At the end of World War II, the United States emerged as the major superpower that was to fill the vacuum left by Britain in the international system. However, the United States’ hegemonic position was not left uncontested. The Soviet Union rose to the challenge, and thus the era known as the Cold War emerged. During this period, containing communism was the driving force in US foreign policy. However, how each presidential administration dealt with containment differ, and Professor, Peter Trubowitz, tries to explain why.

According to Trubowitz, leaders will always be faced with four main categories that will limit the types of Grand Strategies available to them.\(^1\) He first focuses on the constraints in the international system: the available geopolitical slack.\(^2\) Trubowitz argues that leaders can have abundant geopolitical slack when there is “no threat to the physical security” of their state and when there is no shift in the balance of power.\(^3\) Conversely, they can have little geopolitical slack when “security is scarce and their state is exposed and vulnerable to foreign intimidation and aggression.”\(^4\) Based on these constraints, leaders will either pursue offensive foreign policies when there is abundant slack or defensive foreign policies when there is little slack. How offensive or defensive these policies are will depend on the other 2 main categories: guns or butter. Trubowitz claims that the preference of the leader’s coalition for either guns (military buildup) or butter (internal economic/social development) will determine how aggressive or passive their offensive/defensive foreign policies will be.\(^5\) To see if Trubowitz’s Grand Strategy theory is applicable, the Eisenhower Administration will be examined through the four main categories.

I. Geopolitical Slack

Trubowitz explains that when leaders face abundant geopolitical slack they tend to either establish expansionist or underachiever policies.\(^6\) Expansionist policies would include expansionism, imperialism, and wars of conquest.\(^7\) While underachiever policies include retrenchment and isolationism. On the other hand, when there is little geopolitical slack leaders tend to go with balancing or satisfying policies.\(^8\) Balancing policies encompass internal balancing and preemptive war while satisfying policies include appeasement, external balancing, and buck-passing.\(^9\) The decision whether to choose expansionist over underachiever or balancing over satisfying lies in the coalition’s preference of guns or butter.

\(^2\) ibid
\(^3\) ibid
\(^4\) ibid
\(^5\) ibid
\(^6\) ibid
\(^7\) ibid
\(^8\) ibid
\(^9\) ibid
President Eisenhower inherited from Truman a bipolar world where the United States and the Soviet Union found themselves in a mutual competition to out power the other or to at least maintain the same power. Therefore, there was little geopolitical slack during the Eisenhower administration since the US was forced to stay vigilant of any Soviet aggression that might shift the balance of power or threaten security. During the Eisenhower administration this prove to be the case, as the Soviets were posing a threat to the security and power of the United States by imposing their presence and supporting communism in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. As a result, Eisenhower was pressured to execute a balancing foreign policy rather than a satisfying one, for a satisfying one would not have gotten him elected nor kept him in power since his coalition seemed to prefer guns, and satisfying the Soviet Union would have shifted the balance of power away from the United States. Therefore, when Eisenhower came to the presidency, his main priority was to end the Korean War with an American victory, for losing the war would have been a bad start to his presidential career and a lost to the Soviets; even though it was the Chinese communists who were mainly aiding the North Koreans in the war. Eisenhower then realized that in order to end the conflict he would have to deal with the Chinese communist but without actually going to war with China; the US was already at “war” with the Soviets. So instead Eisenhower thought about using atomic bombs in Korea, but later discarded this as he feared that the Chinese would retaliate by bombing Japan. Consequently, he settled for a threat towards both the Soviets and the Chinese communist about the US’s ability and inclination to use nuclear weapons if no negotiations to end the war were soon made. Soon after, the Chinese communist settled for negotiations and the Korean War was over. The end of the Korean War showed Eisenhower how effective the usage of deterrence was, and so he then decided to invest the military budget in the production of nuclear weapons and the development of the air force. With deterrence, Eisenhower had decided that internal balancing (military buildup) was the new foreign policy.

Deterrence gave Eisenhower the tools to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy than that of Truman’s Containment because at the time the US’s nuclear weapons program was more advance than that of the Soviets; giving Eisenhower the confidence that when faced with nuclear threat the Soviets would be forced to back down. However, after the death of Stalin, Khrushchev called for negotiations to end the arms race, which had begun as soon as the Soviets had answered US nuclear development with their own atomic bomb and H-bomb testing. Nevertheless, Eisenhower did not believed the Soviets, and didn’t really want to end the arms race yet because the development of more potent nuclear weapons was what keep his deterrence policy alive. It wasn’t until the last years of his second term that he realized that an end to the arms race was needed in order to preserve the peace in the world because by that point both the US and USSR had enough retaliatory nuclear capacity to kill the world many times over.

---

11 Ibid, 29.
12 Ibid, 29.
13 Ibid
15 Ibid
Eisenhower continued his active role in foreign affairs, but this time in Iran. Since Britain and France were no longer the authoritative power in the Middle East, the United States made it its duty to occupy that position before the Soviets did. During Eisenhower’s presidency, American oil companies in Iraq and Saudi Arabia exported oil to Western Europe, who relied heavily on it. \(^{16}\) In addition, the Suez Canal granted access to Asia, increasing the value of having power over that region. \(^{17}\) Therefore, any Soviet presence in the Middle East would be seen as a threat to the power and economic stability of both the United States and its allies. Consequently, Eisenhower had to react when he believed that an opportunity for the Soviets to enter the Middle East was at bay. In 1951, the Iranian Prime Minister, Mossadegh had nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company; British company that controlled the oil industry in Iran. \(^{18}\) The British responded by boycotting the Iranian oil, which forced Mossadegh to seek help from the US. \(^{19}\) Eisenhower denied Mossadegh any help because of its relationship with the British. \(^{20}\) As a result, Eisenhower feared that Mossadegh would seek help from the Soviets, which would give them the perfect opportunity to enter the Middle East and disrupt the oil flow to Western Europe. \(^{21}\) In fear of this, Eisenhower authorized a coup against Mossadegh, and called for the Shah’s restoration of power. \(^{22}\) Once the Shah was reinstated, the US and the British got equal share in Iranian Oil. \(^{23}\) The threat of Soviet presence in the Middle East left Eisenhower with little geopolitical slack, that forced him to act immediately because if he had waited till Mossadegh contacted the Soviets and then possibly invited them into that region; well then tensions would have risen between the two superpowers that could have potentially led to an earlier nuclear scare; as Eisenhower was using nuclear deterrence. Additionally, his opponents would have accused him of being weak. Thus, Eisenhower had to take care of the problem before the problem even stared.

Eisenhower was forced to once again focus in Asia. During 1954, the French were fighting a war in Indochina against the Vietminh forces of Ho Chi Minh. \(^{24}\) The French eventually got surrounded and forced to grant independence to Indochina. \(^{25}\) However, the United States did not want all of Vietnam to be under Minh’s communist government so Eisenhower supported an anti-communist regime in South Vietnam under Diem. \(^{26}\) Vietnam was to remain divided until the


\(^{17}\) ibid


\(^{20}\) ibid


\(^{22}\) ibid

\(^{23}\) ibid

\(^{24}\) ibid

\(^{25}\) ibid

\(^{26}\) ibid
elections of 56 determined otherwise.\textsuperscript{27} Eisenhower was so adamant in not losing all of Vietnam to communism because he was a strong believer of the domino effect and feared that communism in Vietnam would spread to all of Asia and eventually be at the doorsteps of America.\textsuperscript{28} This believe made Vietnam a US security issue. Additionally, losing all of Vietnam would have been considered a defeat because the US had been funding 75\% of the war between the French and the Vietminh; so he was trying to reduce his losses by ensuring that at least some of Vietnam remained communist-free.\textsuperscript{29} Eisenhower was trying to contain communism because if he didn’t, then he ran the risk of upsetting the balance of power against the US, and that was the last thing Eisenhower wanted, for the Soviets seemed to be neck to neck with the US during this period. Thus making it crucial that Vietnam was not seen as a lost to the US but rather a draw with the Soviets.

Eisenhower then turned his attention to Latin America, but he would soon be forced to deal with Asia again. In Latin America, the Eisenhower administration had established a military program that basically trained and armed Latin American forces in exchange for economic and military cooperation with the US.\textsuperscript{30} Eisenhower believed that Latin America would serve as a security base for the US against Soviet/communist aggression.\textsuperscript{31} Yet, many of the countries the US was aiding were dictatorships were the military used their arms not to secure the US but to increase their internal security against dissidents.\textsuperscript{32} Thousands of human rights violations were made under these regimes, but that wasn’t the main concern of the Eisenhower administration. Therefore, when they encountered these violations, they simply turned a blind eye because arming Latin America was essential to the United States security.\textsuperscript{33} This is why Eisenhower send a coup to overthrow the elected government of President Arbenz in Guatemala. Arbenz was said to be a Marxist and Eisenhower worried that he was including communists in the government.\textsuperscript{34} Then Arbenz passed a land reform that basically gave landless peasants lands owned by the United Fruit Company.\textsuperscript{35} This led Eisenhower to cut military aid to Guatemala which forced Arbenz to get arms from communist Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{36} Eisenhower saw this as a threat to home security because he was not going to risk communism coming from America’s backdoor; especially when millions of dollars were spend on the military program that was to create a US

\textsuperscript{27} ibid
\textsuperscript{31} ibid
\textsuperscript{32} ibid
\textsuperscript{33} ibid
\textsuperscript{35} ibid
defense in Latin America. Therefore, he ordered the removal of Arbenz and placed Castillo in power, who was anti-communist and anti-reform. In this scenario, Eisenhower was meet with a threat to US security and thus was forced to take action because the risk of doing nothing was too high; he had no geopolitical slack.

Finally, Eisenhower returned his focus on Asia two more times in what became known as the Strait Crisis. In 1954, the Chinese communist were bombing the Quemoy Island held by the Chinese nationalist, and the Quemoy along with the Matsu islands were essential pathways to both Taiwan and mainland China. Hence, the direct pathway to the enemy. However, Eisenhower did not want to directly intervene because war with China would not be prudent, and because he only cared about Formosa not these islands. Yet, when the Chinese communists began attacking the Tachen islands, Eisenhower said he would defend Formosa and these islands from communist aggression if he saw that these attacks were part of a great plan to invade Formosa. Eisenhower then publically stated that he would use atomic weapons if more attacks happened but he left it unclear whether he would be posing opposition in Quemoy and Matsu. According to Divine, Eisenhower’s ambiguity left the Chinese communist with uncertainty about America’s response in the region and thus, was one of the reasons why the Chinese communist settled for negotiations. This marked the end of the first Strait Crisis. Then in 1958, the Chinese communists attacked Quemoy once more, and once again Eisenhower use ambiguity and nuclear retaliation as a way to deal with the crisis. However, the Soviets also threaten the US and said that any attack on the PRC would be an attack on them. Both Eisenhower and the Chinese communists realized that without negotiations a third world war could start; they decided to end the Second Strait Crisis with negotiations. While Eisenhower knew he had to defend Formosa for he feared the domino effect and a cold war lost; he was also constrained on how far he could go. He knew that direct involvement would lead him to a war with China and the Soviets; something the US couldn’t afford especially when nuclear weapons were involved in both sides. Thus his geopolitical slack was very limited in both Strait Crisis because he was forced to act in order to preserve the balance of power in Asia, but at the same time not to act to aggressively for it would increase the risk of a nuclear war.

Then in 1956, Eisenhower is forced to deal with the Middle East again but this time in Egypt. Nasser, president of Egypt, was using cold war competition to get both the US and Soviets to provide him with economic and military aid. He bought arms from Czechoslovakia and received money from the US to build a dam on the Nile. However, the Eisenhower administration

---

39 Ibid, 57.
40 Ibid, 60.
41 Ibid, 60.
42 Ibid, 67.
43 Ibid
44 Ibid, 68.
46 Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia. “Dwight D. Eisenhower: Foreign
stopped funding him when Nasser recognized the People’s Republic of China.\textsuperscript{47} As a response, Nasser nationalizes the Suez Canal which then led Britain, France, and Israel to attack Egypt.\textsuperscript{48} Eisenhower was not informed of the attack and when the attack occurred, he was furious because this made Nasser look like he was defending Egypt from foreigners; sparking nationalistic sentiment in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{49} Consequently, Eisenhower forced Britain, France, and Israel to stop the attacks.\textsuperscript{50} Once negotiations were over, Eisenhower created the Eisenhower Doctrine which was like the Truman Doctrine but in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{51} Eisenhower feared that the Soviets would use the confrontation among allies to sneek into the Middle East. Thus, forcing Eisenhower to act fast and reduce the risk of Soviet presence in the Middle East; a region of value to US security and power.

Overall, Eisenhower was a leader during a time period where the US had little geopolitical slack as it was facing threats to its security and status as a super power in the international arena. Therefore, Eisenhower executed internal balancing policies that allowed the US to defend its status as a super power and even expand it. He conducted defensive wars in Latin America and Asia to contain communism from areas already under the US sphere of influence. Additionally, he also did internal balancing by building up nuclear weapons and arming Latin America; which then allowed it to defend the Middle East from Soviet intervention. Despite having little geopolitical slack, Eisenhower’s balancing strategy was very much aggressive, and this is likely to do with his administrations preference for military buildup.

References


\textsuperscript{47} ibid
\textsuperscript{48} ibid
\textsuperscript{49} ibid
\textsuperscript{50} ibid