In May, Senator Symington warned Democrats that a majority of Americans who felt the president had the Cuba situation "under control last fall but had now lost it . . . there was recognition of a need to do something about Cuba."[290] In October, Goldwater wrote that the U.S. had become a "laughing stock since a comparatively unarmed Cuba soundly kicked the daylights out of a U.S. sponsored

invasion force at the Bay of Pigs; the 'get tough' ultimatum to Khrushchev about missile withdrawal was found to have been offset by the shutdown of our own bases in Italy and Turkey," and more.[291]

In addition to Cuba, conservatives attacked Kennedy's support for the Limited Test Ban Treaty, which the Senate ratified by a vote of 80 to 19 in September. They also argued that Secretary McNamara was undermining America's national security by convincing the president to slow down the production of nuclear weapons and redirect money toward conventional forces. When McNamara finally signed onto the concept of Mutual Assured Destruction in 1963, they said, he promoted a version that abandoned Eisenhower's insistence on nuclear primacy. McNamara was arguing that in order to make nuclear war implausible, neither the U.S. nor the Soviets should be able to launch a second strike. In other words, neither super power should have more nuclear capacity than the other.[292] Conservative activists like Phyllis Schlafly felt that McNamara had won acceptance for lowering nuclear weapons production right as the Soviets accelerated their own.[293]

Although Kennedy believed that his chances for reelection in 1964 were extremely good, these attacks concerned him. In August 1963, the president instructed Myer Feldman, a White House counsel, to study into right-wing organizations and their impact. Feldman reported to the president that the radical right constituted a "formidable force in American life" that had helped elect 74 percent of the candidates they endorsed in 1962. "The right-wing," he said, "seems to have been more successful, politically, than is generally realized." Even the four candidates who ran as John Birch members in 1962 had "surprisingly strong" races. Distinguishing between the conservative right and the

radical right, Feldman estimated that the latter spent about $15 million annually and had radio programs on over 1,000 stations. Some of the groups studied included the Americans for Constitutional Action (founded in 1958) which published annual ratings of legislators and the American Council of Christian Churches, headed by the Protestant fundamentalist Reverend Carl McIntire, which broadcast a weekly radio show that often focused on the threats Americans faced from communist forces. Other groups had similar activities. Founded in 1962, the Conservative Society of America published a voting index, action handbook, two-full lengths books (including one on General Walker), pamphlets, and radio shows devoted to combating the "policies of appeasement of Communism." The Young Americans for Freedom, which had been founded by William Buckley in 1960 to represent conservative youth, claimed a paid membership of 30,000 and chapters on almost 200 college campuses. Most of the money for these organizations came from corporations, foundations, and individuals. The "National Education Program," a propaganda machine for several right-wing organizations, received substantial sums from Gulf Oil, Republic Steel, Humble Oil Company, Armco Steel, and U.S. Steel. Small contributions came from "average" citizens who offered money at rallies and purchased books, pamphlets or tape recordings.[294] Senator McGee warned Kennedy that the movement had been developing a "close affinity" with the conservative wing of the GOP even though they remained operationally separate. McGee explained that "the Conservative Right and the Radical Right, in short, often make common cause, and if the conservatives are not card-carrying Birchers and do not—for instance—advocate the impeachment of the Chief Justice, they deplore the same Supreme Court decisions as those who do . . . in short, as the Radical Left has had its sympathizers over

the years, the Radical Right in America today has its own band of conservative fellow-travellers."[295]

The president's concerns about the threat from conservatives influenced his actions in Southeast Asia. By 1963, the president had sent military advisers and assistance to South Vietnam to shore up their fight against Ho Chi Minh's National Liberation Front. When the president received reports of the difficulties the U.S. was experiencing in the region and the dangers of escalation, he resisted ordering a withdrawal. On November 1, South Vietnam unraveled when a U.S. supported coup resulted in President Ngo Dinh Diem's assassination. According to Kenneth O'Donnell, Kennedy recalled the politics of 1950 in a conversation they had when he said: "if I tried to pull out completely now from Vietnam we would have another Joe McCarthy Red scare on our hands. But I can do it after I'm reelected. So we had better make damn sure that I am re-elected."[296]

On November 22, 1963, conservatives greeted Kennedy when he arrived on a campaign trip in Dallas, Texas. The day before, Nixon had warned an audience in Dallas that Kennedy's foreign policy was "brave talk and no action.[297] When the president came to the city (which he called "nut country") conservative protesters surrounded him. One associate of General Walker handed out 5000 handbills modeled after police "most wanted" circulars. Their caption read "Wanted for Treason" and contained "mug shots" of the president. "This man is wanted for treason," the handbill said, for "turning the sovereignty of the U.S. over to the communist controlled United States" and for having been "WRONG on innumerable issues affecting the security of the U.S…." A group of wealthy, conservative businessmen paid for a full page ad in the *Dallas Morning News*

that asked why Kennedy done nothing as “thousands of Cubans have been imprisoned, are starving and being persecuted” and why he had “scrapped the Monroe Doctrine in favor of the ‘Spirit of Moscow’?” [298] When Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated Kennedy the next day, it was not surprising that many observers instantly assumed that the far right was responsible.[299]

Before his death, President Kennedy had completed the restoration of the political strength of liberal internationalism. At a critical turning point, facing a concerted effort by Republicans to use national security as a method to regain electoral ground, Kennedy and his administration emerged from the Cuban Missile Crisis emboldened by a model of how Democrats could protect the nation. National security had been a central part of Kennedy’s congressional career, as well as his 1960 presidential campaign. But as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the events in Dallas revealed, Kennedy, and other like-minded Democrats, had not eliminated the Republican Right from the scene. Rather they had created an intensely competitive environment where national security remained a central political issue and powerful factions within each party competed against one another, usually drowning out proponents of bipartisanship, to create a volatile governing situation.

THE ELECTION OF 1964

During the 1964 presidential campaign, neither Democrats nor Republicans exhibited much restraint when dealing with national security. In some respects, the vicious tone of the campaign was the natural outburst produced by almost fifteen years of partisan battle over national security. The campaign pitted two politicians who embodied the competing

ideologies of the era--liberal internationalism (Lyndon Johnson) and the Republican Right (Barry Goldwater).

Johnson's opponent in 1964 was Senator Barry Goldwater. The son of Protestant and Jewish department store entrepreneurs, Goldwater's unimpressive school grades had convinced his parents to send him to a military academy where he thrived. During WWII, Goldwater served as an Air Force pilot. After working in local government for several years, Goldwater won a seat in the Senate in 1952, when he stunned Democrats by defeating Majority Leader Ernest McFarland. The senator gained national attention when he published *The Conscience of a Conservative* (1960). Goldwater did not trust the Soviets and supported a war against communism that relied on everything from nuclear weapons to foreign aid.[300] The senator had reluctantly accepted that big government was needed in order to defend the nation and defeat communism, once writing that "as a conservative, I deplore the huge tax levy that is needed to finance the world's number-one military establishment. But even more do I deplore the prospect of a foreign conquest, which the absence of that establishment would quickly accomplish."[301] Goldwater also objected to the expanding power of the presidency since the 1930s, which he said had come at the expense of the other branches. Those who supported a "strong" presidency, Goldwater argued, showed a "totalitarian philosophy that the end justifies the means."[302]

Goldwater championed the ideas that had animated the Republican Right since WWII. As a result of his prominence among right-wing activists, Goldwater became a test case for whether a Republican who fully embraced their positions could win a presidential election. Goldwater told supporters that the administration was hiding its true

intentions to escalate the war in Vietnam. America was already at war, he said, and the president needed to acknowledge this was the case and authorize a full-scale military operation rather than half-hearted measures. Speaking in Southern California, Goldwater played to Johnson's worst fears by claiming that "this loss will be a far more costly loss than the humiliating defeat we have suffered in Korea. It will mean the loss of the whole of Southeast Asia."[303] The senator coupled these criticisms of Johnson with a proposal to end the draft so that the U.S. could shift to a more efficient professional force; Johnson responded that the Pentagon was studying the issue and he refused to make the draft a political issue.[304]

Although most Republicans did not have a firm position about Vietnam in 1964,[305] Goldwater was not the only Republican criticizing Johnson for his stance toward communism. Richard Nixon said that the new Soviet leadership was "younger than Khrushchev, they're tougher than the old Khrushchev was, they are more dangerous for that reason . . . against the new team in the Kremlin, America needs a new team in the state Department and in the White House."[306] The Republican Platform in 1964 promised the GOP would fight for a "free and independent government in Cuba" and insist on a complete withdrawal of Soviet forces from the island. A flood of popular right-wing books hit the shelves, many of which focused on these themes. The books included the third edition of Phyllis Schlafly's *A Choice Not an Echo* and J. Evetts Haley's *A Texan Looks at Lyndon.*[307] Senator Dirksen warned that the administration's "indecision" was "dribbling away both American lives and American prestige in Southeast Asia."[308] The House Republican Conference accused Johnson of having let the nation's "guard down" in Vietnam. During his acceptance speech at the Republican Convention, Goldwater said

the words that got right under the president's skin: "yesterday it was Korea; tonight it is Vietnam."[309]

These attacks posed a difficult challenge to Johnson since Democrats had not yet coalesced around a clear position on Vietnam. Behind the scenes, this period was marked by confusion, uncertainty, and division. Although most of the president's advisors supported continued military involvement, congressional Democrats did not yet have a clear vision of what to do. Some urged the president to protect Southeast Asia from the domino effect while others called for withdrawal. Senate Majority Leader Mansfield had written the president in December 1963 that "there may be only a war which will, in time, involve U.S. forces throughout Southeast Asia, and finally throughout China itself in search of victory. What national interests in Asia would steel the American people for the massive costs of an ever-deepening involvement of that kind?" In January 1964, Mansfield wrote the president again, referring to a phone call where Johnson said he did not want another China in Vietnam, to say that "neither do we want another Korea. It would seem that a key (but often overlooked) factor in both situations was a tendency to bite off more than we were prepared in the end to chew . . . We are close to the point of no return in Viet Nam."[310] While warnings from senators such as the liberal Frank Church (ID) were more predictable, Johnson was also hearing from the southern conservative Senator George Smathers who reported in 1964 that he was having troubling finding legislators who thought 'we ought to fight a war in that area of the world."[311] *New York Times* reporter Max Frankel wrote in his column that "it is beginning to look as if the Democrats plan to be their own most vigorous critics in this year's election debate."[312]

The most revealing example of this confusion came with Johnson's most trusted ally, the hawkish Richard Russell, who did not support America's involvement. On May 27, Johnson called Russell to let him know that he needed advice on the "Vietnam thing." Russell said it was the "damn worse mess I ever saw" and there was no way out without a major war against China in the jungles. Russell said the U.S. position was "deteriorating" and it looks like "the more we try to do for them the less they are willing to do for themselves." Russell said the American people were not prepared to send in their citizens to fight. If it came to the option of sending Americans in to fight or getting out, Russell said, "I'd get out." When asked by Johnson what was at stake, Russell responded that the territory was not worth a "damn bit" to the U.S. When Johnson said the U.S. needed to uphold the SEATO alliance by protecting South Vietnam, Russell responded that the U.S. seemed to be the only ones paying attention to the treaty.[313] Russell also said he was concerned that Secretary McNamara was not "objective" as he needed to be in surveying conditions in Vietnam and that he didn't understand the "history and background" of the Vietnamese people. Even McNamara, Russell added, had admitted to Congress that the situation was not getting any better.[314] Calling it a "tragic situation," Russell said this was a crisis where Johnson could not win.[315] Russell warned Johnson that Wayne Morse—the Oregon senator who opposed involvement in the conflict--reflected the sentiment of a majority of Americans.[316]

Privately, Johnson agreed with Russell's concerns. Echoing Russell's argument, Johnson told McGeorge Bundy that Vietnam was the "biggest damn mess" and that it looked to him like they were getting "into another Korea." Johnson said the Communist Chinese would enter and there was not much benefit the U.S. would obtain from a South

Vietnamese victory. “I don’t think it is worth fighting for and I don’t think we can’t get out.” Johnson said he was recently looking at a sergeant he knew, who had six kids, and thought why should he send him to Vietnam: “what in the hell am I ordering him out there for?”[317]

At the same time, the conflicted president felt equally intense pressure to maintain America’s presence. Strategically, Johnson feared what his hawkish advisors were telling him, namely that the loss of South Vietnam would constitute an enormous strategic defeat in the war against communism.[318] In response to Mansfield’s warning, Secretary McNamara wrote the president that the war could still be won and that “the consequences of a Communist-dominated South Vietnam are extremely serious both for the rest of Southeast Asia and for the U.S. position in the rest of Asia and indeed in other key parts of the world . . . the stakes in preserving an anti-Communist South Vietnam are so high that, in our judgment, we must go on bending every effort to win . . . My assessment of our important security interests is that they unquestionably call for holding the line against further Communist gains.”[319] Speechwriter Theodore Sorenson agreed that proposals for a neutralization of South Vietnam (a plan, supported by Mansfield, which originated with France’s Charles de Gaulle to allow the Vietnamese to resolve the conflict without international intervention), were not yet tenable: “The commitment to preserve Vietnamese independence was not made by Democrats—but we are not free to abandon it.”[320]

Politically, Johnson worried about the GOP. He said that “the Republicans [are] going to make a political issue out of it, every one of them….” After lambasting U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge as the key factor behind America’s poor performance in

Southeast Asia, Johnson said that if he removed Lodge, the former senator would be back campaigning against the administration.[321] Defending McNamara as a "flexible fella" who wanted to avoid provoking the Chinese, Johnson told Russell that the Pentagon was being lobbied by Republicans (including Lodge, Rockefeller, Nixon, and Goldwater) and the conservative media to be more aggressive in bombing North Vietnam.[322] The president said that Americans in places like Georgia would "forgive you for everything except being weak," especially with Senator Goldwater "raising hell" about going on a "hot pursuit" with more bombing. Russell agreed.[323]

When confronted with proposals to withdraw forces from Vietnam, Johnson could not stop thinking about the period when Democrats in the 1950s had paid a high price because of accusations of not standing firm against communism in Asia. "I'm not going to lose Vietnam," Johnson said to Ambassador Lodge, "I am not going to be the president who saw Southeast Asia go the way China went."[324] During one discussion with Russell, Johnson asked: "they'd impeach a President, though, that would run out, wouldn't they? Outside of Morse [Wayne Morse], everybody I talk to says you got to go in . . . I don't know how in the hell you're gonna get out unless they [Republicans] tell you to get out."[325]

Besides electoral politics, the administration feared that if Republicans gained control of Congress or the White House, they would produce a much deadlier war than the Democrats. George Ball explained, "our principal concern was one thing, that there would be a kind of orgasm of outrage in the congress and that some of the right-wing hawk Republicans might take such action that would be in effect a declaration of war or would put the administration in a position where we had to do things which we thought

would be very unwise, that might involve bringing the Chinese in or offending somebody else."[326]

In the heat of the campaign, Johnson was determined to make sure the issue did not weaken his chances for an overwhelming victory in November. While many observers dismissed Goldwater as an extremist who had no chance of victory, there were enough respected voices who disagreed to cause Johnson concern. The president was also hoping for a landslide so that he could disprove the skeptics (some real, some imagined) who did not think that he deserved to be president and would never be able to win a national election. The competitive Johnson dreamed of outdoing Roosevelt's 60.8 percent in 1936.[327]

Therefore, the president took steps to ensure that he would not be vulnerable to conservative attack. His major goal was to keep Vietnam out of the headlines by covering all his bases.[328] On the one hand, he made certain to display his hawkish credentials as a politician who had spent over a decade in the legislative trenches in the war against communism. A few weeks before the Democratic Convention in August 1964, Johnson responded to an alleged attack on August 4 on two American ships in the Gulf of Tonkin. In late July, Johnson had stepped up secret operations in the Tonkin Gulf with the hope of intimidating the North Vietnamese and taking this issue away from Goldwater, an issue which Lou Harris reported was "working" for the Republican.[329] The president downplayed an attack that occurred on August 2 and refused to approve proposals for a military attack. Johnson concluded that it had probably been a mistake or decision by a low level commander, and he wanted to avoid increasing tensions. Nonetheless, Johnson told Secretary McNamara the he wanted to leave the impression that he would be firm

"as hell" without saying something that "is dangerous." His supporters were pleased with the president's response, but also wanted to make sure the administration would remain firm and not pull out and run. Johnson reiterated the whole country wanted him to be firm because Goldwater was "raising so much hell about how he is going to blow them off the moon and they say we oughtn't to do anything that the national interest doesn't require but we sure ought to always leave the impression that if you shoot at us you going to get hit."[330]

In the early hours of August 4, there were scattered reports of another attack on a U.S. ship. At the first NSC meeting following the reports, the sole Republican in the administration, Douglas Dillon, told the president that "there is a limit on the number of times we can be attacked by the North Vietnamese without hitting their naval bases." When Johnson met with congressmen to inform them about the situation in the evening, several Democrats wavered about what to do while all the Republicans in attendance (Saltonstall, Halleck, and Dirksen) supported a congressional resolution authorizing the use of force. During a walk with Kenny O'Donnell, Johnson and he agreed that the administration was being "tested" and that a tough response by the U.S. was essential, not just for the North Vietnamese, but with an eye toward Goldwater and hawkish Republicans. Johnson was not convinced an attack had taken place (the evidence has continued to suggest that Johnson's instinct was right). But after a member of the National Security Council leaked the story to the press, Johnson decided that he needed to retaliate.[331]

The president pushed for a resolution granting him sweeping authority to increase military operations in the region. Electoral calculations were central to the president's

request.[332] In the days that followed the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the president openly spoke about the electoral implications of actions by administration officials, such as a conversation with James Rowe about the negative impact of Hubert Humphrey's numerous media appearances with regards to Vietnam could have on his political future.[333]

Johnson, before bringing the resolution to Congress, privately asked Goldwater on August 4 to support him. Goldwater said he thought this was the "proper action."[334] The senator, who was not convinced that the attacks on U.S. ships had really taken place, released a statement proclaiming that "we cannot allow the American flag to be shot at anywhere on earth if we are to retain our respect and prestige."[335]

Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin resolution on August 7 with only two votes of opposition. All of the Republican leadership supported the measure, while Senator Fulbright took responsibility for moving the measure through Congress. While many legislators expressed deep opposition about passing this measure, Fulbright—who was a respected southern chairman at this point in his career—personally assured them that Johnson would not misuse the authority they gave him and that the measure would protect the president, and Democrats, from right-wing attacks in the election.[336] Johnson had promised Fulbright, the senator told his colleagues, that he would return to Congress if he needed to change the mission significantly. Just as important, most Democrats could not foresee what would come next. Even President Johnson's most aggressive advisors were not yet anticipating the scale of ground war on which the United States would soon embark.

Through the resolution, Johnson sent a strong signal to voters that he would not back down from communists. “I didn’t just screw Ho Chi Minh,” Johnson boasted, “I cut his pecker off.”[337] Johnson was elated as his poll numbers skyrocketed.[338] Besides the resolution and handling of Goldwater, the president surrounded himself with Kennedy’s most hawkish advisors, including McNamara, Rusk, and Bundy. Breaking the tradition of insulating Secretaries of Defense from elections, Johnson instructed McNamara to deliver speeches to rebut Goldwater’s claims that the U.S. would lose 90 percent of its “deliverable nuclear capacity” by the 1970s as a result of Democratic policies.[339] Johnson instructed Rusk and McNamara to monitor Republican statements on Vietnam and prepare strong responses for reporters as the debate turned uglier.[340]

While Johnson protected himself from hawkish attacks, he simultaneously turned the tables on Goldwater by depicting the senator as an unstable individual who could not be trusted with a nuclear stockpile.[341] Back in May, for instance, the president had capitalized on a statement by Goldwater in an interview with ABC television. Goldwater had said that, in Vietnam, Johnson was fighting the kind of defensive war that “is never won.” To shut down the hidden trails that the communists were using to move troops through the jungles, Goldwater discussed several possibilities of the “defoliation of the forests by low-yield atomic weapons….” Although the senator added that he did not think the U.S. would use this option, the comment was taken out of context by Democratic campaign officials to suggest that Goldwater intended to use nuclear weapons.[342] Another example came following the Gulf of Tonkin incident, when Goldwater told reporters that Johnson authorized the use of nuclear weapons in Vietnam. The president told the press that this was not true.[343] In discussions with reporters, Johnson pointed to the nuclear

weapons statement as another example of the kind of reckless charges that Goldwater and other Republicans were willing to make. Johnson questioned the stability of his Republican opponent.[344]

By late August, many of the nation's most prominent journalists (such as Walter Lippmann and Joseph Alsop) were publishing articles that warned Goldwater would bring the nation into a full-scale war.[345] At this point in the election, Johnson believed that the most important development in the campaign, even more important than the white backlash against Democrats from civil rights legislation, was the "Republican backlash" of moderates against Goldwater.[346] According to a Gallup poll completed in early September, Johnson explained to Representative Carl Albert (OK) that "the three issues are roughly, peace, prosperity, and Medicare . . . the party best keep us out of war, Democrats 44, Republicans 20…."[347]

On September 7, 1964, the Democratic National Committee played on these perceptions by airing the "Daisy" spot in prime television markets. The advertisement opened with a young girl picking petals off a flower. As the girl slowly counts to ten, viewers hear a male voice simultaneously counting down from ten to one. As the male voice reaches one, the camera zooms in on the girl's eyes which suddenly turn black. One of her pupils shows the reflection of a nuclear explosion. The advertisement ends with Johnson exclaiming that: "These are the stakes—to make a world in which all of God's children can live, or to go into the dark. We must love each other, or we must die." The chair of the Republican National Committee accused Democrats of committing "libel per se" against Goldwater.

Both parties later pledged to a Fair Campaign Practices Code in which they would avoid vilifying opponents through unfair accusations.[348] Although Johnson pulled the Daisy ad, the effect of the spots and the national media reporting on the ad was to convey the image of Goldwater as an out-of-control militarist. Through these ads, boasted Johnson's aide Bill Moyers, the Democrats had "hung the nuclear noose around Goldwater and finished him off."[349] In subsequent statements, the president went so far as to claim that he was the only candidate who would "keep the United States out of the war in Vietnam."[350] News about the John Birch Society and the Hollywood movie *Dr. Strangelove* played into concerns of an overzealous right-wing willing to risk nuclear anihiliation.[351]

On November 3, 1964, Johnson won 61.1 percent of the popular vote and 486 electoral votes. Democrats enjoyed sweeping majorities in the House and Senate. Johnson, while crafting a domestic agenda that appealed to liberals who were hoping to extend the reach of the federal government beyond the New Deal agenda, succeeded where Truman had failed. He had neutralized Republicans on national security. Nonetheless, the Republican calls for stronger military action continued unabated. In late 1964, Nixon and Strom Thurmond (who had switched to the Republican Party) publicly called for stepping up military pressure. They warned that Democrats would suffer politically if he did not.[352]

Even though the election marked a major victory for Democrats, the president did not rest easily. On November 5, the president asked Secretary McNamara for an update on the situation in Vietnam. McNamara told the president that Vietnam was a "worrisome problem," explaining that he, Rusk, and Bundy were not sure what would come next.

McNamara said that they were trying to find something in between the "clobber China" school and the current course, which would result in "accommodation with the Chinese" through a popular front government.[353] After reviewing the results of the election, Johnson returned to Russell. The Georgian's feelings about Vietnam, which he called Johnson's "worst problem," had not changed. He said they needed to find a way to "get out of there," because if they started "messing around with those Chinese," troops would be there for ten years.[354]

On December 1, Johnson approved a bombing campaign against the North Vietnamese. He concurred with Maxwell Taylor's recommendation that the U.S. military should use every bomb that they had. "We don't want to send a widow woman to slap Jack Dempsey," the president said.[355] Johnson was also fearful that General Curtis LeMay, who retired in February, would use his newfound freedom to attack the president and call for an all-out war (indeed, in his memoirs published in November 1965 LeMay implored the president to threaten the North Vietnamese that he would bomb them back into the Stone Age). Following an attack on Army barracks in Pleiku on February 6, Johnson launched "Operation Rolling Thunder," one of the fiercest bombing campaigns in military history.

Still, the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and Operation Rolling Thunder had not made a full-scale war inevitable. As a result of his landslide reelection in 1964, Johnson had even more political space to make a choice. A number of international leaders, policy advisors, legislators, and pundits with impeccable Cold War credentials continued to warn the president that increasing U.S. involvement would be disastrous. On March 6, Russell told Johnson that the war "scares the life out of me but I don't know how to back

up now . . . we just got into the thing and there is no way out and we're just getting pushed forward and forward and forward…." Johnson himself acknowledged that "we're losing more every day, we getting in worse…."[356] Vice President Humphrey urged Johnson to call for a withdrawal since 1965 "is the first year when we can face the Vietnam problem without being preoccupied with the political repercussions from the Republican right…"[357] Through their willingness to criticize expanded U.S. involvement publicly and privately, congressional Democrats had create an important political opportunity.

But it was a missed opportunity. These warnings and self-doubt did not overcome the president's Cold War beliefs and his political fears of the right, both of which led him to side with his hawkish advisors.[358] In the spring of 1965, Johnson decided to "Americanize" the war by sending in ground troops. In terms of anti-communism, the president and his advisors continued to see the battle over Vietnam as a central step in the struggle against Asian Communism. If Vietnam fell, according to the logic of the domino theory, the entire continent would soon be lost. "The choice," McNamara explained, "is not simply whether to continue our efforts to keep South Vietnam free and independent, but rather whether to continue our struggle to halt Communist expansion in Asia."[359] In response to Senator George McGovern's claim that the war had taken a dangerous turn with the addition of troops and that bombing had no effect on the communist presence in North Vietnam, McNamara told the president, "If bombing won't have any effect and the added men are undesirable, what in the hell do we do, get out?" McNamara said that when he sat with foreign press from England, France, Italy, Germany, and Israel, none offered a different strategy than the one the U.S. was pursuing. The only criticism,

McNamara said, came from the French who only said the U.S. was not taking into account their experience (thus ignoring DeGaulle's proposal for neutralization of the war).[360]

Johnson's political fears led him to the same conclusion. Responding to campus protests over Vietnam in 1965, Johnson told Under Secretary of State George Ball, "don't pay any attention to what those little shits on the campuses do. The great beast is the reactionary element in the country."[361] While there were protests against the war on college campuses, they did not turn public opinion.[362] When confronted with data suggesting that the U.S. could not defeat the North Vietnamese, Johnson said he regretted the situation but believed there was no turning back.[363] As Johnson explained, "I knew that if we let Communist aggression succeed in taking over South Vietnam, there would follow in this country an endless national debate—a mean and destructive debate—that would shatter my Presidency, kill my administration, and damage our democracy. I knew that Harry Truman and Dean Acheson had lost their effectiveness the day that the Communists took over in China."[364]

According to William Bundy, "[T]he president, his advisors, and almost every experienced Washington observer thought that the most serious pressures of American opinion must come in time from the hard-line right wing. To make a 'soft' move and get nothing for it . . . was, it was deeply believed, likely to open the way to the kind of wide outcry for extreme measures that had characterized the MacArthur crisis . . . ."[365] These fears were not irrational. A growing number of congressional Republicans were demanding escalation throughout 1965. Gerald Ford, who the House Republicans selected as the Minority Leader in 1965, argued that Johnson needed to bomb industrial

plants, ammunition dumps, and the transportation infrastructure of North Vietnam. “Why are we pulling our best punches in Vietnam?” Ford asked, “is there no end, no other answer except for more men, more men, more men?”[366] Eisenhower told the president that the U.S. could only negotiate from a position of strength.[367] Republicans said that the president needed to call for higher military spending to provide the support needed to finance the growing troop presence.

When speaking with congressional Republicans, Johnson did not express the doubts that emerged in private conversations with Democrats like Russell. Instead, Johnson sounded like a unwavering hawk. After listening to Johnson’s “friend and brother” Senators Church and McGovern “t-ing off” on the administration’s Vietnamese policy in February 1965, Senator Dirksen concluded that the president needed some “defense” from the other side of the aisle. Explaining to Dirksen that President Eisenhower was in agreement with administration policies, Johnson added that the “worst problem we have,” were not the ambushes, raids, or accidents that occurred in Vietnam but the congressional “speeches that are made about, uh, negotiation . . . and about pulling out . . . they use those, the communists take them and print them up in pamphlets and circularize them in newspapers . . . they keep all the government fearful . . . .” There have been nine changes in government in Vietnam, Johnson said, because they are afraid the U.S. would pull out and negotiate. By February, Johnson was citing Eisenhower when he told advisors to clamp down on any public discussions about negotiation (Johnson was especially angry with Hubert Humphrey for raising the issue with the media). Johnson said that the North Vietnamese would only negotiation when they felt that they had no choice.[368]

Even as Republican legislators emerged as Johnson's strongest congressional allies with regards to Vietnam, the partisan attacks continued. On June 14, the chairman of the House Republican Conference, Melvin Laird (WI) said that Republican support for Johnson's Vietnam policy might soon come to an end because the president was not clear on whether he would accept a "large-scale use of ground forces in order to save face in Vietnam." Republicans, Laird said, could only conclude that "present policy is aimed not at victory over the Communist insurgency nor at driving Communists out of South Vietnam but rather at some sort of negotiated settlement which would include Communist elements in a coalition government." Hearing these kinds of statements led Senator Mansfield to warn his colleagues against returning to the bitter partisanship of the 1950s. "That may be ancient history," he said, "but the scars of partisan politics are still with us years afterward. Let no one doubt that we have paid a massive price for the politics of foreign policy of an earlier day. We have paid for its divisiveness with lives and with billions of dollars of foreign aid—much of which has vanished without a constructive trace into the maw of Asia—and I hope we are not now beginning to pay for it, once again, in many lives."[369]

As Johnson sent ground troops into Vietnam during the remainder of 1965, most Democrats hesitantly agreed to support the president. Even those legislators who had been strong skeptics, like Russell, backed the president once the operations were underway. Southern Democrats said that if the president was fighting, he should mobilize all the force available to him in order to bring the war to a speedy conclusion without many American casualties. In these early months, Republicans were the most solid allies

for the president. Johnson worked closely with Dirksen, Ford, and Senate Republican Whip Thomas Kuchel (CA).[370]

INTO VIETNAM

Although often remembered as a "Democratic War," Vietnam was rooted in Republican politics as well. While the popular political ideas from the Cold War and the ideology of liberal internationalism were highly influential, Johnson's decision to accelerate the war in Vietnam also grew out of the partisan battles over national security. Democrats in the 1950s had decided to respond to the Republican Right, not by seeking to resurrect a bipartisan coalition that existed in 1947 and 1948, but by entering into a partisan campaign to demonstrate they were not weak on national security and their party was better suited to protect the nation.

Johnson's anxieties about the Republican Right continued to shape his outlook about national security throughout his presidency. Combined with his acceptance of the domino theory, this resulted in tremendous political pressure to accelerate rather than curtail the intervention in Vietnam.[371] Besides threatening his chances for re-election in 1968, the president believed that Republicans would capitalize on any sign of Democratic weakness to build support for a far more lethal war that included nuclear weapons. Moreover, Johnson thought that successful conservative attacks on his national security policies would severely weaken his ability to keep pursuing his ambitious domestic agenda. Each time that Johnson was confronted with an opportunity to pull back, the president decided against that option. Military and diplomatic strategy was always front and center, but domestic politics was never far behind. Ironically, his intense political

sensitivity pushed Johnson deeper into a war that undermined exactly what he sought to protect.

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