

**More Than Deference:
Eisenhower, Congress, and Foreign Policy**

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The standard view of President Eisenhower's relationship with Congress in foreign policy asserts that Congress became quiescent after the failure of congressional challenges to executive authority during the first two years of Eisenhower's presidency.¹ As James Lindsay writes of the period after 1954: "Deference... replaced both cooperation and confrontation as the chief characteristic of executive-legislative relations" (Lindsay 1994, 22). This view is largely correct with respect to the use of force: Congress was usually content to let Eisenhower make the difficult decisions about when to deploy U.S. forces in hotspots such as the Middle East and East Asia.

But the conventional wisdom neglects two important parts of the story of Eisenhower's relationship with Congress. First, it underestimates the extent to which Eisenhower and his advisers had to employ a variety of clever strategies to earn congressional backing on major foreign policy issues. Eisenhower's deft cultivation of support on Capitol Hill, as much as any congressional predisposition to deference, led Congress to support him on use of force and other decisions.

Second, the standard view does not give sufficient attention to the extent to which Congress continued to challenge Eisenhower during the latter years of his presidency on issues that were at the heart of his foreign policy grand strategy, particularly foreign aid and defense spending. In fact, Congress repeatedly slashed Eisenhower's foreign aid spending requests by large amounts, even as it appropriated funds for many defense programs that Eisenhower opposed. This congressional assertiveness on foreign affairs spending led Eisenhower to "go public" more often during his second term in an effort to build support for his foreign policy agenda. Only by employing all the tools of

¹ I thank Andrew Dallas, Khalil Ali, and Benjamin Jones for excellent research assistance related to this paper.

presidential influence was Eisenhower able to prevent Congress from using the power of the purse to wholly undermine his grand strategy.

In what follows, I summarize Eisenhower's grand strategy, explain how Eisenhower co-opted Congress on use of force issues, analyze in greater depth Eisenhower's relationship with Congress on foreign aid, and offer some food-for-thought concerning President Obama's relationship with Congress today.

Eisenhower's grand strategy

Eisenhower's foreign policy agenda was shaped by a distinct grand strategy for dealing with the Soviet Union and the threat of communism. Like Harry Truman, his predecessor, Eisenhower thought that the containment of communism must be America's foremost objective, and that containment required a powerful military, robust alliances, and effective international institutions. But Eisenhower placed equal importance on economic strength, believing that the United States needed a dynamic economy in order to prevail over the Soviet Union in the long run. Eisenhower's worry that excessive spending and taxation would severely hamper economic growth led him to overhaul American defense strategy.

After the outbreak of the Korean War, Truman had adopted NSC-68 as the foundation for American strategy. NSC-68 called for massive increases in spending on both conventional and nuclear arms so that the United States could maintain a military advantage over the Soviet Union and fight communist expansion anywhere in the world. The combination of its implementation and Korean War spending led the defense budget to triple between 1950 and 1953.

Eisenhower concluded that the United States could not afford to continue spending at that level, and after a review of defense strategy at the beginning of his administration, he adopted a new strategy centered on nuclear deterrence, which allowed for sharply reduced spending on conventional arms and military personnel.² This strategy, known as the New Look, called for the United States to deter Soviet or Chinese aggression with an expanded nuclear arsenal, while relying on local allies and covert action to counter communist advances on the ground (Gaddis 2005, 125-161).

On the whole, Eisenhower implemented this strategy with remarkable consistency. After negotiating the end of the Korean War, Eisenhower slashed defense spending, and he kept U.S. troops out of combat for the rest of his presidency, while employing the CIA to spur the overthrow of leftist governments in Iran and Guatemala. Eisenhower also was more willing than any other American president to engage in nuclear brinkmanship, threatening China with nuclear retaliation should it intervene directly in Indochina or move against Formosa (now Taiwan).

Yet Eisenhower's grand strategy evolved over the course of his presidency in important ways. After initially paying insufficient attention to the Third World, by the end of his first term he came to recognize the need to compete with the Soviet Union and China for political and economic influence throughout the Middle East and Asia. His politically courageous decision in 1956 to oppose Britain, France, and Israel during the Suez crisis was motivated by an understanding that if the United States did not stop its allies' attack on Egypt, America's standing throughout the Middle East would weaken (Divine 1981). And starting in 1957, Eisenhower tried to shift U.S. foreign economic

² This strategy was outlined in NSC 162/2, adopted on October 30, 1953.

policy from a narrow focus on trade and private investment toward a greater emphasis on the provision of long-term development assistance to poor countries.

To implement his grand strategy, Eisenhower needed support from Congress. Yet when he took office, congressional opposition to the exercise of executive power in foreign affairs was at a fever pitch. Since 1950, conservatives in Congress had been assailing Truman for taking America to war in Korea and deploying four Army divisions to Europe without congressional authorization. At the same time, Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI) was waging a witchhunt against State Department employees, and momentum was building in support of an amendment introduced by Senator John Bricker (R-OH) to restrict the president's ability to enter into binding international agreements without congressional approval.

In this context, Eisenhower recognized that he could achieve little in foreign policy without a relaxation of congressional-executive tensions. His success on this front was one of his most important foreign policy achievements. Although legislators fought him on foreign aid and defense spending through the end of his presidency, Eisenhower's respect for the institution of Congress, regular consultation with legislators, and use of a variety of strategies for cultivating congressional support fostered greater foreign policy cooperation between the branches on the whole. These strategies included co-opting Congress into shared responsibility for use of force decisions, facilitating compromise by making concessions to Congress on issues of secondary importance, and going public or threatening Republican legislators when necessary.

Use of force decisions

Eisenhower's approach to Congress began with his recognition that the power to declare war resided constitutionally in the legislature. Keenly aware that Truman's decision to deploy U.S. forces to Korea without congressional authorization fueled sharp congressional criticism of Truman when the war effort sputtered, Eisenhower repeatedly demonstrated a reluctance to use force without congressional approval.

This reluctance was particularly evident when Eisenhower considered intervening in Indochina as the French faced imminent defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. In NSC meetings and private conversations, Eisenhower told his advisers that he would not intervene in Indochina without congressional approval (Burke and Greenstein 1989, 46, 69; Immerman 1987, 135-136). This position led Eisenhower to engage in intensive consultations with Congress, both to gauge congressional opinion and to try to build congressional backing for a potential intervention. At one key consultative meeting, a bipartisan group of congressional leaders told Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Arthur Radford that they would not support intervention without a commitment to participate from U.S. allies, particularly Britain, and a commitment by France to grant Indochina independence. After this meeting, Eisenhower ruled out the possibility of unilateral American intervention, telling his advisers: "Even if we tried such a course, we would have to take it to Congress and fight for it like dogs, with very little hope of success" (Immerman 1987, 136).

At the same time, Eisenhower's handling of Indochina policy in 1954 revealed a deft ability to co-opt Congress. Eisenhower was disinclined himself to intervene unilaterally in Indochina, believing that the United States was more effective fighting the

Cold War alongside allies. But Eisenhower also thought a communist takeover of Indochina would lead to a “domino effect” in Southeast Asia (Divine 1981, 39). By eliciting from congressional leaders a statement that they would support the use of force if it was carried out multilaterally and with a French guarantee of Indochinese independence, Eisenhower gained their tacit assent to a prospective intervention under those conditions (Burke and Greenstein 1989, 82, 111). This enabled him and Dulles to set about trying (unsuccessfully) to gain the British and French commitments that Congress had requested, with the knowledge that Congress would back an intervention if those commitments were obtained.

Eisenhower’s approach to possible uses of force elsewhere also demonstrated both his respect for congressional war power authority and his ability to co-opt Congress. In early 1955, as mainland China shelled the small offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu, which were occupied by Chinese Nationalist troops, Eisenhower was faced with the decision of whether to use force to protect the Nationalists. Eisenhower told his advisers that he would not approve a U.S. attack on the Chinese mainland without congressional authorization, even commenting that such a use of force “could conceivably lead to impeachment” (Accinelli 1990, 333).

Eisenhower’s view on the crisis was that, regardless of congressional approval, the United States should not go to war with the mainland over the small offshore islands. But Eisenhower also knew that he risked being criticized by the fiercely anti-Communist “China bloc” in Congress if he did nothing to protect the Nationalists. To preempt such criticism, Eisenhower and Dulles came up with a clever plan for co-opting Congress: requesting a congressional resolution authorizing the use of force in the Formosa Strait,

thereby sending a signal of resoluteness to the Nationalists and their American supporters (as well as to the Chinese Communists). This plan worked, as the House and Senate approved by overwhelming margins a resolution giving the president the authority to employ the military “as he deems necessary” to protect Formosa—the first time in American history that Congress had given the president such a blank check (Ambrose 1984, 232). Anna Kasten Nelson describes how the resolution represented a form of effective co-optation: “[It] ensured that any unforeseen developments surrounding the Formosa issue could be met without fear of political reprisals on the domestic front” (Nelson 1987, 55).

Two years later, Eisenhower gained congressional approval of a similar resolution concerning the potential U.S. response to communist aggression in the Middle East, though this resolution did not explicitly authorize the president to deploy U.S. forces. Like its approval of the Formosa Resolution, Congress’ passage of this Middle East Resolution in part reflected growing congressional deference to the executive. Some members of Congress, happy to leave the difficult decisions to Eisenhower, even argued that the president didn’t need congressional approval to use force overseas (Ambrose 1984, 382; Lindsay 1994, 22).

But the passage of these congressional resolutions was also a testament to Eisenhower’s persistent efforts to gain congressional trust, and was the result of a consistent Eisenhower strategy of cultivating congressional support for possible uses of force before actual decisions to deploy troops needed to be made. The strategy paid dividends in 1958 when Congress largely remained publicly silent as Eisenhower sent U.S. troops to Lebanon as peacekeepers to bolster a pro-Western government, even

though most legislators were privately skeptical of the deployment's wisdom (Divine 1981, 97-104).

The battle over foreign aid

While congressional-executive relations on use of force matters were generally cooperative under Eisenhower, Congress remained fiercely independent when it came to foreign policy spending. This independence was demonstrated most powerfully with respect to foreign aid, an issue on which Eisenhower struggled mightily—and with only partial success—to win congressional support.

Eisenhower's struggle with Congress over foreign aid—or, as it was then called, the Mutual Security Program—is worthy of more in-depth examination, for two main reasons. First, foreign aid was central to Eisenhower's grand strategy, and he considered it to be a top presidential priority (Hess 2010, 5). Second, Eisenhower employed a variety of strategies to gain backing for his foreign aid requests, offering a rich basis for comparing the effectiveness of these different approaches.

Ironically, Eisenhower's commitment to low government spending was part of the source of his support for foreign aid. Eisenhower believed that the United States could get more bang for its buck in the effort to contain communism by helping to boost the capacity of other countries than by using the money for any other purpose. As he said when making his first foreign aid request to Congress, in May 1953: “Unequivocally, I can state that this amount of money judiciously spent abroad will add much more to our Nation's ultimate security in the world than would an even greater amount spent merely to increase the size of our own military forces...”³

³ President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Special Message to Congress on the Military Security Program, May 5, 1953.

But Eisenhower's aid proposals evolved in an important way during his presidency. When he took office, Eisenhower's foreign aid program consisted almost entirely of arms transfers and budgetary support to America's military allies. It was only in his second term that he began to push for large increases in U.S. assistance for economic development. This evolution was triggered by his recognition that the United States needed to do more economically in order to compete effectively with the Soviet Union in the Third World (Kaufman 1982, 49).

Concomitant with this change in the profile of Eisenhower's aid requests was an evolution in his approach to gaining congressional support. During his first term, Eisenhower's legislative strategy on aid centered on intensive private lobbying of key members of Congress, coupled with mild public statements conveying deference to Congress' prerogative to cut his requests. Faced with unsatisfactory results from this strategy, Eisenhower shifted course dramatically in his second term, launching multifaceted public campaigns to build support for his aid agenda and criticizing Congress harshly when it failed to approve his proposals. Although Congress continued to reject some of Eisenhower's aid agenda, and never provided as much funding as he wanted, the latter strategy appears to have been somewhat more effective than the former.

Eisenhower's first term advocacy

During the two years of unified government in 1953 and 1954, the Eisenhower administration invested substantial time in wooing key House and Senate authorization and appropriations committee chairmen. Yet Eisenhower's aid requests for FY 1954 and FY 1955 were slashed by 16% and 20%, respectively, by the end of the appropriations process. These cuts occurred despite the administration's attempt to accommodate

congressional opinion by shifting a large portion of the proposed aid budget from Europe to the Cold War's new frontlines in Indochina and Formosa, where conservatives generally wanted the United States to be engaged (Reichard 1975, 73).

Rather than scold Congress for these cuts, Eisenhower chose to graciously accept them. Following the enactment of the 1953 appropriation, Eisenhower stated that the foreign aid program could manage with the reduced amount of funding. More remarkably, after the House cut his FY 1955 request by \$600 million, Eisenhower commented that the House figure was "as good a guess as ours" (Reichard 1975, 76). These statements surely represented in part a desire to avoid a war of words with his co-partisans in Congress at a time when both branches were under Republican control. But they also reflected Eisenhower's inclination to respect congressional prerogatives as a coequal branch of government.

While facing this strong resistance to its aid requests on Capitol Hill, the administration began in 1954 and 1955 to consider a major reorientation of the U.S. aid program. C. D. Jackson, who had served as a senior White House advisor to Eisenhower until resigning in March 1954 to become an executive at *Time* magazine, persistently encouraged Eisenhower to endorse the proposals of an independent study group based at MIT led by Walt Rostow and Max Millikan. The study group recommended that the United States boost its development assistance by \$2 billion per year, a remarkably ambitious proposal considering that American development aid for FY 1955 totaled less than one-tenth of that amount (Rostow 1985, 102).

Although the size of the proposal was politically unrealistic, its thrust was consistent with an evolution in the thinking of Dulles and Eisenhower. By the halfway

point of Eisenhower's first term, he and Dulles were increasingly convinced that the United States needed to change its foreign economic policy, which up until that point had emphasized only trade liberalization and the promotion of private investment, to include the provision of greater development aid for poor countries. This recognition was fueled by a growing awareness that the Cold War was becoming as much an economic as a military competition, as the Soviet Union was bolstering its standing in the developing world by providing large sums of its own economic aid to both communist and nonaligned countries (Baldwin 1966, 173-175).

Eisenhower was keenly aware, though, that winning congressional backing for new aid initiatives would be very difficult. In fact, when Jackson first presented the Rostow-Millikan group's idea to Eisenhower in August 1954, Eisenhower responded that "trying to sell it to Congress scares me" (Ambrose 1984, 204). Indeed, the political climate for foreign aid was going from bad to worse in the mid-1950s. Political opinion surveys revealed that foreign aid was generally quite unpopular, and that the opponents of foreign aid held their views much more strongly than did its supporters (Truman 1962, 69).

Moreover, although congressional Democrats were generally more sympathetic to aid than congressional Republicans, the shift in 1955 from Republican to Democratic control of Congress complicated Eisenhower's task in two ways. First, Eisenhower had weaker leverage over congressional Democrats, being less able to use patronage and other means of influence available to a party leader to sway Democratic votes. As Eisenhower noted in frustration in his memoirs, "With Congress controlled by the Democratic Party, I could employ only persuasion to gain approval of programs that, in

my view, were virtually necessary to the welfare of the United States” (Eisenhower 1965, 144).

Second, the congressional takeover placed one of foreign aid’s fiercest critics, Louisiana Democrat Otto Passman, in the role of chairman of the House appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations. The irascible Passman, who became known as “Otto the Terrible” to his executive branch adversaries, took pride in battling the executive over the aid budget. As he once said to an Eisenhower administration official: “Son, I don’t smoke; I don’t drink; my only pleasure in life is to kick the shit out of the foreign aid program of the United States” (Johnson 2006, 72).

While Passman’s hostility to foreign aid was extreme, his power was bolstered by the disproportionate membership on his subcommittee and on the counterpart subcommittee in the Senate of other Southern Democrats who were also strong aid opponents. When allied with conservative Republicans, these foreign aid critics formed a very powerful coalition.

In this difficult political environment, Eisenhower moved cautiously toward reorienting the aid program. In April 1955, he made his first significant new request for development aid, asking for \$200 million from Congress to establish a fund for development in Asia. Although the size of this request was modest, Congress cut it in half in the appropriations process, and then eliminated it entirely in 1956. In one comment typifying congressional hostility to the request, Senator William E. Jenner (R-IN) said that the notion that American aid to poor countries would prevent communist gains in Asia was “nonsense,” and was being used by the Communists “to help us spend our way to bankruptcy” (Kaufman 1982, 55).

In 1956, Eisenhower tried another tack, seeking congressional authorization to make multi-year commitments of assistance for some development projects, rather than being required to return to Congress each year for a new commitment of funds. In a message to Congress, Eisenhower asserted that this change was necessary to allow for long-term planning on projects requiring funding continuity.⁴ In internal discussions, Eisenhower's advisers also argued that such multiyear commitments were necessary to outperform the Soviet Union.⁵ But Congress, intensely protective of its prerogative to review the budget on an annual basis, rejected the request (Rostow 1985, 113).

Eisenhower also clashed with Congress in 1956 over aid to nonaligned countries. Whereas Eisenhower argued that aid to such countries was necessary to keep them out of the Soviet orbit, many members, including Senate Minority Leader William Knowland, questioned why America should support countries that refused to ally themselves with the United States. Over Eisenhower's objection, Congress enacted an amendment prohibiting military aid to Tito's Yugoslavia (Kaufman 1982, 68-71).

Throughout these battles, Eisenhower's strategy for dealing with Congress on foreign aid remained centered on lobbying individual legislators. Eisenhower frequently conducted this advocacy himself when it concerned key members, often by inviting them to the White House for private meetings. This lobbying effort, however, had inconsistent results. Passman was simply not persuadable: he used a White House meeting with Eisenhower on aid to harangue the president (Johnson 2006, 72-73). But even members who Eisenhower might have expected to be more open to his appeals often resisted them.

⁴ President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Special Message to Congress on the Mutual Security Program, March 19, 1956.

⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1955-57*, Volume X, page 134-137: Memorandum from the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Jones) to the Special Assistant to the President (Randall), November 20, 1956.

In March 1956, Eisenhower tried to sway Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Walter George (D-GA), who supported Eisenhower on most foreign policy issues, by trying to accommodate him, commenting that nothing in his plan was “sacrosanct” and asking for George’s suggestions for improving it. But George told Eisenhower that he was being pressured by party leaders to vote against key elements of the program for partisan reasons, and that Eisenhower could not convince him to change his vote (Ferrell 1981, 322).

Eisenhower’s second term: The president goes public

Having been repeatedly frustrated with congressional resistance to his foreign aid agenda, Eisenhower decided at the start of his second term to adopt a new legislative strategy: going public. This public campaign began with his second inaugural address, one of whose principal themes was the need to address the material needs of poor countries: “We must use our skills and knowledge and, at times, our substance, to help others rise from misery, however far the scene of suffering may be from our shores. For wherever in the world a people knows desperate want, there must appear at least the spark of hope, the hope of progress or there will surely rise at last the flames of conflict.”⁶

The public campaign intensified in the spring, when Eisenhower issued his most ambitious economic aid proposal to date, requesting \$500 million for FY 1958 and advance commitments of \$750 million per year for FY 1959 and FY 1960 for a new Development Loan Fund that would offer poor countries loans on favorable terms. Eisenhower also asked Congress again for greater operating flexibility for the rest of the

⁶ President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Second Inaugural Address, January 21, 1957.

aid program, including multi-year authorizations and the discretion to determine which countries should be provided appropriated funds.

Eisenhower took his case for his new aid request directly to the American people, employing more forceful language than he had used in the past. In a May 21 radio and television address to the nation, he pronounced: “To cripple our programs for Mutual Security in the false name of ‘economy’ can mean nothing less than the weakening of our nation... For upon them critically depends all that we hold most dear—the heritage of freedom from our fathers, the peace and well-being of the sons who will come after us.”⁷ More specifically, Eisenhower emphasized that the aid program was essential to prevent communist takeovers of vulnerable governments overseas. The speech appeared to be successful, at least in the near-term. Immediately after it, White House mail was overwhelmingly supportive of the aid program, and one senator told Dulles that he would vote in favor of aid for the first time in 10 years (Eisenhower 1965, 135-136). Eisenhower’s public campaign also involved an effort to mobilize private citizens on aid for the first time: the administration organized a private advocacy group composed of foreign aid supporters to educate the public and Congress about the program’s importance (Kaufman 1982, 104).

At the same time as he went public, Eisenhower used a variety of strategies, ranging from persuasion, to credit sharing, to threatening, to scolding, to try to influence Congress more directly. He continued to engage in personal lobbying, making the case for his aid request to many members individually. As he recalls in his memoirs: “To reinforce my arguments [to members of Congress] I pointed again and again, in meeting

⁷ President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Special Message to Congress on the Mutual Security Program, May 21, 1957.

after meeting, phone call after phone call, to some of the problems then besetting various areas in which we have important interests and in which our aid could become vital in producing a satisfactory result” (Eisenhower 1965, 145). Eisenhower also tried to win friends on Capitol Hill by rightly crediting the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which was generally sympathetic to aid, with helping to conceptualize the Development Loan Fund proposal. In testimony before the committee, Dulles stated, “We regard [our proposals] as being derived equally from the work of the Congress and from the efforts of the executive branch” (Rostow 1985, 130).

But as it became clear that congressional resistance to his aid agenda remained very strong, particularly in the House, Eisenhower also resorted to personal and public threats. Privately, he told Republican congressional leaders that if GOP legislators did not support his aid bill, he “would not be able to understand [those legislators] should they ever request [his] help in the future” (Eisenhower 1965, 146). Publicly, he took the dramatic step of warning Congress, as legislative action moved from authorization to appropriation in August, that if it did not appropriate the full amount that had been authorized, it would face the possibility of a special session in the fall (Haviland 1958, 709). When the House appropriations subcommittee reduced funding levels nonetheless, the White House issued a harsh statement saying that the president was “gravely concerned” about the cuts (Haviland 1958, 711).

On the whole, these strategies did not add up to a clearly better outcome than Eisenhower had achieved with his more low-key approach in previous years. Congress ultimately cut his \$3.9 billion FY 1958 total aid request by 23%—the largest such cut of his presidency—and it again refused Eisenhower’s request for multiyear commitments.

Eisenhower might have been more successful with Congress if he had gone public without threatening the legislature with a special session. Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson, who was often an ally of Eisenhower on foreign policy, criticized the threat, and the author of the most detailed study of the 1957 aid debate concludes that it antagonized other legislators (Haviland 1958, 709).

Still, Congress did agree to establish the Development Loan Fund, and appropriated 60% of the \$500 million Eisenhower had requested for it, thereby beginning the institutionalization of long-term development assistance as an important element of U.S. foreign policy. This was an impressive achievement considering that in 1957 the United States was entering a recession and a public opinion survey in March—before Eisenhower’s aid speech to the nation—had indicated that only 4% of Americans wanted to increase foreign economic aid, while 61% wanted to reduce it (Haviland 1958, 700).

In 1958, Eisenhower redoubled his efforts to gain congressional support for his aid program, expanding his public campaign to include new efforts designed, according to a memo by Eisenhower aide Bruce Harlow, “to elicit discussion at the grass-roots,” and to make it “possible for congressmen to support the program without facing political defeat.”⁸ One of these new efforts was a series of White House meetings and conferences with business and civic affairs leaders, at which Eisenhower and other senior administration officials tried to persuade the attendees that the aid program was necessary, and pleaded with them to use their influence to rally support for the program. For instance, Eisenhower told a group of businessmen at a luncheon in January that “they

⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States* 1958-60, Volume IV, page 411: Memorandum for the Record by the President’s Assistant (Harlow), January 30, 1958.

should get their friends to proselytize their friends and bring about in the country a renaissance of conviction and determination to carry through these [aid] programs.”⁹

Eisenhower even employed the mass media as part of his campaign in 1958, placing pro-aid advertisements in newspapers and magazines, and on television and radio, across the country.¹⁰ This remarkable step reflected both the great importance of aid to Eisenhower’s grand strategy, and Eisenhower’s awareness that public support for aid would need to increase in order to prod Congress to fund it more generously.

Interestingly, one of Eisenhower’s closest allies in Congress, Representative Charles Halleck, confirmed the wisdom of this strategy, telling Eisenhower that Passman could only be defeated on the floor of the House if “it was clear that the country as a whole was soundly convinced of the need for mutual security programs.”¹¹

The continuation of the economic recession in 1958 also led the administration to tweak its message on foreign aid, emphasizing that aid was not only necessary to combat communism, but that it also created jobs in the United States because recipients spent much of the funding on American goods and services (Kaufman 1982, 136). Despite all of these efforts, the program remained a tough sell at a time when unemployment was approaching 7% and the federal deficit was growing. As Walt Rostow notes, “For most politicians seeking reelection in November this was not a setting in which it was helpful to have to defend a vote for a large increase in foreign aid” (Rostow 1985, 136).

⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-60*, Volume IV, page 412: Memorandum for the Record by the President’s Assistant (Harlow), January 30, 1958.

¹⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-60*, Volume IV, page 411: Memorandum for the Record by the President’s Assistant (Harlow), January 30, 1958.

¹¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-60*, Volume IV, page 446: Notes of the Legislative Leadership Meeting, February 17, 1959.

Given this political climate, Eisenhower's 1958 effort was relatively successful. Although Congress cut his overall funding request by 16% and continued to reject his requests for multiyear commitments and greater flexibility in the administration of aid, it approved an administration proposal to enhance the status of the Development Loan Fund by making it a permanent government corporation, and boosted the Fund's budget from \$300 million in FY 1958 to \$550 million for FY 1959. The administration also gained congressional approval in 1958 of new multilateral aid initiatives, including the establishment of the Inter-American Development Bank.

These relative successes were not due exclusively to Eisenhower's public campaign; private lobbying of members of Congress was necessary to persuade some legislators, including several Republicans on the House appropriations subcommittee, to change their votes on key issues (Kaufman 1982, 139). But the public campaign probably helped, in two ways: first, by sending a powerful signal to legislators, particularly Republicans, that aid was a top priority to Eisenhower; and second, by easing (at least marginally) some of the intense public opposition to the aid program.

In 1959 and 1960, Eisenhower continued to use a variety of public and private means to influence Congress, with continued partial success. He made the issue a particularly high priority in 1960, when the administration organized a new grassroots campaign on behalf of aid through former Eisenhower advisor C. D. Jackson and a variety of nongovernmental advocacy groups. Eisenhower also delivered a series of forceful speeches on behalf of the aid program in the spring of 1960. In one of them he called Congress' reluctance to fully fund the program "profoundly disturbing," adding

that the cuts jeopardized the nation's defense and weakened efforts to resist Communist expansion.¹²

In addition, Eisenhower kept making his case directly to congressional leaders. In one May 1960 conversation with House Speaker Sam Rayburn, who generally supported Eisenhower on aid issues, the president asked for the speaker's "cooperation and advice in dealing with the implacable resistance of Congressman Otto Passman to the mutual security program." Rayburn responded that he would try to help, but noted that it was difficult to counteract Passman's criticisms of alleged waste and fraud in the aid program.¹³ Indeed, during his subcommittee's hearings on it, Passman frequently attacked the administration for failing to spend within 12 months all of the funding that Congress appropriated for a given fiscal year, and for allocating funds to projects that appeared unnecessary or were marked by corruption.¹⁴

In the end, 1960, like 1958, was a relatively successful year on aid for the administration, as Congress cut Eisenhower's \$4.2 billion aid request by just 9%, the smallest reduction of Eisenhower's presidency. This is particularly notable because 1960 and 1958 were the two years in which Eisenhower campaigned most aggressively for the program (Kaufman 1982, 135-136, 198). This correlation suggests that going public, in combination with intensive private lobbying, did help Eisenhower win congressional support.

By the time Eisenhower left office, he had managed, despite fierce resistance among powerful legislators, to begin an important transformation of U.S. foreign aid.

¹² President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Address at a Dinner Sponsored by the Committee for International Economic Growth and the Committee to Strengthen the Frontiers of Freedom, May 5, 1960.

¹³ *Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-60*, Volume IV, page 498-499: Editorial Note.

¹⁴ See, for example, Hearings of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, April 29, 1958, May 7, 1958, May 21, 1958, June 11, 1958.

Most importantly, he started a significant shift in the program toward a greater emphasis on economic, rather than military, assistance. Although the total U.S. aid budget did not change dramatically between 1954 and 1961, the proportion devoted to economic aid increased greatly, from less than one-third in FY 1954 and 1955, to over one-half in FY 1960 and 1961. Eisenhower was not entirely responsible for this shift; a growing contingent of Senate liberals also pushed for a reallocation of aid dollars from military to economic assistance during Eisenhower's final years in office (Pastor 1980, 270-271). But Eisenhower deserves credit for employing all the levers of presidential power to influence the more conservative House.

To be sure, Congress still did not provide the amounts Eisenhower requested, and it kept rejecting his proposals for multi-year aid commitments and greater flexibility. This persistent congressional resistance deeply frustrated Eisenhower. In February 1960, as legislative leaders described continued congressional opposition to his program, Eisenhower lamented that they had "been breaking [his] heart over [foreign aid] for seven years and apparently must do so once more" (Kaufman 1982, 203). Still, Eisenhower's persistent and creative leadership on this issue prevented the aid budget from being slashed even more severely, and enabled the beginnings of a major U.S. commitment to long-term development assistance, which grew under President John F. Kennedy and has continued to this day.

Conclusions and possible lessons for today

I focused on foreign aid in this paper in part because Congress' assertiveness (or rebelliousness) on aid under Eisenhower challenges the conventional view that Eisenhower dominated foreign policy after the Bricker amendment's defeat and the

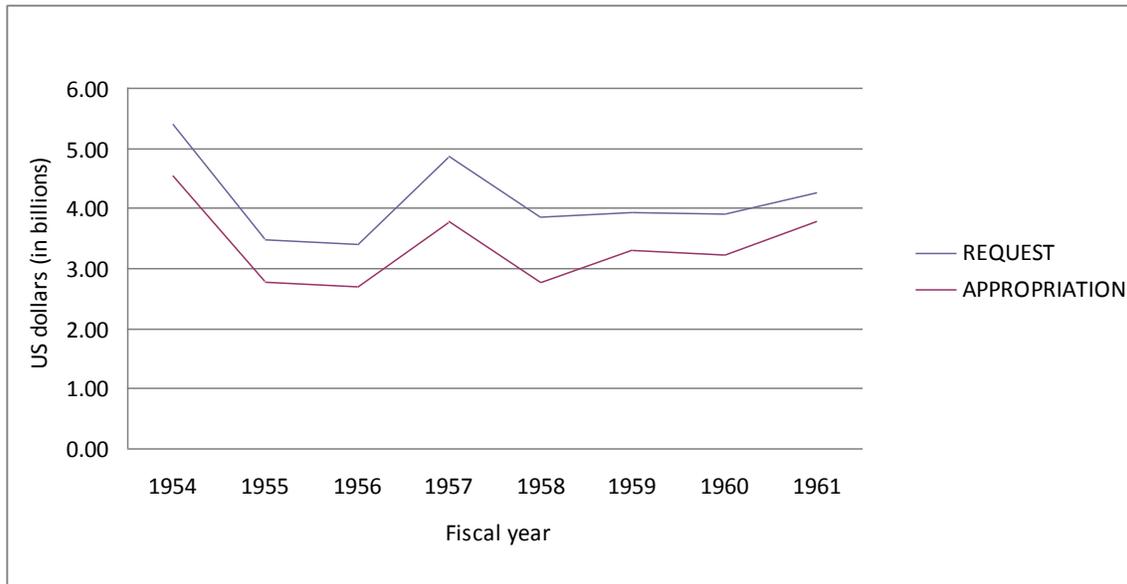
McCarthy investigation's implosion in 1954. Although legislators were quite deferential to Eisenhower on use of force decisions, Congress resisted Eisenhower's foreign aid agenda with gusto throughout his presidency, cutting his aid requests by an average of 19% per year. As Figure 1 shows, these cuts were substantial in every year of Eisenhower's presidency, ranging in size from 23% for FY 1958 to 9% for FY 1961.

Moreover, congressional independence on foreign policy was not limited to the aid budget. On defense spending, which I did not cover in this paper, Eisenhower also fought fierce battles with Congress, particularly after the Soviet Union's launch of the Sputnik satellite in October 1957. Congressional Democrats, led by Senators Stuart Symington, Lyndon Johnson, Henry Jackson, and John F. Kennedy, harshly criticized Eisenhower for allowing a so-called "missile gap" to emerge with the Soviet Union. Their charge, which Eisenhower knew to be false, was that the United States was falling behind the Soviet Union in ballistic missile capability (Roman 1995).

This congressional criticism, unlike Passman's attacks on foreign aid, had a strong partisan tone, particularly as the 1960 election approached. But it also had real consequences for the defense budget, as Congress enacted measures that provided funds for a variety of new weapons programs and for increases in military manpower that Eisenhower opposed. These budget increases so angered Eisenhower that he impounded some of the funds, rather than spending them (Aliano 1975, 7-8). The appropriations also contributed to Eisenhower's decision to focus his farewell address on the need for America to restrain spending and guard against "the acquisition of unwarranted influence... by the military-industrial complex."¹⁵

¹⁵ President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Farewell Address to the Nation, January 17, 1961.

Figure 1: Foreign aid requests and appropriations under Eisenhower



Source: Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1953-1960.

Despite these battles over foreign aid and defense spending, it remains true that Eisenhower was quite successful on the whole in forging a cooperative relationship with Congress. This success stemmed principally from his remarkable commitment to consultation and bipartisanship. The commitment was evident in his regular meetings with congressional leaders of both parties, establishment of the White House legislative liaison office, and occasional comments to Cabinet members urging them to forge personal relationships with legislators and to consider congressional opinion before adopting new policies (Eisenhower 1963, 193-194; Ferrell 1981, 237, 276; Greenstein 1982).

Eisenhower also appreciated the need to make concessions to members of Congress on issues of secondary importance in order to win their support on bigger

issues. Eisenhower did this on foreign aid by shifting the focus of U.S. aid programs from grants, which his administration favored, to loans, which were more acceptable to Congress (Pastor 1980, 267). In addition, Eisenhower fostered legislative goodwill by being quick to share credit with Congress, as he did when the Development Loan Fund was established and in a variety of foreign policy signing statements (Conley 2010).

So, what lessons can we draw from Eisenhower's experience with Congress on foreign policy? For the most part, the lessons are straightforward (and unsurprising): 1) Treat the institution of Congress with respect. 2) Consult with legislators of both parties early and often. 3) Take congressional concerns into account when proposing new policies. 4) Be willing to compromise, particularly on second-tier issues. 5) Share credit with representatives and senators.

But Eisenhower's legislative experience on foreign aid also provides some other food-for-thought. Eisenhower quickly learned that consultation and other low-key strategies were insufficient to gain congressional backing for his aid agenda. He therefore decided to go public in his second term, harshly criticizing congressional stinginess, organizing citizens' groups, and even, on one occasion, threatening Congress with the prospect of a special legislative session. The public threat appeared to backfire, but the other elements of his public campaign seemed at least to give a small boost to his advocacy effort.

As President Obama tried to shepherd health care reform legislation through Congress during his first year in office, he seemed, like Eisenhower, to have a preference for relatively low-key, hidden-hand leadership. Rather than trying to publicly take charge of the process—as the Clinton administration did with its health care reform drive in

1993—Obama’s handling of the issue created the impression that congressional leaders, rather than the White House, were driving the reform effort. With that effort now stalled following the recent Senate election in Massachusetts, Obama seems to be trying to restart it through a more public campaign, which includes the nationally televised bipartisan health-care summit that he has called for February 25.

If there is a lesson from Eisenhower’s foreign aid experience, it is that going public is sometimes necessary, and that it can help, but that it can only do so much to overcome entrenched opposition on an issue, like spending or health care reform, that is a congressional prerogative. Obama’s task is made even more difficult by the extreme polarization of today’s political environment and the party unity of the Republican congressional caucus. Still, Obama has rightly concluded that in order to enact major reform, he needs somehow to put public pressure on Republican legislators to come to the negotiating table. Fortunately for him, he may only need to persuade one Republican senator, and he does not have to go through Otto Passman. It remains to be seen whether he will succeed.

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