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Douglas Kinnard
U.S. Army (Ret.)

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The Public and National Security Policy

Brigadier General Douglas Kinnard, U.S. Army (Retired)

My aims are, first, to set in perspective the role of the public in the national security policy-making process; second, using available polling data, to summarize the substance of public attitudes toward major national security issues just prior to the Bush presidency; and finally, to draw together process and substance in the form of observations and unanswered questions as we view an uncertain future.

A good way to begin is to summarize the diverse elements involved in the process of national security policy-making.¹ Then we can examine a relevant historical case: the Eisenhower administration and the New Look. Granted that all historical analogies are unique, they still give a bedrock of reality on which to discuss the present and to conjecture on the future.

There are, moreover, other compelling reasons for using the Eisenhower period in discussing the process of policy-making. The case is comparatively recent, the 1950s; yet it is well documented—much more so than the Reagan period will be for years to come. It is also more applicable than are comparable cases in the 1960s and 1970s, which were driven by the Vietnam War. Most important, the case is concerned explicitly with national security policy formulation that emphasizes budgetary constraints, a vital consideration for military and civilian policymakers alike in the 1990s.

This is followed by a discussion of the Congress' changing role in national security policy-making. It is dramatically different from what it was in the Eisenhower period and is still changing. The way that Congress, beginning in the 1970s, resurged in the policy-making process is stunning, both in pace and breadth. Whether viewed as good or ill, this aggressive role raises important issues as to the future role of the public because of the public's symbiotic relationship with Congress.

General Kinnard is a Secretary of the Navy Senior Research Fellow at the Naval War College. He graduated from West Point in 1944 and served in combat in World War II (Europe), the Korean War, and twice in Vietnam. General Kinnard earned his Ph.D. in politics from Princeton University, and is the author of *President Eisenhower and Strategy Management*, *The War Managers*, and the *The Secretary of Defense*. He is Professor Emeritus of Political Science, University of Vermont.

An Overview

In the process of national security policy-making, there are four participating elements: presidential, bureaucratic, congressional, and nonelected. The latter includes the media, special-interest groups, and the public, or more precisely, the publics.

Responsibility and authority for formulating and implementing national security policy begins with the president. This stems, of course, from his constitutional authority, whether explicit, implied, or prerogative. Other sources of presidential power depend in degree on the president himself and the times in which he serves, for example, his participation in the legislative process, his political skills, and his ability to capture public attention and support through the media.

The president's immediate staff and advisers constitute another presidential power center. Though their power is derived from the president and depends on his support, they obviously exercise power in their own right. Of particular interest here for our purposes are the Assistant for National Security Affairs and the director of the Office of Management and Budget.

In the area of national security policy the key presidential appointees are the secretaries of Defense and State and, in a different way, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency. These officials are both presidential and cabinet officers in the sense that they simultaneously represent the president and their departments or agencies. Their power, though again derived from the president, also exists by virtue of the offices they hold and the bureaucracies over which they preside. If they are able to win over their own fiefdoms, their power will be commensurately greater. The bureaucracies themselves also wield power by making policy—for example, they interpret legislation as well as assist the president in formulating and proposing legislation.

The struggle between the president and Congress over who has the dominant position in determining policy and conducting foreign and national security affairs is as old as the Constitution. There have been periods when one or the other branch was dominant. During the Eisenhower administration, the case to be described shortly, one would conclude after analysis that Congress had only a negligible role in forming national security policy. This judgment would be wide of the mark in today's polity. Hence, following a description of the Eisenhower case is a section relevant to present political realities, entitled "A Changing Congressional Role."

As for nonelected participants in the policy-making process, I am restricting my comments to two: the media and the public.² We are primarily concerned here with only that news media, such as *The New York Times*, that both select the news to be reported and comment upon it. They play a significant role by first defining the agenda of the political process and then helping to form

public attitudes. Besides forming public opinion, the news media play other roles with regard to the executive branch: they carry its message to the public, and they keep the president in public view.³

The public itself is an element in national security policy formulation. Everyday citizens influence and are influenced by the president, Congress, and the media. Although public opinion tends to be tentative and defers to the judgment of government leaders in national security affairs more than in domestic issues, it does react to international events and sometimes even leads policy-makers, as in the case of Vietnam.

Though we cannot treat them separately in this article, there are, in fact, many publics in the area of national security; in increasing size and decreasing knowledge, they can be described as the influential public, the knowledgeable public, and the general public. Presumably the influential and knowledgeable publics are of greatest influence.

A Historical Case: The Eisenhower Administration

During his 1952 presidential campaign, Eisenhower made two major promises: to end the Korean War and to reduce the budget. The two were related because ending the war, which he did within six months of taking office, was a prerequisite for reducing the budget. But he needed to do more. To reduce the overall budget from \$74 billion during the fiscal year he took office to \$70 billion the next year and to \$60 billion the following year, he had to pare the defense budget further. This meant taking a close look at the kind of strategy the United States was going to pursue in the post-Korean War period.

In his memoirs Eisenhower tells us what his concepts were when he came to the Oval Office. He wanted to rely on deterrence and to rule out preventive war; to stress the role of nuclear technology, reducing reliance on U.S. conventional force; to place heavy reliance on Allied land forces around the Soviet periphery; to stress economic strength, especially through reduced defense budgets; and to be prepared to continue the struggle with the U.S.S.R. over decades.⁴ His problem was to blend these strategic views into a credible strategy that could be implemented at a fairly low cost and be sold both to the American public and to America's allies. To accomplish this objective the president used organizational means, careful selection of key appointees, his long experience in handling bureaucracies, and his great rapport with the American people, on which he depended during major challenges to his policies.

At the apex of the defense and foreign policy process, Eisenhower restructured the National Security Council, transforming it into a formal organization with formal procedures, but balancing this with informal organization and procedure. In practice, he placed even more emphasis on

informal meetings and briefings on defense-related matters, and the number of such meetings was rather substantial.

By July 1953, Eisenhower felt that it was time for his newly appointed service Chiefs to take a look at U.S. strategic policy. He asked them to come up with an agreed-upon paper on overall defense policy for the indefinite future. This paper was the first step toward what subsequently became known as the New Look, which the president later defined as "first a reallocation of resources among the five categories of forces, and second, the placing of greater emphasis than formerly on the deterrent and destructive power of improved nuclear weapons, better means of delivery, and effective air-defense units."⁵

The Chiefs of Staff were able to agree on a basic paper of strategic premises and guidelines, but translating these generalities into specifics for the fiscal year 1955 defense budget was another matter. Reasoning that there was no change in the perceived threat, or in alliance commitments, and no new guidance on the employment of nuclear weapons, they decided that no substantial changes could be made in the defense budget of \$42 billion.

It fell to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Arthur W. Radford, to defend the service Chiefs' premises before the National Security Council (NSC). Radford centered his presentation at the 13 October 1953 NSC meeting on the nature of presidential guidance for employment of nuclear weapons. His message, which was to have very significant results, was that if the use of nuclear weapons from the outset of a conflict was accepted as a planning premise, then a less costly force structure could be developed.

Admiral Radford's premise led to a subsequent NSC session on 29 October, at which the president approved NSC-162/2, the policy basis of the New Look. The paper placed maximum reliance on nuclear weapons from the outset of a conflict. Radford's talk of 13 October had been entirely on his own; neither the army nor the navy had agreed with the new NSC policy on nuclear war. Nevertheless, Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson, with Radford's help, was able to get qualified agreement from Army Chief Matthew B. Ridgway and Navy Chief Robert B. Carney, and to use the new policy to get the defense budget down to a level acceptable to Eisenhower and the secretary of the treasury.

Congress examined the New Look during hearings on the fiscal year 1955 defense budget. Members offered no challenge to the concept and almost none to the particulars. The administration's image of unanimity on the Eisenhower strategy remained intact during the hearings, despite the misgivings Army Chief Ridgway voiced about the administration's lack of emphasis on land forces. Floor debate was neither systematic nor informed. With the defense appropriation cleared, Eisenhower had his strategic policy.⁶

By early 1956 Congress was pressuring the administration to raise the level of defense expenditures in fiscal year 1957. No extraordinary event had occurred, but 1956 was an election year and some members of Congress wanted to impress the voters with their zeal for a greater defense effort. Pressures also came from the air force in an effort to secure additional funds for their strategic bomber force. Senator Stuart Symington, an air force proponent, obliged that spring with airpower hearings by his subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

It was in this atmosphere that Eisenhower met with Defense Secretary Charles Wilson and Chairman Radford concerning congressional probes and possible air force testimony. Ike's message to the senior military went beyond the immediate question of the air force budget, however. The president maintained that "a Chief of Staff of one service should not present just the picture of his own service . . . each man testifying must think of what other services contribute. If he can't bring himself to do this, he doesn't belong in the position he holds."⁷

In early October 1957, the Soviets orbited the first earth satellite, *Sputnik*. Its psychological and strategic impact brought on congressional and, to some extent, public pressure to increase the size of the fiscal year 1959 defense budget. The president, however, was not one to overreact, especially when it came to defense spending. To help counter public anxiety over the Soviet launchings and the attendant public commentary, the president decided to give three "confidence" speeches to the American public. His major points were that the overall military strength of the free world was greater than that of the communist countries and that the United States must be selective in expending its resources. In the end, Ike's wide public support was key, and his views on the defense budget prevailed.

As the executive preparation of the fiscal year 1960 defense budget reached its final stages, the president met in late November 1958 with his civilian defense advisers and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Nathan F. Twining. His new Secretary of Defense Neil McElroy developed the major issues and pointed out that he had reduced the service estimates by almost a billion dollars in recent months. The director of the Bureau of the Budget, Maurice Stans, agreed that the Defense Department had made substantial cuts, but said more cuts were needed in the vicinity of \$3 to \$4 billion. The president asked McElroy to look over the budget again to make additional cuts, which he did.⁸

However, by then the climate was right for Congress to try to intervene more forcefully in defense matters. Technology was in a state of flux, raising many technical and strategic questions, and few people seemed certain of the answers. The goals of the services were sufficiently far apart that it was not difficult for Congress to find points of conflict between services or between a service and the administration. Finally, the political climate created by the

congressional elections just past and the presidential election on the horizon encouraged Congress to take on the administration.

Committees in the House and Senate asked the usual questions about hardware and strategy, as well as the unusual question about who had played what part in the development of the defense budget, including the guidelines on which it was based. In these hearings, the senior military began showing in public their lack of consensus regarding the particulars of the defense budget. The most spectacular hearings that spring, though, were not those related directly to the appropriations process, but rather those conducted by Senator Lyndon B. Johnson's subcommittee.

Under the heading "Four Military Chiefs List Objections to Budget Limits," the *New York Times* of 9 March 1959 carried the story of the Chiefs' testimony before Johnson's subcommittee, as well as the written texts of their memoranda. "General Maxwell D. Taylor, the Army's Chief of Staff," it reported, "was most vehement in his comments." Meeting that same morning with JCS Chairman Twining, President Eisenhower brought up the article, which he had read. The President instructed Twining "to caution the Joint Chiefs that the military in this country is a tool and not a policy-making body; the Joint Chiefs are not responsible for high-level political decisions."⁹

Undoubtedly, these hearings were designed to be politically embarrassing to the administration, and they were. Nor was there any question as to the breakdown in consensus within the senior military. In retrospect, however, the effect of these hearings on the Eisenhower strategy and defense budget can be seen as negligible. The 1960 presidential campaign was probably the primary motivation for the hearings and from that perspective, perhaps, they were successful in setting the stage for the defense debate during the approaching national electoral struggle.

Eisenhower's basic power lay in his wide public support and, as it pertained to defense issues, the American public's perception that he was the most important military figure of that time. His success in making this power effective lay in part in the considerable time he spent as president on military matters, not because they interested him, which they did, but because he perceived them to be a vital element in carrying out his overall presidential goals and he was willing and able to carry his argument to the American public over the heads of Congress.

One of Eisenhower's successful approaches to leadership was exemplified in his dealings with the Joint Chiefs: the avoidance of public confrontation. Specifically, he sought prior agreement on issues to prevent their becoming matters of debate among the general public. In particular, his key political and military appointees had to undergo a kind of loyalty test to convince him of their willingness to support his policies.

This is one reason why Eisenhower was able to permit vigorous debate in the NSC forum and still expect support for his decisions. His decisions

had, in many cases, already been made in smaller, informal meetings. The NSC served, however, the function of simultaneously widening the base of support for Eisenhower's decisions while clarifying his rationale to his key appointees. His employment of organizational process can be understood only in the context of an interplay between formal and small, informal groups.

One of the principal issues was the distribution of influence over the policy-fiscal dialogue between the senior military and key civilian appointees. Eisenhower solved this problem through his predilection to be, in effect, his own secretary of defense. He accomplished this operationally by dealing directly with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on strategic matters and, as is normal, directly with the secretary of defense on budgetary matters. Thus, the president became the first civilian official who dealt with all aspects of strategy and management. This will be recognized as one of the roles of the secretary of defense.

In sum, presidential-Pentagon relations in the Eisenhower administration had these characteristics: a president superbly equipped both in fact, and in his public image, to deal with military matters; a chief executive who thoroughly dominated the relationship; a continuing strengthening, through reorganization and practice, of the civilian hand, thus setting the stage for an all-powerful secretary of defense in the next administration; and a lessening influence of the senior military on major policy decisions, which began a trend that was to continue during the next decade and beyond.

From the Eisenhower case, we can infer the following conclusions that still have relevance today:

- The defense budget drives national security policy formulation, not vice versa.
- In developing the defense budget, the domestic context is more important than the external context in time of peace.
- Process is more important in developing national security policies than are the rational arguments for the policies. In this process, the president is the prime mover, and is the key to mobilizing public opinion on national security issues.

A Changing Congressional Role¹⁰

The Founding Fathers envisioned a Congress deeply involved in foreign and national security problems, although they left the precise nature of this involvement to be decided by events. The cyclical nature of congressional participation vis-à-vis the president has been an interesting topic to observers and historians ever since. For example, during the 1930s the neutralist stance of Congress in foreign affairs frustrated Roosevelt's inclination toward greater U.S. involvement in world affairs. Then, following World War II,

the powers of the president in national security affairs swelled significantly with relatively little challenge by Congress.

Executive power expanded well into the period of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The high point was undoubtedly the Tonkin Gulf Resolution of 7 August 1964, in which Congress voted 502 to 2, approving and supporting the determination of the president as commander in chief to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to prevent further aggression in that area. This congressional support gradually waned until Nixon's May 1970 Cambodian incursion, when the tide reversed. Then the war became the impetus for congressional resurgence in national security affairs.

Public alienation and congressional frustration over the war, combined with Nixon's Watergate-related problems, led to a large number of statutes such as the War Powers Resolution of 1973 and the Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974, which implemented greater congressional control over the budget. Their net effect was to inject Congress into national security affairs, curtailing some of the previously accepted presidential hegemony.

At the same time, other developments contributed to this congressional resurgence and its resulting complexity. For a variety of reasons a new generation arrived, especially in the House of Representatives. They were unimpressed by established procedures that emphasized party discipline and members' seniority. There was also an enormous growth in congressional staffs, permitting Congress to intrude into details in a way that had not been possible previously.¹¹ All this occurred at a time when détente between the United States and the Soviet Union seemed to be eroding the previous public consensus of the cold war. The questions of what national security goals to pursue and of how to allot resources were now left open for debate.

The implications of all this for the role of Congress in national security policy-making were many and led to as yet unanswered questions. Because this body has disaggregated into a member-centered organization with a concomitant loss of party loyalty and committee leadership, and the individual members have become the recipients of enhanced resources and influence, the question of who really represents Congress and can arrive at understandings in its name, vis-à-vis the executive, is moot.

Through legislation that began in the 1970s, the chief processes of the congress—authorization, appropriation, and oversight—have become much more detailed and more intrusive into heretofore strictly executive procedures. Now the White House is much more accountable to Capitol Hill. The reaction of the executive branch has been ambivalent. On the one hand, the executive now has problems of coordination that are often uncomfortable; on the other hand, the question of who is responsible for given actions can be papered over. When results are less than desired, the public cannot be sure which branch should be held accountable. Each side can insist, "We didn't do it! They did."

As for the relationship of the public and Congress in national security policy-making, let us acknowledge that public opinion can play an important role. In keeping with the concept that Congress is the most representative branch of our government, many legislators believe that, by virtue of their continuous contact with the people, they have "served not only to ensure democratic control over the foreign policy-making process, but have also been the conveyors of sometimes ambivalent and occasionally vociferous public opinion."¹² This outlook provides Congress with opportunity and incentive to intrude into national security affairs on behalf of the public. Given today's resurgent Congress, the chief executive needs all the more to stay in touch with the public and should not be impressed by the congressional belief that its viewpoints are more authoritative than his on matters of public opinion.

A New Security Environment

Having looked at process, we are now ready for substance; but before considering current attitudes of the American public on security issues, we should appreciate, in an impressionistic way, the national security environment as it might be viewed by executive and legislative decision makers at the beginning of the Bush administration.

Because Moscow has achieved nuclear parity with the United States, a balance exists that makes a nuclear arms race unattractive and counterproductive. While the Soviet Union continues to pose a serious military threat, it cannot compete seriously with the West in other areas, such as economic.

The American people are gradually becoming aware that communism is not the root of all the nation's external problems. In this regard the containment concept has stopped being a unifying force in domestic politics. Replacing it is a desire for a peaceful end to the cold war, including, if possible, the solution of long-standing problems, particularly in the arms control area.

While the U.S.S.R. remains America's chief military rival, the diffusion of military technology is a growing threat to U.S. interests. It comes from several directions: China, and perhaps in time Japan, will become major military powers; even smaller countries will acquire advanced weapons and so decrease the relative military advantage of the major powers.

The postwar American economic hegemony has been replaced by a much more competitive world economy in which the U.S. position is in relative decline. Americans see this economic competition, which is primarily from their allies, as more threatening than communist ideology.

Perhaps the most important issue on the present national security agenda is Nato. Though strains and uncertainties are not unusual for that alliance, such recent events as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and Gorbachev's troop reduction initiatives make current tensions in the

alliance unprecedented. These events have set countervailing forces in motion even though the basic alliance goal of deterring the Warsaw Pact remains. Gorbachev's announced cuts will put Nato leaders under increased pressure from their home fronts to make cuts in their own forces and will accelerate Western Europe's interest in détente over deterrence.

From the American point of view, the current serious budgetary crisis and worldwide security commitments, combined with the trends in Nato, will understandably bring domestic pressure to reduce the large American military forces in Western Europe. Such a condition would allow continued support of navy and air force deployments on a flexible, worldwide basis and, while not diminishing American interest in Nato, would change the way in which Nato obligations are met as one element of America's worldwide global commitments.

Public Attitudes on National Security in an Uncertain Environment

The American public appears to link American national security objectives with American economic strength and competitiveness during this beginning of the Bush administration. Furthermore, this perception is one that seems to focus less than previously upon the Soviet Union and its threat to the United States. The changing domestic and international environments have influenced these modifications. American public opinion on national security issues, however, is frequently ambivalent, highly fluid, and often contradictory, as the following discussion reflects.¹³

The Economy. The American public is emphasizing the "economic well-being" of the United States and is expressing serious doubts about the future "competitiveness" of the United States in a perceived hostile international economic environment. When asked, in November of 1988, to identify how important it was to make the United States more "competitive" in the world economy, 35 percent felt that this was "extremely important," 48 percent felt that it was "very important," and 12 percent felt that it was "somewhat important." Only 3 percent felt that it was not important.¹⁴ Americans see the U.S. economy as basically healthy, but not up to competing with other, more vigorous Western economies, especially those of West Germany and Japan. One survey found a full 50 percent of the respondents holding that the U.S. economy was "slipping dangerously" when compared to the economies of other industrialized nations.¹⁵

The public has a somewhat skeptical view of continued good economic relations between the United States and our "economic competitors." In a March 1988 survey, 68 percent felt that Japan was a "strong competitor," whereas only 36 percent felt that the United States could be described as such

an economic competitor.¹⁶ When Americans were asked whether competition from West Germany and Japan represented more of a “threat” to our future than did “communism,” 45 percent of the respondents felt that it did, while 48 percent still continued to view “communism” as the main threat to U.S. national security.¹⁷ Looking specifically at the Japanese-U.S. relationship, one May 1988 survey found, significantly, that 57 percent of the respondents felt that Japan would become the “preeminent” economic power in the world.¹⁸

The public increasingly defines a strong and dynamic economy as an essential element of national security. One November 1988 survey found that 72 percent of the respondents “strongly approved” of the notion that the United States should “devote as much attention to America’s economic strength as to its military strength.”¹⁹ Americans also seem to view the heavy emphasis upon the military component of national security, as demonstrated in the Reagan era, as harmful to the economic side. Economic vitality is viewed by the public as having been “sacrificed.” In 1983, 41 percent of the respondents of one survey felt that defense spending hurt the economy, whereas in March of 1988, 53 percent felt that this was true.²⁰ This same 1988 survey showed that large numbers of Americans associated military spending with budget deficits, tax increases, and lower spending on health and social programs.

The Military. The public appears to be having a difficult time justifying high defense spending in a “hostile” international economic environment. The public seems to be asking both the President and Congress to use shortcuts where possible, in order to keep military costs down without hurting U.S. military preparedness. Approving of the buildup of the Reagan era, Americans seem to believe, nevertheless, that this buildup to date is sufficient. It is noteworthy that, though more aware of the economic imperative, the public is not yet demanding decreases in defense spending.

There is a feeling that the United States pays too much for the defense of its allies and that the reliance of allies upon American support is simply “not just.” And there is a corollary to this feeling: because of the American allies’ “inadequate” efforts on their own behalf, they are reaping substantial economic benefits from their low level of spending. This, in turn, hurts the economic national security interest of the United States by giving the “economic competitor” a further advantage. In terms of persuading American allies to pay a greater share of their own defense, a November 1988 survey found that 35 percent of the respondents felt that this was “extremely important,” 44 percent felt that it was “very important,” and 15 percent felt that this was only “somewhat important.”²¹

Negotiations and arms-control agreements, according to the American public, may afford an acceptable means of reducing the size of the defense budget. With certain qualifications, arms control is a very popular issue with

the American public. One qualification is that such agreements be "testing exercises," allowing the United States to judge Soviet intentions over the course of time.²² Success or failure of these testing agreements would figure strongly in the negotiation of future agreements. These testing agreements are to be cautious in their nature; that is, they are not to be built upon "trust," but rather upon a direct and unambiguous "verification," such as could be obtained by having American inspectors working within Soviet territory.²³ With this said, Americans seem to be seeking substantial gains from this process. A recent survey found that 61 percent of the respondents strongly approved of an American effort to "negotiate with [the] Soviets to eliminate all nuclear weapons," a further 21 percent "somewhat approved" of this effort, while only 14 percent expressed negative attitudes towards such an effort.²⁴ One survey found that, by a margin of 81 percent to 12 percent, the respondents wanted the strategic nuclear forces of both superpowers to be cut in half.²⁵

The Soviet Union. It is perhaps the Soviet-American relationship that will most fundamentally affect U.S. national security. The American public seems to be aware of the changing nature of the Soviet threat but is expressing great caution as to the prospect of another *détente*. Americans do not want to be fooled again and any new "*détente*" must be founded upon a more secure basis. Although continuing to express distrust of the Soviet system, Americans seem to have an increasingly positive impression of the leader of that system, General Secretary and President Mikhail Gorbachev. Changes occurring in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev have not gone unnoticed by the American public, who sees them as positive developments that, if continued, could lead to a fundamentally new relationship between the two nations.

Central to this continued warming of superpower relations is Gorbachev himself. His unprecedented popularity within the United States has generated significant public optimism concerning the Soviet-U.S. relationship, and this popularity grows with time. A late June/early July 1988 survey found that 31 percent of the respondents had a "very favorable" opinion of him, and an additional 52 percent had a "somewhat favorable" opinion of him. Only 11 percent had an unfavorable opinion.²⁶ As Gorbachev is seen as primarily responsible for the changes that have occurred in the Soviet system, he is frequently viewed as somehow at odds with this system; his struggle with it seems to increase his popularity with Americans. Significantly, a March 1988 survey found that 52 percent of the respondents felt that Soviet-U.S. relations would be adversely affected were Gorbachev to lose power within the Soviet Union.²⁷

The American public still greatly mistrusts the Soviet system itself and continues to believe that the Reagan military buildup was critical both in

potential Soviet attacks. In one survey, conducted in February 1988, 65 percent of the respondents felt that the Soviet Union "continues aggressively in pursuit of furthering the cause of communism."²⁸

For many Americans the nature of the Soviet threat has changed significantly from what it was in the early 1980s. The U.S. military buildup, the superpower summits, and the Gorbachev initiatives have brought about much of this change in the public's mind. The Soviet threat seems to have decreased significantly for the American public. ATS 5, a survey conducted between 25 April and 1 May 1988, found that 17 percent viewed the Soviet Union as a "very serious" threat to the United States, 36 percent as a "serious" threat, 32 percent as a "minor" threat, and 12 percent as "not a threat"; however, ATS 12, which was conducted at the end of 1988, found only 9 percent viewing the Soviet Union as a "very serious" threat.²⁹

A new relationship could be encouraged by common efforts made jointly by both nations to resolve common problems. Certain efforts have particularly strong public support. Three such areas are environmental pollution, the illicit drug trade, and international terrorism. Additional areas in which both nations could also cooperate include: regional trouble spots (such as the Middle East), cultural exchange programs, and the elimination of excess nuclear weapons.³⁰ Joint cooperation in these areas could, with time and other positive accomplishments, provide a more secure foundation upon which to build a new superpower relationship.

Some Observations and Questions

In considering the public and national security policy, the approach has been one of first examining the policy process itself and then the substance of relevant public views in the present environment. It is now time to bring these two strands together by way of observations and questions.

In doing this I shall restate the conclusions of the Eisenhower case as hypotheses for the present national security policy-making environment and then comment under each in terms of process and substance as appropriate. It will be useful to begin by restating in summary fashion public attitudes at the end of the Reagan period on national security issues.

- The American public recognizes that important changes are occurring in U.S.-U.S.S.R. relations, but their outlook remains cautious on this development.
- They approve of the defense buildup accomplished during the Reagan period but consider that to be sufficient.
- They are of the opinion that nuclear weapons are more likely to be used by terrorists or Third World states than by the superpowers.
- There is increasing public concern over American economic competitiveness.

- Finally, they no longer think primarily in terms of East-West problems, but rather of global, diffuse problems involving such matters as the demise of American economic hegemony, the deterioration of the environment, and random terrorist activities.

The defense budget drives national security policy formulation, not vice versa. This proposition says that the means (the defense budget) determines the ends (national security policy). While this should evoke no great surprise on the part of any student of the subject, it is at variance with the established process model.

Theoretically, the president and his senior advisers begin the process of the budget cycle by deciding what national security policy should be. This policy is then translated into military requirements and budgets by the executive branch and, after approval by the president, is sent to Congress for its action and eventual appropriation of funds. In actual practice, the size of the executive budget request is not related to policy directly but to budgetary ceilings the president approves. This is not wholly without logic as, in fact, national security policy is rarely defined with such precision that there can be only one interpretation of the means needed to carry it out.

Thus, in the initial Bush defense budget, the debate was not over strategy at all but over whether the defense budget should reflect a 2 percent real growth (after inflation) as President Reagan proposed, or a zero real growth (after inflation) as President Bush proposed, or some lesser figure.

When the military chiefs make their case for continued real growth, they do so in two ways. The first is to make the case for forces meeting their interpretation of policy goals. However, they also make a case addressed to the political arena in which the budget is really decided. I will take this up in the next proposition to be considered.

In developing the defense budget, the domestic context is more important than the external context in time of peace. The notion that the domestic context influences policies directed toward external events is not a new one. Thucydides noted how the external behavior of the Greek city states was frequently shaped more by what was happening at home than by actions of the other city states. This concept is particularly relevant to our own country, whose form of government encourages open debate among officials and active involvement of the people.

The present views of the American people give little reason to believe that external matters will take precedence over domestic problems. In fact, Americans today seem worried whether too great attention to national security may be hurting the economy itself. In 1983, 53 percent of Americans felt that the Reagan defense buildup had been good for the overall economy, while by 1988, the same number felt that the buildup had harmed the economy.

How does all of this square with the 40 years of cold war vigilance the United States has been through? While it would be premature to say that the public feels that the cold war is over, there is little question that most Americans think a growth in defense spending is unnecessary.

Continuing now the discussion in the previous proposition as to the service chiefs' case for continued growth of the defense budget, several public comments attributed to Air Force Chief of Staff General Larry D. Welch, challenging the public views previously described, are relevant. Welch assailed "the unwarranted but still pervasive belief that defense spending is a major cause of the budget deficit." He lamented what he saw in America as two changing perceptions: that "economic competitors pose a greater threat to U.S. national security than do military adversaries," and "the military and expansionist policies of the Soviet Union have been moderated."³¹

Whether service chiefs have enough political clout today to be effective in swaying the public on defense budgets is debatable. They do, however, have their bureaucratic forums with the president and the Congress. Their effectiveness here is a question of process, to which we now turn.

Process is more important in developing national security policies than are the rational arguments for the policies. In this process the president is the prime mover and is the key to mobilizing public opinion on national security issues. Let us begin by acknowledging that, given the differences in personalities and the times and the resurgent role of Congress, no president in the foreseeable future is going to play the role on national security policy and defense budgets that Eisenhower did in the 1950s. In particular, it is unlikely that any president will have the public image or support on defense issues that General/President Eisenhower did during his White House years.

But any president is pivotal in the defense process. It is he who must make the policy and budgetary case with the Congress and, more importantly, with the public.

Effective process will also require that the Bush administration establish a genuine dialogue with Congress on the assumptions and analyses of defense issues as well as upon the policies and budgets themselves. Not an easy task, this involves restructuring the national security process at the most basic level, for example, moving economic and security decisions onto the same track.

How this will be accomplished depends at the present on George Bush. His speeches make clear that he considers Congress to have eroded presidential authority, especially on national security process. Whether he has the political power and public support to change this, or the will to accommodate, remains to be seen.

Notes

1. The policy-making process for national security, as used here, involves the functioning and relationships of governmental authorities and agencies responsible for national security policy formulation. It includes the participation of nongovernmental groups as well, such as the media, special interests, and the public itself. The process has intellectual, interpersonal, and bureaucratic components. A representative sampling of current publications summarizing the process of defense and foreign policy-making and containing detailed references would include: Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf, eds., *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988); Roger Hilsman, *The Politics of Policy-making in Defense and Foreign Affairs* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1987); John P. Lovell, *The Challenge of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1985).

2. Space does not allow developing the role of special-interest groups in formulating national security policy. Such groups can be defined as "any organization or coalition of organizations that attempts to influence public policy at any of the branches or levels of government," Hilsman, p. 204.

3. Doris A. Graber, *Mass Media and American Politics* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1989), p. 238. Considering the tremendous influence wielded by the media as agenda-setters, and to some extent judges, of the political process, it is interesting to note that the really influential members constitute only nine organizations: three national television network news organizations, ABC, CBS, and NBC; two national news magazines, *Newsweek* and *Time*; the Associated Press; and three major newspapers, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

4. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Vol. I, Mandate for Change* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963), pp. 445-447.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 457.

6. Nato was brought on board at the December 1954 ministerial meeting when the Nato Council approved MC 48, making Nato's primary strategy dependent upon nuclear weapons.

7. Memorandum of Conference with the President (MCP), 5 April 1956. Pressure by the air force and its supporters had some success in securing an increase in the air force budget for fiscal year 1957, above the president's request. The army's efforts, the so-called "revolt of the colonels," involved press releases of position papers critical of the air force. Largely because of Wilson's response, this attempt to give a greater role to the army was abortive; and with the reassignment of the principals outside Washington, army tactics of this sort ceased. See E. Bruce Geolhoed, *Charles E. Wilson and Controversy at the Pentagon* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 136-138.

8. MCP, 28 November 1958.

9. MCP, 9 March 1959.

10. For representative literature on this subject, see Cecil V. Crabb, Jr., and Pat M. Holt, *Invitation to Struggle: Congress, the President, and Foreign Policy* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press, 1989); James M. Lindsay, "Congress and Defense Policy: 1961 to 1986," *Armed Forces and Society*, no. 13, pp. 371-401; and Wallace Earl Walker, "Congressional Resurgence and the Destabilization of U.S. Foreign Policy," *Parameters*, September 1988, pp. 54-67.

11. Representative Les Aspin, as chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, is particularly prone to lecture the executive on both the process and substance of national security policy. See his *Searching for a Defense Strategy*, House of Representatives, September 1987 and his *What the Next President Should Know about National Defense* remarks delivered at the Science Applications International Corporation, 8 December 1988.

12. House Committee on International Relations, *Congress and Foreign Policy*, 94th Cong., 2d sess., 1976, p.19.

13. The explication and analysis of public attitudes in this section were done by Brent Lollis of the University of Oklahoma. He used as a basis 12 surveys done by the Americans Talk Security (ATS) project between October 1987 and December 1988. The ATS surveys were conducted by telephone and usually included about 1,000 respondents. The surveys were conducted by four organizations: Market Opinion Research, Marttila and Kiley Inc., the Daniel Yankelovich Group Inc., and the Public Agenda Foundation. Each survey was conducted by one of the organizations and reviewed by the others.

14. Americans Talk Security (ATS) 11, a survey conducted from 4-7 November 1988 and published in December 1988, p.232.

15. ATS 3, a survey conducted from 17-24 February 1988 and published in March 1988, p. 82.

16. ATS 4, a survey conducted from 22-27 March 1988 and published in April 1988, p. 81.

17. ATS 6, a survey conducted from 24-27 May 1988 and published in June 1988, p. 143.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

19. ATS 11, p. 266.

20. ATS 3, pp. 21, 53

21. ATS 11, p. 238.
22. Daniel Yaukelovich and Richard Smoke, "America's New Thinking," *Foreign Affairs*, Fall 1988, p. 16. This article is based upon the ATS project and a Public Agenda Foundation (PAF) and Center for Foreign Policy Development, Brown University joint project. This latter project was conducted in five U.S. cities in "laboratories" which brought together about 200 people per city and subjected them to about three hours of professionally moderated exposure to four broad "futures" for U.S. national security policy.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 15.
24. ATS 11, p. 262.
25. ATS 2, a survey conducted from 7-14 January 1988 and published in January 1988, p. 19.
26. ATS 7, a survey conducted from 25 June-7 July 1988 and published in July 1988, p. 115.
27. ATS 4, p. 99.
28. ATS 3, p. 25.
29. ATS 5, a survey conducted from 25 April-1 May 1988 and published in May 1988, p.90. ATS 12, which was conducted from 10-13 December 1988 and published in January of 1989, also includes related information.
30. Yaukelovich and Smoke, p. 3; and ATS 7, p. 25.
31. *New York Times*, 30 November 1988, p. 13.

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“Democracy is the recurrent suspicion that more than half of the people are right more than half of the time.”

E.B. White
The Wild Flag (1946)