

## A Rationale for Aid: Moral Language in the Debates over the Mutual Security Act, 1951–1961

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On August 16, 1951, a fretful Charles Wesley Vursell addressed his colleagues in the U.S. House of Representatives. Vursell, a Republican representative from Illinois, had serious misgivings about H.R. 5113, the bill under debate that day. This proposed legislation, which became the Mutual Security Act of 1951 after its passage, aimed to protect U.S. national security and interests abroad through the provision of military, technical, and economic assistance to friendly, non-communist nations. Yet Vursell and several of his Republican House colleagues balked at the cost of the foreign aid program. Vursell argued that his constituents had not sent him to Congress only to have him vote “to tax them and their Nation into financial bankruptcy” through “the unnecessary giving away and reckless spending . . . of their hard-earned savings” in order to “build up” other countries throughout the world.<sup>1</sup> He feared such spending would destroy the U.S. economy, hastening rather than halting the advance of Soviet communism, and thus failing Americans and freedom-seeking peoples throughout the world. He warned against overextending the United States, pushing his colleagues to “keep America strong so that she can carry the torch of freedom high, and continue to aid other nations to the limit of our ability, [so that] we will in time destroy and defeat the godless ideology of communism.”<sup>2</sup> A number of Vursell’s Republican colleagues, including



President Truman signing the Mutual Security Act into law on October 10, 1951, as Secretary of State Dean Acheson, Deputy Secretary of Defense William Foster, members of Congress, and other dignitaries looked on. Truman stated that the program would support efforts to foster freedom and peace throughout the world.

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<sup>1</sup> 82nd Cong. Rec. 10136 (August 16, 1951) (statement of Representative Vursell).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Ohio representative Clarence Brown and New York representative Daniel Reed, likewise lamented the high cost of the mutual security program—nearly \$7.5 billion for fiscal year 1951–52—describing it as a “give-away” that would hurt American workers and taxpayers.<sup>3</sup>

In response to this grumbling and antipathy, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee James Richards (D-SC) issued a strong defense of the bill, noting the lengthy hearing and deliberation process that the committee had undertaken to draft it, as well as the prudence the members had shown in devising the budget.<sup>4</sup> He also made clear that the Foreign Affairs Committee and the White House shared the belief that the Mutual Security Act (MSA) was crucial to protecting world peace as well as the “defense and security of the United States” against the menace of Soviet communism.<sup>5</sup> Richards stressed that the return on the investment of foreign aid dollars came in the form of a safer world for all, reminding his House colleagues that the “lives, morale, and the intangibles of freedom” that the aid program would defend worldwide were not “measurable in dollars.”<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, the Mutual Security Act of 1951 passed both the House and Senate with the support of nearly all Democrats and about half of the Republicans, and Congress voted to extend the act each year through 1960 (Congress replaced the MSA in 1961 with the passage of the Foreign Assistance Act, which created the Agency for International Development and streamlined the administration of the nonmilitary aid programs of the MSA).<sup>7</sup>

Although the MSA passed each year on a bipartisan basis, the number of “nay” votes it received ticked up steadily between 1951 and 1960.<sup>8</sup> The program also

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<sup>3</sup> 82nd Cong. Rec. 10139 (August 16, 1951) (statement of Representative Brown); 82nd Cong. Rec. 10140–41 (August 16, 1951) (statement of Representative Reed).

<sup>4</sup> 82nd Cong. Rec. 10142–46 (August 16, 1951) (statement of Representative Richards).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 10146.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 10143.

<sup>7</sup> President Harry Truman signed the bill into law on October 10, 1951. “Mutual Security Act of 1951,” in *CQ Almanac 1951*, 7th ed., 05-204-05-211 (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1952), <http://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/cqal51-889-29653-1403944>; “House Vote #85 in 1951 (82nd Congress): HR 5113 Passage, August 17, 1951,” GovTrack (accessed June 7, 2022), <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/82-1951/h85>; “Senate Vote #150 in 1951 (82nd Congress): HR 5113 Passage, August 31, 1951,” GovTrack (accessed June 7, 2022), <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/82-1951/s150>.

<sup>8</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, “Votes on the Passage by the House of the Mutual Security Acts of 1952 through 1957,” *Mutual Security Act of 1958: Hearings before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs*, 85th Cong., 2nd sess., Part VII (Morning Session), March 13, 1958, 32; “House Vote #131 in 1958 (85th Congress),” GovTrack (accessed June 7, 2022), <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/85-1958/h131>; “Senate Vote #191 in 1958 (85th Congress),” GovTrack (accessed June 7, 2022), <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/85-1958/s191>; “House Vote #127 in 1960 (86th Congress),” GovTrack (accessed June 7, 2022), <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/86-1960/h127>; “Senate Vote #307 in 1960 (86th Congress),” GovTrack (accessed June 7, 2022), <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/86-1960/s307>.

occasioned considerable debate each year in committee and on the floor of Congress over its cost and efficacy, not to mention over the proper balance between military assistance and the other forms of support it provided. Proponents and opponents of the bill alike employed ideological rhetoric, specifically a language of human freedom and anticommunism, during these debates. This is not surprising given that U.S. leaders viewed the MSA as well as predecessor foreign aid programs, including the Marshall Plan and Point Four, as tools to help other countries defend against both external and internal communist advances.<sup>9</sup> From their perspectives, supplying military, technical, and economic support to “free” independent countries offered clear strategic value. Economically and politically secure countries could direct resources to building their military strength, and a world populated by stable democratic, capitalist allies would ensure that the United States would not need to become a “fortress America” to resist Soviet power.<sup>10</sup>

By the mid-1950s, the proponents of the Mutual Security Act began to adopt an increasingly *moral* language as they defended spending levels and the foreign

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<sup>9</sup> For scholarship on the Marshall Plan, Point Four program, Mutual Security Program, and ideology in foreign aid and foreign policy more broadly, see John Bledsoe Bonds, *Bipartisan Strategy: Selling the Marshall Plan* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002); Hadley Arkes, *Bureaucracy, the Marshall Plan, and the National Interest* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972); Michael Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947–1952* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Jeffrey Taffet, *Against Aid: A History of Opposition to U.S. Foreign Aid Spending* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2021); Eric Setzekorn, “Eisenhower’s Mutual Security Program and Congress: Defense and Economic Assistance for Cold War Asia,” *Federal History*, Issue 9 (2017): 7–25; Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America’s Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Thomas Paterson, *Meeting the Communist Threat: Truman to Reagan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Lyson Cotti, “Congress and the Politics of Foreign Aid,” (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 2012); David Lumsdaine, *Moral Vision in International Politics: The Foreign Aid Regime, 1949–1989* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); William O. III Walker, *National Security and Core Values in American History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and US Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Mutual Security Act of 1955: Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, 84th Cong., 1st sess., May 25–June 17, 1955 (Washington, DC: GPO: 1955), 33. There is, of course, an extensive literature on how U.S. policymakers sought to create a post-World War II order that would allow for liberal democratic capitalism to flourish and thus avoid the need for the United States to put all of its resources into arming itself against the communist adversary. For a selection, see Melvyn P. Leffler, *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism: U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security, 1920–2015* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); Aaron Friedburg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America’s Anti-statism and its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Paul G. Pierpaoli, Jr., *Truman and Korea: The Political Culture of the Early Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999); Michael Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945–1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

aid program more broadly. This trend may have arisen in response to the types of moral critiques that opponents leveled against the aid program, or due to the perception of supporters that foreign aid served foreign policy goals that extended beyond national security and anticommunism, making it an effective instrument for promoting core U.S. constitutional values, humanitarianism, and human rights. This language emerged within a larger transitional moment in U.S. foreign relations, as Cold War fears intensified and the United States embraced the idea that it could and must lead the free world—and focused its military, economic, organizational, and ideological might on achieving that goal.<sup>11</sup> Preponderant U.S. power, coupled with new security concerns and ideological anxieties, informed how policymakers understood global developments such as decolonization, postwar economic recovery in Europe and Asia, and hot wars—particularly those involving local communist forces—not to mention the stakes of the civil rights movement at home.<sup>12</sup> It also prompted new debates in Congress about how the country should protect and promote its interests.

The perception that communism posed an existential threat, that the United States had a responsibility to protect freedom worldwide, and that the country should project its values through its diplomacy and foreign aid policies all help to explain why moral language became more prevalent in that moment. The stakes of the Cold War conflict had moral valence for U.S. leaders, and they defended their policy positions accordingly. Examining the development of this trend of moralizing language will allow for reflection on the relationship between ideology, morality, and power in U.S. foreign policy. The ideological tenor of the debates over foreign aid reveals that despite considerable consensus during the early Cold War on the need to contain communism, there still existed significant controversy within

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<sup>11</sup> A number of contingent events, including the Berlin Blockade, uprisings in Greece and Turkey, the Korean War, Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin's death in 1953 and the subsequent reorientation of Soviet policies, and the rise of anticolonial nationalism, challenged U.S. leaders as they sought to contain the communist threat. For a concise overview of the significant changes in U.S. foreign policy during the Truman and Eisenhower years—including the creation of an extensive new national security system under the Truman administration to address this threat—see George C. Herring, *The American Century and Beyond: U.S. Foreign Relations, 1893–2014* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 301–26, 335–61. On shifts in the Eisenhower administration's thinking about foreign aid after Stalin's death, see Michael R. Adamson, "Delusions of Development: The Eisenhower Administration and the Foreign Aid Program in Vietnam, 1955–1960," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 157–59.

<sup>12</sup> Melvyn Leffler's framework for understanding Cold War decision making as a nexus of perceptions of threat and opportunity, as well as structure and agency, is instructive here. See Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2008). See also Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

and between Congress, the White House, and the public over the mechanism or method of containment—not to mention over morality in foreign policy and the role that the United States should play in world affairs.

The increasing use of moral language in the debates over the Mutual Security Program of the 1950s served to reset public and congressional expectations for U.S. foreign policy as the country took on the mantle of global superpower after World War II. As the United States developed an expansive Cold War national security state, the moral language that emerged in congressional debates proved integral to the establishment of an aid regime in which morality and human rights concerns could act as both components of and checks on policy making. Over time, this shifted the boundaries of what constituted an acceptable U.S. commitment abroad and created pressure on legislators to create programs that would at least ostensibly align with national ideals. Ultimately, despite the pique of lingering isolationist voices in Congress, foreign aid became a fixed component of U.S. foreign policy, thanks in part to Cold War exigencies. The language that members of Congress used in their fight over aid spending underscored the enduring (though not always determinative) influence of moral values in the making of U.S. foreign policy, helped establish a sustained foreign aid regime, and redefined isolationist and internationalist positions, transforming the politics as well as the historical policy approach of U.S. foreign relations.

### Moral Vocabularies

Moral language is and has been a common feature in U.S. political debate. Philosophers, psychologists, and linguists have compiled “moral dictionaries” filled with words that embody or evoke the concepts of “right” and “wrong,” “good” and “bad/evil,” and “virtue” and “vice.”<sup>13</sup> The *Moral Foundations Dictionary*, for example, provides a list of words—including peace, war, rights, and justice—each coded to correspond with what the involved scholars describe as six foundational, universal moral categories: “care/harm,” “fairness/cheating,” “loyalty/betrayal,” “authority/subversion,” “sanctity/degradation,” and “liberty/oppression.”<sup>14</sup> Such dictionaries

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<sup>13</sup> In particular, see the *Moral Foundations Dictionary* that Jesse Graham, Jonathan Haidt, and Brian Nosek employed in J. Graham, J. Haidt, and B. Nosek, “Liberals and Conservatives Rely on Different Sets of Moral Foundations,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 96 (2009): 1029–1046. More information about Moral Foundations Theory and the *Moral Foundations Dictionary* are available from [MoralFoundations.org](http://MoralFoundations.org). See also J. Graham, J. Haidt, “Sacred values and Evil Adversaries: A Moral Foundations Approach,” in *The Social Psychology of Morality: Exploring the Causes of Good and Evil*, eds. M. Mikulincer & P. R. Shaver (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2012), 11–31; George Lakoff, *Moral Politics. How Liberals and Conservative Think* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Haidt, Peter Ditto, Morteza Dehghani, Mohammad Atari, Sena Koleva, and Jesse Graham, “Moral Foundations Theory,” [MoralFoundations.org](http://MoralFoundations.org).

have provided the basis for social scientific studies on moral rhetoric in contemporary politics, including those that have examined how congressional leaders have used moral language “to shift the public debate and to persuade and motivate voters” as well as to impose and enforce normative behavior.<sup>15</sup> Recent analyses tend to focus on partisan divides in moral language, identifying values such as “self-discipline and self-reliance” in the moral language of political conservatives and “morality as empathy” and social “well-being” in that of political liberals.<sup>16</sup>

These analyses of current partisan language do not map back neatly onto the political leaders of the 1950s, and historical analysis of rhetoric differs methodologically from social scientific language analysis, yet these theories of moral language described above are nonetheless useful. The categories themselves provide clarity as to why particular words or concepts had moral valence. In the debates over the Mutual Security Act, legislators employed language from several of the foundational categories, linking their policy preferences with notions of fairness, responsibility, and liberty, and a desire to avoid harm, oppression, and subversion. Sometimes these notions derived from or reflected religious beliefs. Examining the rhetoric that legislators used to justify their views on foreign aid in categories like this helps to break down what moral language *was* and reveals important patterns in how and why legislators used that language. In this way, this essay aims to add specificity to and build on the work of historians such as Andrew Preston, Robert McElroy, Gaddis Smith, and others who have explored moralism, idealism, ideology, and religion in U.S. foreign relations.<sup>17</sup>

Importantly, morality and ideology are related yet distinct concepts. Where moral values offer a “code of conduct” that individuals or groups might adopt to guide their actions

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<sup>15</sup> Sze-Yuh Nina Wang and Yoel Inbar, “Moral-Language Use by U.S. Political Elites,” *Psychological Science* 32, no. 1 (2021): 14; Stephen Finlay, “Uses of Moral Language,” in *International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, edited by H. LaFollette (Wiley, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444367072.wbiee444>.

<sup>16</sup> Kiki Y. Renardel de Lavalette, Gerard Steen, and Christian Burgers, “How to Identify Moral Language in Presidential Speeches: A Comparison Between a Social-Psychological and a Cognitive-Linguistic Approach to Corpus Analysis,” *Corpus Linguistics and Ling. Theory* 15, no. 2 (2019): 240; Lakoff, *Moral Politics*.

<sup>17</sup> In the introduction to *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, Andrew Preston provides a cogent overview of the links between moralism, idealism, and religious belief in U.S. foreign relations. See Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 7–17. See also Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State*; Hunt, *Ideology and Foreign Policy*; Robert McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy: The Role of Ethics in International Affairs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1986); Frederick W. Marks, III, “Morality as a Drive Wheel in the Diplomacy of Theodore Roosevelt,” *Diplomatic History* 2 (Winter 1978): 43–62; Robert Osgood, *Ideals and Self-Interest in America’s Foreign Relations: The Great Transformation of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

and help them distinguish perceived right from wrong, ideology is a system of thought or a set of ideas that define the contours of political action.<sup>18</sup> Morality and ideology can influence and reinforce each other, and historical studies that consider the intersection of these intellectual forces and how they came to bear on U.S. foreign policymaking abound. There is a robust literature, for example, on how different presidents applied their sense of right and wrong to the decisions they made on behalf of the nation, examining how they melded their personal morality with notions about the core political values of the United States, such as democracy, individual rights, or free enterprise.<sup>19</sup> There are many studies that consider how policymakers sought to justify foreign interventions using moral and ideological language, as well as how the public responded with moral opposition when those interventions seemed to contravene national values.<sup>20</sup> Scholars of politics and social psychology argue that morality and ideology have worked together to shape partisan politics, political identity, and foreign policy attitudes in the United States in both the past and present day.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> For an overview of these concepts, see Bernard Gert and Joshua Gert, “The Definition of Morality,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), available from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/morality-definition>; Christine Sypnowich, “Law and Ideology,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), available from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/law-ideology>.

<sup>19</sup> In many cases these works highlight presidents known for making their religious faith a centerpiece of their political identity (such as Woodrow Wilson, Jimmy Carter, or George W. Bush), though the scholarship is not limited to these leaders. Some examples include John M. Dobson, *Reticent Expansionism: The Foreign Policy of William McKinley* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1988); Marks, “Morality as a Drive Wheel in the Diplomacy of Theodore Roosevelt”; Cara Lea Burnidge, *A Peaceful Conquest: Woodrow Wilson, Religion, and the New World Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Malcolm D. Magee, *What the World Should Be: Woodrow Wilson and the Crafting of a Faith-Based Foreign Policy* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008); Mary E. Stuckey, *The Good Neighbor: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Rhetoric of American Power* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2013); Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*; Rasmus Sinding Søndergaard, *Reagan, Congress, and Human Rights: Contesting Morality in US Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Marla J. Selvidge, “The New World Order: Messianic Rhetoric and Dreams of the Senior Bush Administration,” *Political Theology* 9, no. 1 (January 2008): 61–78; J. Berggren and N.C. Rae, “Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush: Faith, Foreign Policy, and an Evangelical Presidential Style,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, No. 4 (December 2006): 606–32.

<sup>20</sup> A sampling of this literature includes Walter H. Capps, *The Unfinished War: Vietnam and the American Conscience* (Boston: Beacon, 1990); Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Draft Resistance During the Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); John M. Dobson, *America’s Ascent: The United States Becomes a Great Power, 1880–1914* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1978); David F. Healy, *U.S. Expansionism: The Imperialist Urge in the 1890s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970); David E. DeCosse, ed., *But Was It Just? Reflections on the Morality of the Persian Gulf War* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Peter K. Hatemi, Charles Crabtree, and Kevin B. Smith, “Ideology Justifies Morality: Political Beliefs Predict Moral Foundations,” *American Journal of Political Science* 63, no. 4 (2019): 788–806; Nicholas Emler, “Morality and Political Orientations: An Analysis of Their Relationship,” *European Review of Social Psychology* 13, no. 1 (2003): 259–91; Joshua D. Kertzer, et al., “Moral Support: How Moral Values Shape Foreign Policy Attitudes,” *The Journal of Politics* 76 (July 2014): 825–40.

There is also a burgeoning body of work on the history of U.S. humanitarian interventions and foreign aid where, given the moral motivation that often underlies such assistance, it would make sense to address moral and ideological considerations.<sup>22</sup> Although many of these works do address ideology as a motive for providing assistance, only a few pay specific attention to morality or moral language in the formation of foreign aid policies.<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey Taffet's work stands out in this literature for centering moral and religious values in his explorations of U.S. foreign aid funding, as well as for his emphasis on Congress. His contention in *Against Aid* that congressional debates over aid spending reflected political, partisan, and moral considerations, and that the challenges to aid funding eventually "shifted foreign aid programming away from infrastructure spending and toward" supporting "basic human needs" is a critical insight.<sup>24</sup> This article complements these insights by focusing closely on the evolution of the rhetoric around aid and how moral language defined the contours of subsequent congressional debates over foreign policy later in the century. After all, it is difficult to disentangle moral values from U.S. ideology or ideals. This article adds to this literature by centering those values and offering a sustained analysis of their significance in the formation and maintenance of the Mutual Security Program in Congress during the early Cold War. The moral defenses of this program over the course of the 1950s helped to make foreign aid—as well as moral considerations—enduring features of U.S. foreign policy planning. In addition, this article contributes to our understanding of the role that Congress has played in the making of U.S. foreign policy by focusing explicit attention on how congressional funding decisions and debates shaped the Mutual Security Program throughout its existence.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Julia F. Irwin, *Catastrophic Diplomacy: US Foreign Disaster Assistance in the American Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2024); John Norris, *The Enduring Struggle: The History of the U.S. Agency of International Development and America's Uneasy Transformation of the World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021); Salvador Santino F. Regilme Jr., *Aid Imperium: United States Foreign Policy and Human Rights in Post-Cold War Southeast Asia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021); Burton I. Kaufman, *Trade and Aid: Eisenhower's Foreign Economic Policy, 1953–1961* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> See in particular Jeffrey Taffet, *Against Aid*; Jeffrey F. Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: The Alliance for Progress in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2007). For others that address morality in humanitarian interventions or aid, see David Halloran Lumsdaine, *Moral Vision in International Politics: The Foreign Aid Regime, 1949–1989* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); McElroy, *Morality and American Foreign Policy*; Sarah Kreps and Sarah Maxey, "Mechanisms of Morality: Sources of Support for Humanitarian Intervention," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62 (September 2018): 1814–42; Christopher T. Fisher, "Moral Purpose is the Important Thing: David Lilienthal, Iran, and the Meaning of Development in the U.S., 1956–63," *International History Review* 33 (2011): 431–51.

<sup>24</sup> Taffet, *Against Aid*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> There is a robust literature on the role of Congress in the making of U.S. foreign policy. See, for example, Douglas L. Kriner, *After the Rubicon: Congress, Presidents, and the Politics of Waging War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Rebecca K. C. Herman, *Friends and Foes: How Congress and the President Really Make Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000); James M. Lindsay, *Congress and the Politics of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Joel H. Silbey, ed., *To Advise and Consent: The United States Congress and Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century, Volumes 1 and 2* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1991).



### Passing a Mutual Security Act

On May 24, 1951, President Harry Truman delivered a special message to Congress outlining a plan for a comprehensive mutual security program, which included a request for \$7.5 billion in foreign military and economic aid. The proposed program would subsume or replace several other existing foreign aid programs, including the Mutual Defense Assistance Program of 1949, the Marshall Plan, and the Point Four Program (which provided economic and technical assistance to “underdeveloped” countries).<sup>26</sup> Truman emphasized that the proposed mutual security program would complement U.S. military capabilities in protecting “the security of American lives and homes against attack and the security of our rights and liberties as law-abiding members of the world community.”<sup>27</sup> The president argued that providing foreign assistance would contain the Soviet threat and promote world peace, thus linking mutual security aid explicitly with peace, which he perceived as a general moral good.

On June 26, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs began holding hearings on the text on the proposed legislation that the White House had provided.<sup>28</sup> Secretary of State Dean Acheson offered the first statement that day, presenting the Truman administration’s rationale for the new aid program. Acheson made clear that the overriding goal of providing foreign aid was to protect national interests and security, insulating the country and its allies from communist subversion and the threat of war. Security and stability abroad were of paramount concern. Providing aid would ensure that European allies could continue to recover economically and build their military capacity, and that “poverty, disease, illiteracy, and resentments against former colonial exploitations” would not create openings for revolution in Asia and elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> Acheson did incorporate moral language in noting that “to recognize the enlightened self-interest in these activities does not detract from the humanitarian character of some of them, nor from their contribution to the common goal of peace and security.”<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, the majority of the testimony over the six weeks of hearings from Acheson and other executive branch and military representatives—including Gen. George Marshall, Averell Harriman, and Gen. Omar Bradley—emphasized the role that aid would play in mitigating the Soviet threat, potential communist subversion in Europe, and other U.S. security concerns.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Harry S. Truman, “Special Message to the Congress on the Mutual Security Program,” (May 24, 1951). Available from: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/special-message-the-congress-the-mutual-security-program-7>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *The Mutual Security Program: Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, 82nd Cong., 1st sess., June 26–July 31, 1951 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1951), 1–6.

<sup>29</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *The Mutual Security Program* (Statement of Hon. Dean Acheson, Secretary of State), 17.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 81–315, 565–642; 697–777, 853–938, 983–1003, 1079–1089, 1193–1213, 1263–1513.

That said, a noticeable amount of moral language suffused these hearings and the debates on the House floor that followed after the Foreign Affairs Committee drafted H.R. 5113 and introduced it to Congress on August 10, 1951.<sup>32</sup> This included numerous (and expected) references to communism as “evil,” a descriptor that a variety of witnesses used when testifying about the perceived threats that communism and the Soviet Union posed to the world community and thus the need for the Mutual Security Act. Examples of this include U.S. Army Chief of Staff Gen. J. Lawton Collins describing communism as the main “evil we face” in the world and former Under Secretary of State Will Clayton noting the dangers that “the evil of Communist aggression” posed to national security.<sup>33</sup> The president of the Ford Foundation similarly lamented the promises that “the evil nostrum of communism” offered to the world’s downtrodden, while Chief of Staff for Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe Lt. Gen. Alfred Gruenther noted the “fear of the evil of Russia” that existed among U.S. allies in Europe.<sup>34</sup> There is extensive scholarship on the ideological and religious dynamics of the Cold War that addresses how and why U.S. leaders framed the conflict with the Soviet Union as a battle between good and evil. This type of moral language and moral framing is both pervasive and important, and well-studied.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, philosophers consider the word “evil,” as well as the words “good,” “bad,” “right,” and “wrong,” to be “thin” moral concepts, in the sense that they are “general evaluative concepts that do not seem substantially descriptive.”<sup>36</sup> In contrast, “thick” moral concepts are both “evaluative and substantially

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<sup>32</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Mutual Security Act of 1951: Report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs on H.R. 5113: A Bill to Maintain the Security and Promote the Foreign Policy and Provide for the General Welfare of the United States by Furnishing Assistance to Friendly Nations in the Interest of International Peace and Security*, August 14, 1951 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1953), 2.

<sup>33</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *The Mutual Security Program* (Statement of Gen. J. Lawton Collins, Chief of Staff, United States Army), 565; Statement of Will H. Clayton, Former Under Secretary of State, As Presented by Richard F. Harless, 1035.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* Statement of Hon. Paul G. Hoffman, President, Ford Foundation, 319; Statement of Lt. General Alfred M. Gruenther, Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers, Europe, 1525.

<sup>35</sup> For just a few of many examples, see Preston, *Sword of the Spirit*; William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945–1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Ira Chernus, “Operation Candor: Fear, Faith, and Flexibility,” *Diplomatic History* 29 (November 2005): 779–809.

<sup>36</sup> Though “evil” has some evaluative content and is not as thin a term as “bad,” philosophers still consider it to be on the thinner side of the spectrum. “Thick Concepts,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*, <https://iep.utm.edu/thick-co> (accessed June 5, 2022). See Finlay, “Uses of Moral Language”; “Thick Ethical Concepts,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/thick-ethical-concepts/> (accessed June 5, 2022).

descriptive at the same time.”<sup>37</sup> Several thick moral characteristics, including “justice,” “fairness,” and “responsible,” emerged alongside morally weighty concepts such as equality, liberty, peace, self-help, human rights, and human dignity in the 1951 Mutual Security Act hearings and then became increasingly common in the debates over the renewal of the program.<sup>38</sup> These “thick” and morally weighty concepts have the potential to better illuminate the nature and depth of the conflicts that emerged within Congress over the MSA and subsequent foreign aid spending.

Minnesota Republican Walter Judd, a steadfast though not uncritical defender of foreign assistance, responded to Dean Acheson’s testimony with an insistence that U.S. foreign aid policy and messaging about the policy should emphasize rights as well as the “equality of status” of newly independent nations.<sup>39</sup> Judd employed these terms as he discussed his desire to ensure that the United States not hesitate to extend assistance to friendly but nondemocratic countries. Arguing that “democracy is a goal, and not the condition of our aid,” he contended that the aid program would not achieve its desired effects if it did not recognize that material aid to address “poverty, disease, and illiteracy” was not sufficient to bring decolonized nations into alignment with the United States. Rather, U.S. policies needed to account for the deep wounds of colonialism by elevating the “human dignity” and “equality of status” of countries like Iran, which had long suffered under British colonial rule.<sup>40</sup> Judd’s Republican colleague from Pennsylvania James Fulton similarly sought to ensure that U.S. policy would not condone or support the “suppression of human rights and liberties abroad” by colonial powers.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> “Thick Concepts.”

<sup>38</sup> As a note, philosophers do not necessarily agree on which terms are thick, though “justice” and “fairness” do often come up as examples. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Michael Smith, “On the Nature and Significance of the Distinction between Thick and Thin Ethical Concepts,” in *Thick Concepts*, ed. Simon Kirchin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Samuel Scheffler, “Morality through Thick and Thin: A Critical Notice of *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*,” *The Philosophical Review* 96, no. 3 (July 1987): 441–34; Simon Hope, “Common Humanity as a Justification for Human Rights Claims,” in *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, eds. Gerhard Ernst and Jan-Christoph Heilinger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 220–222.

<sup>39</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *The Mutual Security Program*, 76. Rights and equality are both thick terms associated with the virtue of fairness in the *Moral Foundations Dictionary*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 75–76.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.



Representative Walter Henry Judd served as a Republican representative of Minnesota from 1943 to 1963.

Judd, a devout Protestant, believed that God had created man in his image, imbuing mankind with fundamental “human dignity” and rights.<sup>42</sup> He also believed that the United States had a responsibility to promote democracy and U.S. values worldwide. His religious beliefs informed his moral understanding of the world and his vision for U.S. foreign policy, and he and others who shared his perspective drew on the moral language of human dignity and rights as they

made their case for the passage of the Mutual Security Act.

This conception of rights also related intimately to the vocabularies of freedom and liberty, other thick concepts that appeared regularly in the initial debates over mutual security aid. A number of witnesses in the 1951 hearings linked freedom and citizenship in a “free” nation with human rights, a circumstance that contrasted starkly with life as “slave citizens” under “the fanatical forces of communistic totalitarianism.”<sup>43</sup> One representative from the U.S. army noted that assisting other free nations provided the means for “the defense of our way of life—the dignity of the individual, his political freedom, his freedom of worship,

<sup>42</sup> Yanli Gao and Robert Osburn, Jr., “Walter Judd and the Sino-Japanese War: Christian Missionary cum Foreign Policy Activist,” *Journal of Church and State* 58, no. 4 (Autumn 2016): 632. In my own work, I have discussed how various U.S. Protestant groups have conceptualized human rights based on their readings of Gen. 1:26–27 (New Revised Standard Version), Jn. 3:16, and 2 Cor. 3:17, among others. Lauren Frances Turek, *To Bring the Good News to All Nations: Evangelical Influence on Human Rights and US Foreign Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020), 91; See also Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Gene Zubovich, *Before the Religious Right: Liberal Protestants, Human Rights, and the Polarization of the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022); Doron Shultziner, “Human Dignity: Functions and Meanings,” *Global Jurist Topics* 3, no. 3 (February 5, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.2202/1535-167X.1110>.

<sup>43</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *The Mutual Security Program* (Statement of Hon. George Meader, A Representative in Congress from the State of Michigan), 779. For a selection of other examples within this hearing, see: Statement of Gen. George C. Marshall, Secretary of Defense, 87; Statement of Hon. Paul G. Goffman, President, Ford Foundation, 318; Statement of John C. Lynn, Associate Director of Washington Office, American Farm Bureau Federation, 956; Statement of John Brophy, Congress of Industrial Organizations, 1046.

his standard of living.”<sup>44</sup> The text of the Mutual Security Act itself explicitly noted that the United States intended its provision of aid “to support the freedom of Europe” via military assistance that would enable the continent to defend itself against potential attack along with economic assistance to engender political and economic stability.<sup>45</sup> Casting the provisions of the bill as essential to the promotion of freedom and therefore rights worldwide—moral values that were core to U.S. identity and self-conception—added considerable ideological heft to the proposal to send billions of dollars of assistance to Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

The perceived rhetorical power of the language of freedom also helps explain why conservative opponents of the bill framed their anxieties about the cost of the bill in terms of a threat to freedom and rights within the United States. This theme pervaded floor debate in the House throughout August 1951. A number of representatives expressed concern that the act would force generations of American taxpayers to foot the bill for the good of other countries at the expense of needs at home.<sup>46</sup> Some worried that aiding in the economic development of other countries would “destroy or lose the markets for the goods which flow from our own American factories and the skilled hands of our workers who are paying the costs of altruistic give-away programs.”<sup>47</sup> This overspending and economic damage would, according to one representative, “black out freedom, liberty, and the happiness of all civilization.”<sup>48</sup> Other opponents used similar language as they asserted that having lost freedom and liberties at home, the United States would not be able to promote those moral values abroad.<sup>49</sup> This type of rhetoric was not new, of course. Fiscal conservatives had marshalled similar moral language against spending for the New Deal and other programs in the past, such as when Robert Taft and other Republican leaders accused New Dealers of duplicity, reckless spending, and the abrogation of American freedoms, asserting that President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s efforts to end the Great Depression and create a social safety net represented an “attack [on] the very basis of the system of American

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., Statement of Gen. J. Lawton Collins, Chief of Staff, United States Army, 566.

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Congress House of Representatives, *Mutual Security Act of 1951 Conference Report*, Report No. 1090, 82nd Cong., 1st sess. (October 2, 1951), 1.

<sup>46</sup> See, in particular, the back and forth during the debates on August 16 and August 18, 1951 (though, again, this was pervasive throughout). 82nd Cong. Rec. 10136–10190 (August 16, 1951); 82nd Cong. Rec. 10226–10293 (August 18, 1951).

<sup>47</sup> 82nd Cong. Rec. 10139 (August 16, 1951).

<sup>48</sup> 82nd Cong. Rec. 10136 (August 16, 1951).

<sup>49</sup> 82nd Cong. Rec. 10167, 10176 (August 16, 1951).

democracy.”<sup>50</sup> In the context of the MSA, such language revealed a key distinction in aid opponents’ thinking about what constituted appropriate spending in a foreign policy context. Proponents of the bill were quick to note that many of these same representatives had not hesitated to approve a much larger spending package for U.S. military defenses, and to reiterate that foreign aid was an investment in freedom, peace, and progress that would benefit all.<sup>51</sup>

An additional set of thick moral concepts emerged in the form of a vocabulary of responsibility, self-help, and industriousness. During the floor debates over the MSA, some opponents of the bill asserted that although they would not vote in favor of the bill due to its expense, they supported the principle and goals of foreign aid so long as they deemed the recipient nations deserving of the aid. Indiana Representative William Bray summed up this perspective by noting, “I am in favor of helping the peoples who need help in the world. I am in favor of helping them to help themselves. That is the American way.”<sup>52</sup> This rhetoric of self-help, which was also not a new feature in conservative political discourse, had its roots in classical liberalism and the Protestant work-ethic that sociologist Max Weber observed (but that long predated him).<sup>53</sup> For some opponents, insisting that aid only go to countries that could “help themselves” was merely a moralistic cloak for racism. Further, the gesture of support in principle for “worthy” nations allowed opponents to claim that they were just as committed to promoting freedom abroad as the majority of their House colleagues, even as they continued to insist that the cost of the aid program was outrageous and would jeopardize freedom at home.

### **Sustaining the Mutual Security Program**

Interestingly, after Congress passed the Mutual Security Act and President Truman signed it into law on October 10, 1951, supporters of the foreign aid program began adopting the moral language of responsibility, thrift, and self-help as they defended the program against its opponents over the next nine years. When Secretary of State John Foster Dulles testified in a 1953 Committee on Foreign Affairs hearing in support of extending the Mutual Security Act, he emphasized the thriftiness of the program, arguing that continuing the program would “produce more real

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<sup>50</sup> “Reign of Socialism is Feared by Taft,” *New York Times* (January 19, 1936): N1-2; James A. Hagert, “Young Republican Urges Hillen Quit to Aid State Party,” *New York Times* (May 16, 1936): 1; “Hoover Presents an 11-Point Plan for U.S. Reform,” *Washington Post* (November 17, 1935): 1.

<sup>51</sup> 82nd Cong. Rec. 10162, 10170, 10174, 10183 (August 16, 1951).

<sup>52</sup> 82nd Cong. Rec. 10254 (August 17, 1951).

<sup>53</sup> Preston, *Sword of the Spirit*, 13; Joshua Yates and James Davison Hunter, *Thrift and Thriving in America: Capitalism and Moral Order from the Puritans to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1905; English translation London: Unwin Hyman, 1930).

security for the people of the United States than we could get by spending the same amount of money on a purely national program.”<sup>54</sup> He also described the program’s outlays as “prudent investments in concrete projects” of widespread benefit.<sup>55</sup> Director of the Mutual Security Agency Harold Stassen likewise assured his colleagues that aid funds would “be administered with extreme care and that throughout the year every opportunity will be seized for further savings when they can be made without prejudice to our country’s objectives.”<sup>56</sup> This language, which offered a clear rejoinder to the ongoing opposition from fiscal conservatives, differed from the more limited moral language of self-help that opponents employed, but still fell within the same broad moral category of responsibility. Where fiscally conservative aid opponents emphasized their belief that they had a moral responsibility to U.S. taxpayers to spend wisely, avoid deficits, and minimize debt, aid supporters contended that because aid spending had a high return on investment, it was a wise and thus responsible use of public money. In the mid-1950s, some advocates were also asserting that the program fostered self-reliance—one representative proudly stated that through the MSA “we help most those who help themselves most”—and cast this characteristic as both a moral good and a strategic benefit to the United States.<sup>57</sup>

The incidence of thick moral language grew even more frequent in the 1955 hearings, with extensive references to the Mutual Security Program (MSP) as a tool for promoting peace, justice, cooperation, self-sufficiency, and freedom worldwide.<sup>58</sup> Former Ambassador to India Chester Bowles managed to draw together a number of these core concepts when he argued that the nation had a moral (and indeed explicitly biblical) “obligation to help others who are less fortunate,” that providing “effective aid now may save far greater expenditures later,” and the United States best helped those who helped themselves.<sup>59</sup> Given these principles, and in light of the ongoing global competition with the Soviet Union, Bowles expressed his sense that “the urgent need for an adequate foreign assistance program seems to me irrefutable even for those few who deny the importance of moral principles

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<sup>54</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Mutual Security Act Extension: Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, House of Representatives 83rd Cong., 1st sess., March 11–June 6, 1953, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1953) (Statement of Hon. John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State), 142.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* (Statement of Hon. Harold E. Stassen, Director for Mutual Security), 153.

<sup>57</sup> U.S. Congress House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Mutual Security Act of 1955: Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs*, House of Representatives, 84th Cong., 1st sess., May 25–June 17, 1955 (Washington, DC: GPO: 1955), 42.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 20, 31, 33.

<sup>59</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Mutual Security Act of 1955* (Statement of Hon. Chester Bowles, Former United States Ambassador to India), 508.

in dealing with other people in international affairs.”<sup>60</sup> Democratic congressman, Baptist preacher, and civil rights leader Adam Clayton Powell offered his support for the Mutual Security Program using a similar blend of religious and values-based language. He described humanitarian assistance as a form of “witness”—a term freighted with Christian meaning, including a sense of biblical responsibility to share the “truth” with others throughout the world and live according to core Christian principles.<sup>61</sup> For Powell, aid served as a way to bear witness “to the cause of democracy” across the globe.<sup>62</sup> To that end, he advocated for an increase in foreign aid spending for African and Asian countries over and above the levels in the existing MSP, and for the United States to take a “firm, unequivocal stand” against colonialism.<sup>63</sup>

Powell was not the only member of Congress to see in foreign aid funding an opportunity for the United States to address the moral ill of colonialism—or, at the very least, to view anticolonial sentiment as a key issue for the United States to manage as it sought to position itself as a beacon for freedom in a polarized Cold War world.<sup>64</sup> Some legislators, including Walter Judd, linked anticolonial sentiments in Africa and Southeast Asia to perceptions of inequity in the distribution of U.S. foreign aid dollars. For example, Judd derided the Office of Refugee Relief program as “utterly immoral and . . . shortsighted” for spending the bulk of its aid money on assisting European rather than Asian refugees.<sup>65</sup> He contended that this inequitable spending sent the message that “when the showdown comes, you always look after white people first,” and that in so doing, the policy hurt U.S. strategic interests and its reputation.<sup>66</sup> Other legislators noted likewise that colonialism, racism, and inequity fed neatly into Soviet critiques of

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., Statement of Hon. Adam C. Powell, A Representative in Congress from the State of New York, 475; John 1:7, 18:37 (King James Version).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 476.

<sup>64</sup> These members of Congress did not, however, discuss the extent to which foreign aid itself could and did function as a tool of U.S. imperialism and hegemonic control, an aspect (and critique) of foreign aid that many scholars and people who live in aid recipient nations have raised for decades. See, for example, Wesley Attewell, *The Quiet Violence of Empire: How USAID Waged Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023); Lynn Richards, “The Context of Foreign Aid: Modern Imperialism,” *Review of Radical Politics* 9 no. 4 (December 1977): 43–75; Getachew Fentahun, “Foreign Aid in the Post-Colonial Africa: Means for Building Democracy or Ensuring Western Domination?” *Cogent Social Sciences* 9, no. 1 (August 2023); Olubanke Awosope, “Development Aid – A New Imperialist Strategy?” *Asia Blogs* (May 31 2021), available from: <https://asia-blogs.org/2021/05/31/development-aid-a-new-imperialist-strategy/>.

<sup>65</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Mutual Security Act of 1955*, 458.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 459.



the capitalist West.<sup>67</sup> As a number of historians have documented, entrenched white supremacy and the violent responses to the civil rights movement in the United States at that time amplified these critiques.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, Chester Bowles argued that providing *just* military assistance, rather than broad-based aid to nurture economic growth for all and democratic governance, would “inevitably [awaken] colonial memories.”<sup>69</sup> If administered properly however, these members of Congress believed that foreign aid funding and humanitarian assistance programs could provide a means for demonstrating a U.S. commitment to the moral principles of fairness, justice, and equality in its foreign policy.<sup>70</sup>

To help corroborate this position, members of the House Foreign Affairs committee invited a number of representatives from government agencies and nongovernmental organizations involved in distributing or advocating for humanitarian aid to testify in the 1955 hearings. Nearly all of them spoke about the benefits of the aid program in moral as well as strategic language. Eager to persuade the House Foreign Affairs Committee to continue its financial support for the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Dr. Martha Eliot of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) asserted that the structure of that program encouraged “self-help” among poorer nations and that its efforts to ameliorate childhood malnutrition and illnesses was laying “the foundations of international peace and understanding.”<sup>71</sup> The legislative secretary for the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom used comparable language in her testimony, stressing her organization’s belief that

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 101, 104–5, 284, 476, 508, 517, 521.

<sup>68</sup> On the foreign relations implications of racism in the United States and the civil rights movement, see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956–1974* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Gerald Horne, “Race from Power: U.S. Foreign Policy and the General Crisis of White Supremacy,” in *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945–1988*, ed. by Brenda Gayle Plummer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 45–66.

<sup>69</sup> Chester Bowles, “Suggested Draft Statement on Foreign Policy,” Draft memorandum re: Foreign Policy Position of Democratic Leaders in Congress, May 15, 1954, Folder 0751, Box 166, Chester Bowles Papers, Yale University Special Collections Library & Archives, New Haven, CT (hereinafter YUSCLA).

<sup>70</sup> Not all of the legislators who addressed the issue of colonialism did so from a modern antiracist or anticolonial perspective; Chester Bowles, for example, recognized the threat that colonialism posed in terms of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry, but still described people in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as being “extremely sensitive” about colonialism and discussed them and their interests in a paternalist manner. *Ibid.*, 521.

<sup>71</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Mutual Security Act of 1955* (Statement of Dr. Martha Eliot, Chief, Children’s Bureau, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare), 461, 463.

humanitarian aid would help “create the conditions for . . . all the people in the world so that it will not be possible for communism to exploit the people’s misery,” and to allow freedom and world peace to flourish.<sup>72</sup>

These moral themes seemed to resonate with Congress, which renewed funding for the mutual security program for fiscal year 1955 with a 188–77 vote in the House and passed an amended Mutual Security Act of 1955 with a 59–18 vote in the Senate.<sup>73</sup> Yet the program’s opponents remained a force to be reckoned with, both within Congress and outside of it. The appointment of Representative Otto Passman (D-LA) to the chairmanship of the House Appropriations Committee’s subcommittee on foreign operations in late 1954 proved particularly vexing for those hoping to continue to fully fund the Mutual Security Program.<sup>74</sup> Passman, a conservative Southern Democrat and segregationist, had long been an outspoken opponent of foreign aid; he voted against aid programs consistently during his long tenure on the House Appropriations Committee and greatly savored his ability to decimate spending for aid once he took over as subcommittee chairman.<sup>75</sup>

He was thus part of a small but noisy cohort of conservative members of Congress who sought to constrain U.S. engagement abroad during the Eisenhower administration. Efforts to block foreign aid funding were of a piece with the Senate campaign to pass the Bricker Amendment, legislation that would have severely restricted “presidential treaty-making power.”<sup>76</sup> The amendment, a version of which Senator John W. Bricker (R-OH) offered annually between 1951 and 1957, proposed to elevate the role of Congress in foreign policy-making above that of the president by requiring that “all treaties and executive agreements first to be ratified by two-thirds of the U.S. Senate, *then* by both houses of Congress with enabling legislation, and finally, as the proposal

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, Statement of Mrs. Alexander Stewart, Legislative Secretary, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, United States Section, 767.

<sup>73</sup> The conference report for S 2090 Mutual Security Act of 1955 passed the house by 262 to 120. See “Senate Vote #52 in 1955 (84th Congress),” GovTrack, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/84-1955/s52>, (accessed February 21, 2023); “House Vote #144 in 1954 (83rd Congress),” GovTrack, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/83-1954/h144>, (accessed February 21, 2023); “House Vote #59 in 1955 (84th Congress),” GovTrack, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/84-1955/h59> (accessed February 21, 2023).

<sup>74</sup> The chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, Representative Clarence Cannon, appointed Passman to the subcommittee in late 1954, and he took up the post in early 1955. Thomas J. Lueck, “Otto Passman, 88, Louisiana Congressman Who Fought Spending,” *New York Times* (August 14, 1988): 41; “Louisiana’s Passman Asks Foreign Aid Loan Plan,” *The Southeast Missourian* (January 28, 1955): 4.

<sup>75</sup> Rowland Evans, Jr., “Louisiana’s Passman: The Scourge of Foreign Aid,” *Harper’s Magazine* (January 1962): 78–83.

<sup>76</sup> “Bricker Amendment,” in *CQ Almanac* 1956, 12th ed., 08-483-08-485 (Washington, DC: *Congressional Quarterly*, 1957). Available from <http://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/cqal56-1349514>; Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Abroad: Foreign Policy Under the Bricker Amendment,” *New York Times* (January 18, 1954): 22.

mutated, by *all* 48 state legislatures before becoming ‘the law of the land.’<sup>77</sup> As historian Carol Anderson makes clear, much of the impetus for this amendment reflected conservative disdain for the United Nations, and in particular for the U.N. Genocide Convention, which Southern Democrats and other white supremacists feared would be a way for supporters of civil rights to “sneak an ‘anti-lynching’ bill past Congress” or to chip away at segregation and Jim Crow laws in Southern states.<sup>78</sup>

These concerns dovetailed with conservative assertions that the United Nations, its supporters, and internationalists more generally, along with advocates for civil rights and human rights, were socialists or communists. Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI), FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, and the House Un-American Activities Committee stoked these fears through hearings, investigations, and public rhetoric that targeted a wide range of organizations, including civil rights groups, as subversive. Racism infused isolationist and neo-isolationist foreign policy perspectives amongst the public as well as within Congress. As noted, opponents of foreign assistance often asserted that certain countries were unworthy of aid due to their lack of appreciation or proper obeisance to the United States and its political ideology; all too often, the countries that these opponents argued were not worth spending money on were those with non-white populaces.<sup>79</sup> Although the Senate narrowly defeated the Bricker amendment in 1954, that defeat came only after strenuous lobbying from President Eisenhower and a pledge to refrain from ratifying UN human rights treaties.<sup>80</sup> Historian Cathal Nolan contends that this resolution of the Bricker controversy was “the eclipse . . . [of] the strength of isolationism in the postwar period.”<sup>81</sup> This rings

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<sup>77</sup> Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 220.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>79</sup> Typically, countries in Asia and Africa. As an example, see, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Selected Executive Session Hearings of the Committee, 1951–56, *Mutual Security Program, Part 4*, “Part 3, Minority Views to accompany H.R. 9678, June 25, 1954,” 432–39; Otto Passman to Judge Frank Voelker (February 21, 1956), Folder 14, Legislation – Foreign Aid, Box 1956 – 1958 – 01: General Files – Legislation, Foreign Aid, and Personal, Drawer 2, Otto Passman Papers, University of Louisiana Monroe Special Collections Library, Monroe Louisiana (hereinafter ULMSCSL).

<sup>80</sup> Subsequent efforts to pass the amendment also failed, and the 1957 Supreme Court ruling in *Reid v. Covert* put the matter to rest. Anderson also notes that the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board* also redirected the focus of Southern Democrats. Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize*, 254; Natalie Hevener Kaufman and David Whiteman, “Opposition to Human Rights Treaties in the United States Senate: The Legacy of the Bricker Amendment,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (August 1988): 320; Cathal J. Nolan, “The Last Hurrah of Conservative Isolationism: Eisenhower, Congress, and the Bricker Amendment,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 345–46.

<sup>81</sup> The fight over the Bricker amendment was largely an interparty one for Republicans, though isolationist Southern Democrats did vote in support of it, and Eisenhower’s win was thus a win for internationalist Republicanism. Nolan, “The Last Hurrah,” 338, 346.

true as far as isolationism existed in the Senate and the Republican party, the core foci of Nolan's study.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the escalating debates in the House over mutual security funding may represent a concurrent but more protracted repudiation of isolationism in that body, or at least the redefinition of non-interventionist as well as liberal internationalist positions—and new rhetoric to defend them.

For his part, Passman frequently inveighed against foreign aid spending in speeches on the House floor, framing that spending as fundamentally wasteful and unfair. Grasping the lectern and with an “admonishing finger piercing the air,” he would chide the House for “giving away the American taxpayer’s money” and for creating within the Congress a sense that it had “a moral obligation” to continue providing aid to countries that no longer needed it at the expense of those suffering at home.<sup>83</sup> In congressional hearings as well as in letters to constituents, Passman contended that the Mutual Security Program was plagued by waste and fraud, that it benefited wealthy American industrialists more than the world’s neediest, and that it had failed to win favor for the United States among the poor nations whose allegiance it was competing for against the Soviet Union.<sup>84</sup> He filled his speeches and letters to his colleagues in Congress with the most granular—and often misleading—of spending figures as part of a strategy to sway votes to his side by creating suspicion that the administration was putting forth wildly inflated funding requests for the program.<sup>85</sup> His repeated and passionate assertions that waste, fraud, deceit, and

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<sup>82</sup> In his article “Who Were the Senate Isolationists,” Richard Grimmett contends that “isolationism in the Senate reached its height in 1952” and then steadily declined among Republicans, which roughly tracks with Nolan’s timeline. Grimmett also shows that Southern Democrats in the Senate continued to vote in isolationist patterns at *increasing* levels until 1956. Richard F. Grimmett, *Pacific Historical Review* 42, no. 4 (November 1973): 497.

<sup>83</sup> Evans, Jr., “Louisiana’s Passman,” 79; 101 Cong. Rec. 3193, 3199 (March 18, 1955) (statement of Representative Passman).

<sup>84</sup> 104 Cong. Rec. 12824–12837 (July 1, 1958) (statement of Representative Passman); Passman to Voelker (February 21, 1956).

<sup>85</sup> Passman took particular umbrage at reobligated and unexpended funds, money that had been appropriated for particular projects but not yet spent, even though much of it was already obligated to in-process programs or reappropriated. He sent out a regular newsletter to members of Congress showing expenditures and what he described as unexpended funds to suggest that the foreign aid program was not spending what Congress had appropriated for it and thus did not need the amount of money that the president had requested for the next year’s budget. This was misleading—one journalist helpfully described his accounting process as akin to concluding that someone who carried over a “\$100 end-of-month balance in a checkbook” each month would have a “‘cumulative’ unspent balance after one year” of \$1200 instead of the actual \$100—but it was still a politically effective tactic. Evans, “Louisiana’s Passman,” 82–83. See also Otto Passman, Dear Colleague letter (July 30, 1958), Folder 28, Foreign Aid—Subcommittee, Drawer 3, Otto Passman Papers, ULMSCSL; H. Field Haviland, Jr., “Foreign Aid and the Policy Process: 1957,” *The American Political Science Review* 52, no. 3 (September 1958): 714–22.

Otto Ernest Passman, a Southern Democrat who represented Louisiana in Congress from 1947 to 1977, used his position as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee's subcommittee on foreign operations to limit foreign aid spending.

general unfairness were hallmarks of the foreign aid program spoke to the core moral concerns he had about aid, as well as the moral ills that he thought would most excite the righteous anger and opposition of his fellow members of Congress. Indeed, as one journalist noted in a detailed *Harper's Magazine* profile, Passman's invectives cast foreign



assistance as “slightly wicked for the country and a sure path to fiscal disaster.”<sup>86</sup> Although Passman did not necessarily speak for all aid opponents, his arguments were broadly representative of those that others voiced, and his position afforded him particular visibility and influence over the conversation in Congress.

With Passman at the helm of the foreign operations subcommittee of the powerful House appropriations committee, the battles over foreign aid spending became even more pitched. In letters to constituents, Passman proudly noted that his role had allowed him “to reduce substantially the appropriation for foreign aid” in 1955 and pledged that he would “work untiringly to cut every penny out of” every future bill that he could.<sup>87</sup> He made good on those promises. In 1956, he led the House Appropriations subcommittee members in a vote that cut more than \$1 billion from President Eisenhower’s request for \$4.9 billion in foreign aid spending.<sup>88</sup> The Eisenhower administration responded to the immediate threat of these cuts by rallying allies in the Senate to try to restore at least some of the funding through the Senate appropriations process.<sup>89</sup> This proved somewhat successful, and required considerable effort on the part of the administration and the State Department. The Eisenhower administration, State Department, and

<sup>86</sup> Evans, “Louisiana’s Passman,” 81.

<sup>87</sup> Otto Passman to Mrs. R. W. Cash (January 20, 1956), Folder 14, Legislation – Foreign Aid, Drawer 2, Otto Passman Papers, ULMSCL.

<sup>88</sup> Lewis Gulick, “New Aid Cut Voted in House,” *Washington Post* (July 5, 1956): 2.

<sup>89</sup> Robert C. Albright, “Ike Presses Fight for Aid Funds: Key Officials Appeal to Senators on President’s Behalf to Restore Slashes,” *Washington Post* (June 13, 1956): 1; William S. White, “Senate Unit Adds 680 Million in Aid; Votes 4.1 Billion: Most of Money Cut From House Bill Restored by Appropriations Group,” *New York Times* (14 July 1956): 1; William S. White, “Senate Defeats 3 Efforts to Cut Foreign Aid Fund,” *New York Times* (July 21, 1956): 1.

congressional supporters of the Mutual Security Program took note of the nature of this increasing opposition to foreign aid spending and, in particular, to the level of cuts that occurred to the program budget during the appropriations process, and began to strategize in earnest to counter it.

Their defense of the program involved both a practical and a moral rhetorical response to the critics of foreign aid. When President Eisenhower issued his semiannual *Report to Congress on the Mutual Security Program* in September 1956, he addressed the budget cuts and the arguments that had inspired them directly.<sup>90</sup> In addition, to counter the allegations of waste and fraud, Eisenhower announced a series of studies on the Mutual Security Program and its efficacy. According to his report to Congress, this transparency would reveal the trustworthiness of the involved agencies while ensuring that the MSP would continue to “bring maximum returns to the American people and provide our free world partners with the most effective kind of military and economic cooperation.”<sup>91</sup> The administration appointed two groups to conduct these studies, the President’s Citizens Advisers on the Mutual Security Program and the International Development Advisory Board, and each released its respective report in March 1957.<sup>92</sup>

An academic study from that year noted that both reports made very similar practical proposals for improving the management and operational flexibility of the MSP, and that both attested to the necessity and value of the program as it stood.<sup>93</sup> The International Development Advisory Board, however, framed economic assistance in particular as the best means for creating a foreign policy that was “in keeping with our own moral traditions and our present responsibilities of leadership” in the Cold War world.<sup>94</sup> It stressed that foreign aid fostered peace by helping “to diminish the causes of war at the earliest possible stage,” and by bridging cultural differences between the United States and its partners.<sup>95</sup> The

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<sup>90</sup> International Cooperation Administration, “Economic, Technical and Defense Progress in Free World Reported by President,” Press Release No. 221 (September 24, 1956), Folder 14, Legislation – Foreign Aid September 1956, Drawer 2, Otto Passman Papers, ULMSCL; Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Report to Congress on the Mutual Security Program*, House Document No. 481, 84th Cong. 2d. sess. (September 20, 1956).

<sup>91</sup> Eisenhower, *Report to Congress on the Mutual Security Program*, 4.

<sup>92</sup> Haviland, “Foreign Aid,” 693. The reports, titled *Report to the President by the President’s Citizen Advisers on the Mutual Security Program* and *A New Emphasis on Economic Development Abroad*, were known colloquially as the Fairless and Johnson reports, after the chairmen of each respective group.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 694.

<sup>94</sup> The International Development Advisory Board, *A New Emphasis on Economic Development Abroad: A Report to the President of the United States* (Washington, DC: March 1957), 7.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 5–6.

report also argued that providing economic assistance was thrifty, saving the United States money in the long run by stabilizing societies and nurturing the transition to democratic capitalism in newly independent states.

The Senate also commissioned a series of studies by scholars and think tanks to review the aid program and its contribution to “the national interest,” as well as to consider how to improve its efficacy.<sup>96</sup> Through these studies and their potential implementation, the Senate hoped to achieve several bipartisan goals for reforming the Mutual Security Program that had emerged by 1956, including a shift toward “loans as distinguished from grants, greater participation by private capital . . . and a sharper separation of military and economic aid.”<sup>97</sup> Verifying that countries that received military or economic assistance used that military aid to build “their own military strength” and that technical and economic assistance was “helping the mass of people to help themselves” remained overriding concerns.<sup>98</sup> In terms of the ethical defense of the program, the executive branch study groups emphasized the moral values of peace, responsibility, and thrift, whereas the Senate studies stressed self-help and self-reliance.<sup>99</sup>

Self-help, thrift, and responsibility remained touchstone values for defending the foreign aid program in the House as well. As the appropriations process unfolded in the spring and summer of 1956, Representative Walter Judd honed his core rejoinder to allegations of wastefulness and unfairness through a number of letters to constituents. In these letters, he argued that rather than being a “give-away” or “handout” to other countries, the “aid programs have saved the United States tens of billions of dollars” by ensuring that allies could stay free and aid in their own defense.<sup>100</sup> According to Judd, “if our allies were to go down, it would cost us not less than 10 billions more, not to mention the human lives involved, or the increases in our own armed forces that would immediately become necessary” to resist the power of the Soviet Union.<sup>101</sup> Not only that, but cutting the aid budget

<sup>96</sup> 102 Cong. Rec. 12318 (July 11, 1956) (Senate Resolution 285).

<sup>97</sup> Haviland, “Foreign Aid,” 690.

<sup>98</sup> 102 Cong. Rec. 12320 (July 11, 1956) (Statement of Representative John C. Stennis).

<sup>99</sup> For a cogent overview of the *policy* differences between the executive and legislative branch studies, see Haviland, “Foreign Aid.”

<sup>100</sup> Walter Judd to M. J. Kingsboro (February 4, 1956), Folder: Congressional File – Mutual Security Act of 1956 – Correspondence, 1956, Box 130, Walter Judd Papers, Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford, CA (hereinafter Hoover); Walter Judd to Albert Lindholm (April 2, 1956), Folder: Congressional File – Mutual Security Act of 1956 – Correspondence, 1956, Box 130, Walter Judd Papers, Hoover.

<sup>101</sup> Walter Judd to Thomas O. Strutzel (June 7, 1956), Folder: Congressional File – Mutual Security Act of 1956 – Correspondence, 1956, Box 130, Walter Judd Papers, Hoover.

would not redirect government spending to reduce taxes or the national debt, as some letter writers and congressional foes of the MSP suggested.<sup>102</sup> Judd's carefully crafted rhetoric on this issue underscored his belief that foreign aid spending was a responsible choice that bolstered U.S. security and safeguarded the freedoms U.S. taxpayers enjoyed, a perspective shared by internationalist Republicans and Democrats alike.

Yet, given the emotional appeal of the arguments that Passman and other aid opponents advanced, think tank studies and letters to constituents linking the aid program with the values of responsibility, self-help, and the promotion of freedom were not sufficient. The supporters of foreign aid needed to mount a stronger political and rhetorical counterpoint to Passman's charges that the Mutual Security Program wasted the money of American taxpayers in a give-away to those he cast as either unworthy of or ungrateful for the aid. They also needed to issue more robust salvos against charges that the Eisenhower administration sent inflated funding requests and sought to usurp congressional authority by pursuing longer authorization periods for MSP funding.<sup>103</sup> Though Passman cast his claims about the potential negative effects of aid spending levels and funding mechanisms as pragmatic and objective fiscal conservatism, the underlying issues he spoke to were moral ones: what was fair and what was right, and for which groups?

Perhaps for this reason, the moral and explicitly religious language grew even more pronounced in the 1957 hearings on the MSA budget for 1958, which included a full three days dedicated exclusively to testimony from representatives of different religious groups. When the chairman of the Foreign Affairs committee opened this hearing, he asserted that the other hearings on the Mutual Security Act would "be meaningless and unimportant unless we keep constantly in mind the basic compelling reason for a mutual security program: the mutual good of all men throughout the earth. All men must be concerned about their fellow men if any of us hope to remain free."<sup>104</sup> The chairman trusted that testimony about foreign aid

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.; Walter Judd to Richardson Phelps (April 5, 1956), Folder: Congressional File – Mutual Security Act of 1956 – Correspondence, 1956, Box 130, Walter Judd Papers, Hoover.

<sup>103</sup> The latter was a suggestion for streamlining the aid process in the administrative and even some of the Senate reports, but one that anti-aid House members strongly opposed. Haviland, "Foreign Aid," 722.

<sup>104</sup> U.S. Congress House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Mutual Security Act of 1957: Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives*, 85th Cong., 1st sess., May 28, 29, and June 5, 1957 (Washington, DC: GPO: 1957), 112.



spending from religious leaders would “help give correct perspective to the mutual security program and our part in it.”<sup>105</sup>

The witnesses, who represented a variety of Protestant and Catholic denominations and parachurch organizations (as well as the president of the Synagogue Council of America, the sole Jewish attestant), used a range of thick moral concepts to press the members of the Foreign Affairs committee to support President Eisenhower’s funding request for the MSP budget. This included language about the significance of economic aid for fostering “freedom, justice, and self-government, and thus . . . world security and peace” and the benefits and stabilizing effect these outcomes would have for the world as a whole, not to mention the sentiment that the United States (and all religious believers) had a “moral obligation” to help those in need.<sup>106</sup> Some witnesses framed these goals as central to the national project. One Catholic leader noted that the founders had established the “moral basis” of U.S. civil society and insisted that “unless our national interest in based upon moral interest, our society and our objectives can claim no superiority over those of the communist nations.”<sup>107</sup> That the witnesses used the words freedom, justice, security, dignity, and peace so frequently and consistently throughout their different statements demonstrated the power that these moral concepts held—or that the witnesses believed they would hold—in making the case for foreign economic aid.<sup>108</sup> In appearing before the committee, these representatives, along with congressional supporters of foreign aid, expressed explicit hopes that such morality-based arguments would mobilize public opinion in favor of the MSP.<sup>109</sup>

That hope did not appear to have come to fruition in 1956. When the appropriations bill came to the floor of the House on July 11, most proponents reverted to making national security-focused arguments while opponents continued to marshal their

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., Statement of Rev. Dr. Ralph W. Sockman, Minister, Christ Church, New York, NY, 113; House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Mutual Security Act of 1957*, 132.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., (Statement of Rev. James L. Vizzard, S.J., Vice President, National Catholic Rural Life Conference, 135.

<sup>108</sup> For a sampling, see House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Mutual Security Act of 1957* (Statement of Rabbi Abraham J. Feldman, President of the Synagogue Council of America, Hartford, CT), 124; Statement of Rev. James L. Vizzard, S.J., 134; Statement of Dr. A Powell Davies, Minister of All Souls Church, Unitarian, Washington, DC), 158; Statement of Rev. Dr. James H. Robinson, Minister, Church of the Master, New York, NY), 172.

<sup>109</sup> House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Mutual Security Act of 1957*, 139.

moral vocabulary of waste, deception, and unfairness against the bill.<sup>110</sup> Despite this, the appropriations bill passed the House and then the Senate.<sup>111</sup> The Eisenhower administration acknowledged just how bruising the fight was, though, and this memory shaped how MSP advocates approached the appropriations process for 1958, 1959, and 1960, years that saw a similarly challenging environment on the appropriations committee and in the House.

In these years, moral concerns about wasteful spending on the one hand and questions about the nature of the spending on the other hand dominated the debate. Representative Passman continued to give impassioned speeches accusing the Eisenhower administration and the State Department of “seeking to spend the maximum and support the requests of bureaucrats for strange programs they can justify only with half-truths, fancy phrases and scare phrases.”<sup>112</sup> Thick moral language that embodied the notions of irresponsibility and unfairness or cheating pervaded these speeches and those of other politically conservative aid opponents. By the late 1950s, political liberals had also begun to issue morally based challenges to certain types of aid spending, in particular expressing concern about the high proportion of spending on military versus economic or humanitarian aid. Even Chester Bowles, a committed advocate for foreign aid, issued a press release in 1959 calling on Congress to better calibrate military versus economic aid to prevent waste and to better ensure the achievement of U.S. ideological objectives.<sup>113</sup> Growing congressional concerns about aid spending also brought forth new investigatory committees, adding to the challenges that the administration faced.

Eisenhower and the State Department labored to counter the critics of foreign aid. In internal memoranda, the International Cooperation Administration (ICA), which had coordinated the MSP since 1955, noted that its administrators

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<sup>110</sup> “Mutual Security Appropriation Bill for 1957,” 102 Cong. Rec. 12337–12381 (July 11, 1956).

<sup>111</sup> Public Law No. 84-853.

<sup>112</sup> Otto Passman, Speech on the Mutual Security Program (July 1, 1958) Folder 30: Speeches – Passman 1958, Box 1956 – 1958 – 01: General Files – Legislation, Foreign Aid, and Personal, Drawer 2, Otto Passman Papers, ULMSCL.

<sup>113</sup> Chester Bowles, “Bowles Urges Constructive Revisions in Mutual Security Bill,” Press Release (April 20, 1959), Folder 0702, Box 242, Chester Bowles Papers, YUSCLA. See also Edwin P. Reubens, “Foreign Aid Plan Examined: President’s Program Held Failing to Meet Problems Here and Abroad,” *New York Times* (February 28, 1958): 20; International Cooperation Administration, Congressional Criticisms, Memorandum (September 18, 1959), Folder: Criticisms – Miscellaneous 1958/1959 (Cong. Rec. etc.), Container 10: Communications GAO 59-60 THRU Congressional Correspondence, USAID Entry P 139: Subject Files, 1957–1962, Record Group (RG) 286, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (hereinafter NARA).

Representative Chester Bliss Bowles drew on his experiences as ambassador to India and Nepal in 1951–1953 as he advocated for foreign aid spending. He served the Democratic party in a wide variety of roles during his career, and as a congressman from Connecticut, 1959–1961.



spent a considerable amount of time responding to congressional inquiries and criticisms about the aid program.<sup>114</sup> As resistance to aid funding increased in the late 1950s, the ICA sought to more publicly counter negative perceptions and misinformation about the program, including through press releases, statements to Congress extolling the

achievements of the MSP, and an 88-page report for the House Committee on Foreign Affairs responding directly to criticisms that legislators had leveled.<sup>115</sup> Eisenhower pled directly to Congress to support his requested foreign aid budget, touting the MSP as a guarantor of U.S. and global freedom and praising Congress for approving his plan for replacing the grant-based development assistance program with a development loan fund to encourage private enterprise and “self help”—rather than a “handout to foreigners”—abroad.<sup>116</sup> He even had Truman join him for a bipartisan address about foreign aid at a dinner for political and business leaders, where both men linked the MSP with the goal of achieving world peace. As with earlier efforts, the president drew on the moral concerns and aspirations of Congress as he shaped his defense of the program. Yet Eisenhower lamented that, despite the great benefits of foreign aid, “every

<sup>114</sup> ICA, Congressional Criticisms.

<sup>115</sup> ICA Office of the Deputy Director for Program and Planning, *The Achievements of the U.S. Foreign Aid Programs* (February 29, 1958), Folder: Criticisms – Miscellaneous 1958/1959 (Cong. Rec. etc.), Container 10: Communications GAO 59-60 THRU Congressional Correspondence, USAID Entry P 139: Subject Files, 1957–1962, RG 286, NARA; House Committee on Foreign Affairs, *International Cooperation Administration Replies to Criticisms of the Foreign Aid Program* (March 14, 1958).

<sup>116</sup> “Text of President’s Message Asking Congress to Continue Foreign Aid,” *New York Times* (February 23, 1958): 10; “Mutual Security Act Sets Up Loan Fund,” in *CQ Almanac 1957*, 13th ed., 05-601-05-610 (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1958). Available from <http://library.cqpress.com/cqalmanac/cqal57-1345378>; Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Special Message to Congress on the Mutual Security Program,” (February 16, 1960) *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower 1960–61* (GPO, 1961), 177–88.

time another year comes around, the mutual security program is compelled to engage in a life-and-death-struggle for its very existence.”<sup>117</sup>

The moral and ideological beliefs that permeated the debates over foreign aid funding greatly heightened the stakes of that yearly struggle. They also persisted in the program that replaced the MSP in 1961. That year, the John F. Kennedy administration pushed for a reorientation of the nation’s foreign aid policy, which it accomplished through the passage of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and the issuance of Executive Order 10973, which established the Agency for International Development.<sup>118</sup> Upon signing the Foreign Assistance Act into law, Kennedy articulated the nature of the policy shift his administration sought by declaring that with this bill “a Decade of Development begins.”<sup>119</sup> While “world-wide collective security” and defense remained important, the primary focus would be fostering “economic and social progress” in what he referred to as “the under-developed countries of the world” to respond to the threat of communist advances.<sup>120</sup> Morality and ideology mattered deeply in this project, a project that in many ways reflected the essence of 1960s liberalism, including faith in expertise and technocratic solutions.<sup>121</sup>

## Conclusion

The growing frequency of moral language in the debates over the Mutual Security Program, as well as the persistent emphasis on the categories of liberty, peace, and self-help/responsibility, reflected the defining political cleavages of the 1950s. In addition to highlighting divergent views over the proper mechanism of containment (whether military force or economic and ideological power would be most effective at containing communist expansionism), questions about who was “deserving” of assistance globally overlapped with political divides over civil rights for Black Americans and funding for social safety net programs at home, among other issues. It is hardly surprising, after all, that political liberals and internationalists such as Chester Bowles used moral language to frame their

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<sup>117</sup> “Text of Eisenhower and Truman Addresses Urging a Strong Foreign Aid Plan,” *New York Times* (February 26, 1958): 8.

<sup>118</sup> PL 87-195; John F. Kennedy, “Executive Order 10973—Administration of Foreign Assistance and Related Functions,” (November 3, 1961). Available from <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-10973-administration-foreign-assistance-and-related-functions>.

<sup>119</sup> John F. Kennedy, “Statement by the President Upon Signing the Foreign Assistance Act,” *The American Presidency Project*, edited by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. Available from <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/235567>.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy*, 6.

support for aid as a means to promote global peace, freedom, and stability while white supremacist (and isolationist) conservatives such as Otto Passman used moral language to express their disdain for civil rights and their opposition to sending assistance to “others” abroad in nearly the same breath.<sup>122</sup>

Even amongst those leaders who shared a broad internationalist vision and consensus that U.S. foreign policy should seek to underwrite global democratic capitalism, partisan divides shaped policy preferences and hence different moral vocabularies.<sup>123</sup> The moral language of mutual security spending as fiscal responsibility that Republican Walter Judd developed differed from that of Democrat Chester Bowles, who more often targeted military spending than economic aid as wasteful. Yet both advocated for a broadly liberal internationalist foreign policy, and both used moral language to do so. For this reason, the use of moral language in debates over the MSP reveals that even in legislation that ostensibly addressed realist concerns, ideology, idealism, and moral values were not only present, but were crucial to congressional and public advocacy.

Furthermore, moral language proved critical for internationalists seeking to defend an expanded global role for the United States in the 1950s against their isolationist and non-interventionist opponents. As the immediate post–World War II crises of European recovery receded and new Cold War demands to contain communism and attempts to respond advantageously to anticolonial nationalism emerged, Congress had to reconsider the parameters of U.S. foreign policy in light of greatly expanded U.S. power and capabilities. These realities eroded but did not eliminate isolationist influence, however, though they did force those seeking to limit the U.S. role abroad to deploy new arguments as international conditions changed. Moral language and values became key rhetorical battlegrounds in these debates. They also helped to reset conservative and liberal positions on international as well as domestic priorities. When supporters of foreign aid in Congress responded to their opponents’ arguments with moral language of their own, they staked out new positions of support not just for the Mutual Security Program, but for liberal

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<sup>122</sup> That both Bowles and Passman belonged to the Democratic party also reflects the ideological rather than strictly partisan nature of those debates. Otto Passman to F. M. Patterson (March 19, 1956), Folder 14, Legislation – Foreign Aid, Box 1956 – 1958 – 01: General Files – Legislation, Foreign Aid, and Personal, Drawer 2, Otto Passman Papers, ULMSCL; *The Radio Edition of ‘The Independent American’ Newspaper*, Broadcast #59-84 (December 5, 1959), Folder 29 (3): Foreign Aid – Statement of Witnesses Before Subcommittee 1958, Drawer 3, Otto Passman Papers, ULMSCL.

<sup>123</sup> For more on partisan divides amongst isolationists and internationalists in this era, see Sidney Blumenthal, “The Return of the Repressed: Anti-Internationalism and the American Right,” *World Policy Journal* 12, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 5–8.

internationalism more generally. Those positions and the attendant desire to infuse U.S. foreign policy with moral values proved quite powerful, and through them, the diverse supporters of the MSP managed to secure a durable and comprehensive foreign aid regime for the nation. This represented an important turning point in U.S. foreign relations, as prior to World War II the United States had generally only extended assistance on a limited and often ad-hoc basis.<sup>124</sup> It also laid the groundwork for the more expansive human rights focus and language that would emerge in decades to come.

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*Picture credits:* President Truman signing, AP Photo/Charles Gorry; Walter Henry Judd, Otto Ernest Passman, Chester Bliss Bowles, courtesy of the Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives.

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<sup>124</sup> Irwin, *Catastrophic Diplomacy*; Taffet, *Against Aid*.