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Reviewed by Paul C. Avey, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University

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Author's Response by **Brendan Rittenhouse Green**, Williams College

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I was surprised and delighted to read Douglas Macdonald's four-thousand-word critique of my recent *International Security* article. That "Two Concepts of Liberty: US Cold War Grand Strategies and the Liberal Tradition" could attract such sustained attention is more than I had hoped, but to attract it from a scholar of Macdonald's caliber is both flattering and humbling.

And I may have a great deal to be humble about. Macdonald generously concludes that my work represents an important advance in the study of American security policy, and argues further that my treatment of ideology may have even broader utility than I have claimed for it. But this praise frames several useful points of criticism. Among them: my conceptual categories are vague

and unhelpful; my choice of policy focus narrow and limiting; and my arguments about ideology better suited to the developing world than Cold War Europe.

I naturally take a somewhat more optimistic view of the article's choices on these issues. My article sought to demonstrate the impact of ideology on American grand strategy in Europe, not in the developing world. It identified the transition between Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy as a critical break point, purposefully omitting the important earlier policies of the Truman administration. I believe there are strong methodological and substantive reasons for these decisions.

More importantly, Macdonald raises points of very broad interest to social scientists and historians. How ought we to think about ideology and what are the best ways to gauge its impact? What is the relationship between power political forces and ideological imperatives? In trying to explain foreign policy, does the distinction between a geopolitical core and a periphery make any sense? These questions are very much worth exploring in some detail.

I proceed by briefly summarizing my article and Macdonald's main lines of critique. I then outline my aims in setting up the article the way I did, and offer a defense of my concepts and policy focus in those terms. I conclude by reflecting on Macdonald's approach to the study of ideology and foreign policy, agreeing with him that our two perspectives are in many respects complimentary.

THE ARGUMENTS IN BRIEF

In "Two Concepts of Liberty," my central claim is that variation in the type of liberal ideology present in the White House affects the character of American grand strategy. 'Negative liberals' see government coercion as the central threat to freedom, which produces an inward directed force aimed at forestalling the strong state apparatus that an active foreign policy typically requires. 'Positive liberals' believe that strong government can help spread freedom at home through redistribution and other policies, which produces an outward directed force aimed at using government power for the analogous task of spreading and defending liberal values abroad.

These differences led to an important change in American Cold War grand strategy in Europe. The negative liberal Eisenhower pursued a 'buck-passing' strategy, seeking to build an independent Western Europe in order to give it the primary responsibility for containing the Soviet Union. He was motivated by the desire to reduce the economic burdens of containment and to diminish the extent of the extractive and regulatory apparatus that came with it. Conversely, the positive liberal Kennedy chose a traditional balancing strategy of firm forward commitments to manage politics in Europe. Among his motivations was a strong concern that the liberal democracies of Western Europe might revert to autocracy and autarchy without a permanent American presence. In short, while liberals of all stripes agreed that preventing Soviet domination of Western Europe was essential, they were led by their different ideologies to prefer alternate grand strategies for achieving this goal.

Macdonald presents three principle criticisms of my argument. First, he argues that despite my broad claims about changes in American 'grand strategy,' I examine only security policies in Europe. Excluding economic and political commitments to Europe made under Harry Truman, and any commitments in the developing world, seems to greatly truncate the analysis.

Second, Macdonald contends that ‘buck-passing’ is a vague and unhelpful concept, and one that does not well describe American commitments to Europe in any event. If buck-passing just means cutting costs, doesn’t that describe impulses found in almost any state’s strategy? If it means something more, how can it be squared with the policies that the Truman administration advanced to secure Europe in the early 1940s? Though holding back on military commitments, the Marshall Plan, Bretton Woods, and the North Atlantic Treaty were not exactly cheap in either economic or political terms. Given that Truman labored under domestic constraints, aren’t these best thought of as clever ways to balance?

Third, and most centrally for Macdonald, the developing world seems a much better arena in which to test theories of ideology. After all, Cold War Europe saw very little ideological movement between camps, while the developing world was a wide-open contest. Negative and positive liberty might have something to tell us about strategies of value promotion in this contest, but they need to be integrated into a broader framework. Macdonald helpfully provides just such a framework and locates my ideas about liberalism within it.

THEORETICAL CONCERNS AND METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

These criticisms sum to an alternative approach to analyzing ideology and foreign policy, one that emphasizes the range and variety of ideological effects in a less constrained environment. I have a deep sympathy for this approach. But in my article, and the larger book manuscript from which the research was drawn, I pursue a different goal. I aim to demonstrate the impact and importance of ideological variables even under conditions where we expect other very strong forces to be at work—namely, in politics among the great powers.

The study of great power politics has long been dominated by realist theories of international relations, and for good reason: the importance of power in an anarchic and deeply uncertain environment is obvious to any student of diplomatic history. Nevertheless, power configurations alone often underdetermine state behavior. There are sometimes several rational and structurally incentivized strategies by which a great power might meet threats and pursue its interests. In particular, the balancing behavior most prominently predicted by realist theories is generally not prompt, and sometimes does not occur at all, because states have the leeway and incentive to make other choices.¹

The Cold War is a very useful case for exploring gaps in realist explanations of great power politics. Structural conditions were roughly constant throughout the period, yet the United States pursued two very different strategies in Europe. Building on the work of Marc Trachtenberg, James McAllister, and others, I argue that the United States spent the first decade and a half of the Cold War trying to leave Europe and return to its traditional position offshore.² The main effort in this strategy was the attempt to build a ‘third force’ in Western Europe: an independent power complex capable of balancing the Soviet Union largely on its own. This effort was abandoned after Eisenhower left office.

¹ This claim is commonplace. See, e.g., Paul Schroeder, “Historical Reality Vs. Neo-Realist Theory,” *International Security* 19, no. 1 (Summer 1994): 108–148.

² Brendan Rittenhouse Green, “Two Concepts of Liberty: U.S. Cold War Grand Strategies and the Liberal Tradition,” *International Security* 37, no. 2 (Fall 2012): n. 2.

Theorists of grand strategy—especially political scientists—have taken little notice of this important pattern. The exit strategy argument is certainly open to dispute. But I believe that it is basically correct, and that its implications for international relations theory are radically underappreciated.

Ideology is a suggestive candidate to fill the gap and to help more fully predict and explain great power behavior, especially with regard to liberal actors like the United States. However, liberal ideology is frequently misunderstood. Many scholars see liberal ideology as an undifferentiated force, and as Macdonald rightly laments, denigrate its explanatory power because states do not act with perfect ideological consistency. Others note that liberalism does seem to vary between an inward and outward focus, but make few attempts to explain that variation. Realists tend to relegate liberalism's importance only to situations where power imbalances permit states to pursue ideological hobbies.³

These observations produced twin goals for my article: to construct a theoretical explanation for when liberal ideology produces inward and outward directed impulses, and to demonstrate the impact of liberal ideologies in a very tough test—strategic behavior in the great power arena long dominated by realist theories. These goals led to my choices of concepts to use and policies to study.

CONCEPTS AND POLICIES

The distinction between buck-passing and balancing is an important one for great power behavior, and has wide currency among international relations theorists.⁴ John Mearsheimer has the most thorough discussion. He notes that “with balancing, a great power assumes direct responsibility for preventing an aggressor from upsetting the balance of power,” while “A buck passer attempts to get another state to bear the burden of deterring or possibly fighting an aggressor.”⁵ Importantly, buck-passing is not simply about cutting costs: states often “mobilize additional resources of their own in order to make buck-passing work” and “allow or even facilitate the growth in power of the intended buck-catcher.”⁶ In short, buck-passing and balancing are both strategies focused checking potential threats, but they have different aims for the configuration of power and are animated by different strategic logics.⁷

³ Ibid., 11–12, n. 5–8.

⁴ Many international relations theorists use the concept of buck-passing. A sample of the most famous: Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, “Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity,” *International Organization* 44, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 137–168; Randall L Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

⁵ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 156, 157–158.

⁶ Ibid., 158, 159.

⁷ I have identified these logics as “cheap-riding” and “forward commitment.” See Green, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” 11.

I believe the concept of buck-passing does an excellent job of capturing the overall pattern of American commitments in Europe between 1945 and 1961. I actually agree with Macdonald on the need to look beyond military policy to economic, diplomatic, and political commitments in assessing grand strategy. While “Two Concepts of Liberty” does discuss American security commitments in detail, it also highlights the importance of changing policies regarding supranational European institutions, which were primarily economic and diplomatic projects. Eisenhower thought these institutions could become the backbone of a third force and invested much economic and political capital in supporting them. In contrast, Kennedy derided them as an economic burden on America and pursued them only to the extent that they might help him control the Western Europeans.⁸

The real thrust of Macdonald’s conceptual critique is whether I can explain the earlier policies of the Truman administration. I believe so. My research leads me to conclude that Truman was much more ideologically ambivalent than is generally recognized, and that he delegated much of his foreign policy to more negative liberal statesmen—figures like James Byrnes, George Marshall, George Kennan, and Louis Johnson, to name a few. Though all administrations operate under domestic constraints, the Truman administration imposed the most important constraints on itself. Military budget caps, for instance, were chosen by Truman rather than forced on him, and it was the administration that fought to keep defense figures low, often against political pressure.

It is not surprising, then, that the same buck-passing ideas of building an independent European pole of power and reducing American geopolitical burdens animated the Marshall Plan, Bretton Woods, and other policies that Macdonald highlights. Even the increased American military commitments and the development of NATO after the Korean War were limited as much as possible, and leavened with efforts preparing a path for American exit, like strong support for the European Defense Community (EDC). Contra Macdonald, I see important discontinuities between this approach and the strategy of permanent commitments that Kennedy adopted. Reasonable people can differ about how to interpret these policies, but I omitted the Truman administration only because it demands extended analysis. Given my goal of showing the driving force of liberal ideas in the shift away from buck-passing, I think a focus on Eisenhower and Kennedy in my article made the most sense.⁹

IDEOLOGY AND THE DEVELOPING WORLD

⁸ Ibid., 25–26, 32–34.

⁹ An early version of the arguments presented in the past two paragraphs can be found in Brendan Rittenhouse Green, “The Systemic and Ideological Sources of Grand Strategic Doctrine: American Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2011), chap. 6. To be completely fair, the Truman case is much less clean for my theory, and certainly admits of complexities that Macdonald suggests. The central feature of the case is that two important variables move. On the one hand, the ideological character of the administration underwent an important change when Dean Acheson became Secretary of State. On the other hand, the Korean War increased the pressures from the international system, as realists would expect. Both of these changes led to a greater degree of American commitment abroad, though I contend they did not change the fundamental character of American strategy.

The heart of Macdonald's essay is an extended reflection on liberal value promotion in the developing world. For the reasons outlined above, the focus of my work has been elsewhere, and I am embarrassed to have little to add to his stimulating ideas. I conclude by considering the value of Macdonald's approach to the study of ideology and foreign policy.

If my own strategy was to demonstrate the 'strength' of liberal ideology by testing its explanatory power in a very tough environment, Macdonald's is to show the breadth, range, and variation in its effects by examining it in areas of reduced geopolitical intensity. He is absolutely correct to note that Cold War Europe constricted the nature of ideological competition. Liberalism affected American grand strategy, but within strict parameters set by the international system.

The developing world, by contrast, was indeed 'wide open,' and ideologists of all stripes could more freely contemplate how to advance their visions of the world. In this kind of environment, new categories of behavior are necessary: Macdonald is persuasive that concepts like buck-passing and balancing do not really make sense outside of great power politics. There is no partner who can really catch a buck, and even high degrees of commitment do not really look like classic balancing strategies.

This approach is valuable for our understanding the effects of ideology on foreign policy. Macdonald offers a complementary vision of how to integrate realist and ideological theories, one that explains the greater degree of oscillation in value promotion towards the developing world. Power realities are not unimportant in the geopolitical periphery, but serve instead to identify the location of ideological threats and opportunities. Realist forces are more constraining or permissive, rather than strongly forcing policy within a relatively narrow range. The result is ideological oscillations not just across types of liberalism, but within the same liberal administrations. Liberals of one stripe come into office with a vision for value promotion that rests in part on the perceived failures of their opponents; they change their policy while in office in response to their own perceived failure. This produces a recognizable sine wave in American commitments, as different liberals react to each other and to international pressures.

Macdonald's approach also suggests a wider range of effects for liberal ideologies, which he believes my negative/positive liberal dichotomy could accommodate with some modifications. Macdonald shares my belief that liberal ideologists have a broadly common worldview and that they disagree about the best strategy for promoting that worldview internationally. He also concurs that there are important connections between the interpretation of liberalism in domestic politics and favored strategies for value promotion.

We differ in that he reads the inward directed impulse as being less about value promotion at home, and more as a cautious and conservative approach to spreading values abroad. He also notes that the more cautious negative liberals seem to have a greater sensitivity to the contradictions between liberalism and democracy, which influences what sorts of reforms they promote, and with what kind of intensity.

I find much of this argument to be plausible. In an environment where the costs of value promotion and defense are likely to be lower than in the great power arena, concerns about a more intrusive state at home are likely to be diminished. Incremental reforms in the developing world will not require major changes in domestic political economy. Macdonald is right to highlight the fact that negative and positive liberals share a basic set of values and a desire to see them flourish abroad. I would expect negative liberals to retain their general 'exemplarism,' cost

sensitivity, and pessimism, but it makes sense that they might sometimes act to stabilize and shape the natural course of liberal development. It also seems likely that they would be more judicious and restrained in the character of their reform efforts.

Finally, Macdonald's argument expands the field beyond liberalism. He theorizes that all universalistic ideologists find themselves in essentially the same position with regard to value promotion, which allows him to make bold and ambitious extensions of his model to communism, some kinds of fascism, and perhaps other worldviews. His examples of variation in Soviet Russia's decision-making are compelling, and unleash my political scientist's desire to generalize.

In sum, I think Macdonald's work and my own are complementary. Studying liberalism in variant structural conditions allows us to learn more about its causal impact: the strength of its influence, the variety of its effects, and the different ways it interacts with the international environment. Macdonald suggests that my take on liberalism might usefully shed some light on problems he has spent a lot of time thinking about. I hope so, as his work has certainly informed my own.

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