

Introduction: On Eisenhower and Discourse

Every era creates the history that it needs. This is not to say that historians should distort the past to suit the present. The noble though elusive goal of objectivity is still worth striving for. Evidence must be gathered and sifted with logical precision. Conclusions must not go beyond what the evidence can logically support. Still, the whole process begins by asking questions that matter in the historian's present. And it rests on assumptions that often go unquestioned in the historian's present. The result is history that makes sense for, and matters to, the present.

Consider the case of President Dwight David Eisenhower. During the 1950s, most Americans wanted to see their own era as a time of consensus, confidence, and conserving postwar gains. To make this view believable, they were willing to see their president as a genial bumbler presiding over "happy days." That image remained, through the 1970s, the dominant view among professional historians.

By the early 1980s, revisionist historians offered a new image: a prudent "hidden-hand" crisis manager who avoided global war. As John Robert Greene says, they "began to examine—and ultimately praise—Eisenhower for the decisions that he made that avoided disaster."¹ This stood in marked contrast to his successors who took us into Vietnam, and especially to the president of the revisionists' own day, Ronald Reagan, who spoke of fighting and winning a nuclear war. The revisionists had little quarrel with the basic premises of the cold war. They simply wanted every president, and especially Reagan, to be as skillful as Eisenhower in restraining the forces of "hot war."

In the late 1980s, a new school of postrevisionist historians began to ask

why, if Eisenhower had such careful control of policy and crises, he failed to ease cold war tensions and build a more peaceful world. Their answers centered on what they considered Eisenhower's irrational anticommunism. They viewed him as (in the words of Piers Brendon) "a man divided against himself . . . thwarted by his own internal contradictions,"² especially the contradiction between his desire for peace and his desire for cold war victories. In the post-cold war era, it seemed plausible to see his fervent anticommunism as a tragic mistake or aberration. Some historians seemed to treat Eisenhower as a metaphor for the entire nation—a nation essentially committed to a positive and admirable goal of peace, but somehow sadly derailed for four decades by the fatal flaw of anticommunism. With the end of the cold war, this interpretation suggested, we could get back on track and pursue real security more fruitfully.³

But the cold war ended many years ago, and there is still little sign of any fundamental reorientation. The geopolitical situation has changed dramatically. It is the language of U.S. foreign and national security policy that remains fundamentally the same. U.S. leaders view ever-changing geopolitical realities through the prism of an essentially unchanging linguistic structure. Thus their responses to new realities are shaped and limited by the old structure.

I call this structure "apocalypse management." Its basic premises are simple and familiar: The United States faces enemies who wish to, and very well may, destroy the nation and its way of life. Thus every confrontation with these foes is an apocalyptic struggle. But the traditional apocalyptic solution of eliminating evil is ruled out. The enemy threat is now a permanent fact of life. The best to hope for is to contain and manage it forever. As long as every apocalyptic danger is skillfully managed, preserving the precariously balanced status quo, the nation will be secure. Enduring stability—preventing dangerous change—is the only kind of victory to hope for, and the only kind of permanent peace.

This book tells the story of how Eisenhower and his administration created this new linguistic paradigm, how it profoundly influenced their policymaking process, and how it came to dominate American public discourse in the 1950s. Treating language, policies, and practices as components of a single historical process, this book yields a picture of a president and an administration far more consistent and unified than the postrevisionists saw. This is a picture that makes sense for the early twenty-first century, because it helps to explain the continuing consistency in the U.S. attitude toward and relationship with the world. Even today, what most Americans assume about their nation's role in the world was significantly shaped by the pattern of language that Eisenhower disseminated as president.

This book is not a comprehensive history of Eisenhower's national security policies, much less of his presidency as a whole. (Significant domestic developments, which are an important part of the full story of apocalypse management, are scarcely mentioned.) Parts I, II, and III offer a detailed history of Eisenhower and apocalypse management from 1953 to 1955, when the pattern emerged, was tested in the crucible of foreign policy formation, and triumphed as the dominant mode of discourse in American political life. Part IV examines some salient examples of how the paradigm was applied in foreign affairs between 1956 and 1960.

The paradigm, not the president, is the principal subject of the book. But the paradigm and the president are indissolubly linked. I study Eisenhower, his administration, and their cold war struggle because they offer the clearest window into the origins, structure, functioning, and implications of the pattern of language that still dominates American public life. I give particular attention to nuclear weapons policies, because the bomb was the most potent symbol of the apocalyptic shadow that spread across American political discourse in the 1950s.

Words and Power: The Cold War Context

To understand the enduring patterns in U.S. foreign policy and public attitudes about foreign affairs, we must take language seriously. Until recently, most historians treated language largely as an epiphenomenon—often as a smoke-screen hiding reality, or at best as “mere ideology” that can somehow be analytically separated from other causal factors and plays, at best, a secondary role. Ideology is now beginning to emerge as a crucial variable in historical analysis. Policymakers must always respond to facts created by others. But the supposedly objective constraints of national security policy are always screened through the subjective filter of ideology, the invisible assumptions that shape perception, interpretation, and response.

Michael Hunt defines ideology in foreign policy as “sets of beliefs and values, sometimes only poorly and partially articulated, that make international relations intelligible and decision making possible.” Michael J. Hogan traces the origins of U.S. cold war policy to ideas that generated a profound shift in political culture and national identity. Like any other identity, Hogan explains, a national identity is not naturally given but culturally constructed out of “principles, ideas, attitudes, and values.” Yet these cultural constructions often come to be treated as unquestioned givens. Warren Kimball suggests that “the most challenging and yet rewarding task that faces historians of American foreign policy is to identify and explain the givens, the assumptions that are so hard to

identify—for because they are assumed, policymakers see less need to discuss or defend them.”⁴

The notion of “national interests,” so often posited as an objective constraint and motivation for national security policy, is always refracted through an ideological lens. As Frank Ninkovich points out, interests “have no objective existence apart from the way people constitute and interpret them.” Thus, ideological frameworks “are a condition of our knowing.”⁵ Ideological commitments limit the range of responses that policymakers are willing to entertain. And when they consider options from within that range, their ideological commitments strongly influence the choices they make. The cold war, for example, was created by human choices and human imaginings more than by objectively given constraints. Cold war leaders limited themselves to an unnecessarily narrow range of options because of their ideological commitments.

However, to study ideology as a set of inner mental events is to chase a chimera. Peter Lyon and John Newhouse are surely correct: “Precisely what the private Eisenhower privately thought may never be known”; “No one knows precisely what he had in mind.”⁶ The only things we can know with even minimal certainty are what someone said and what someone did. Most often, the saying comes before the doing. Language is the essential matrix of action and policy. Every decision to pursue power, wealth, pleasure, or any other goal is shaped from the very beginning within the nexus of language. As Daniel Rodgers says, “the making of words is indeed an act, not a business distinct from the hard, behavioral part of politics. . . . The old dichotomy between behavior and ideas, intellectual history and the history of politics, never in truth made much sense. Political talk is political action of a particular, often powerful, sort.”⁷

To understand history one must study not just events, but discourse. Frank Costigliola, citing the work of Michel Foucault, has defined discourse as “the unquestioned beliefs, practices, and rules that restrict (but of course do not wholly determine) how people think and act.” A discourse, then, is a pattern of language that reflects an ideological commitment. As Costigliola notes, the “most significant meanings” of historical events are not discovered, as if they exist objectively; they are assigned in a complex process of interpretation: “People who are more privileged in terms of class, race, gender, and other markers have more to say in assigning meanings to objects and events. . . . What people in society ‘know’ is heavily influenced by relations of power.”⁸ Discourse may best be defined as a pattern of language, assuming and expressing a set of basic assumptions, deployed in the context of power.

It is appropriate to study Eisenhower from the perspective of discourse, and not only because of his immense influence and power. Contrary to popular

impression, he was very careful with words. He painstakingly edited speeches, memos, and letters. When he wanted to, he could speak at length in rather precise and lucid words. He recognized that (in his own words) “if our attitudes are muddled, our language is often to blame.” Eisenhower’s words were never merely means to pragmatic ends. He considered the production of words essential to the real business of governing. As John Lewis Gaddis says, the Eisenhower administration often acted as if it could materially disadvantage its opponents by “merely making pronouncements and striking poses.” “Words were extremely important in this cold war situation,” the president told his National Security Council. He was probably more right than not when he wrote to his friend General Alfred Gruenther that “there have never been any great differences within the Administration on fundamentals. Most of the talk centered around the question of ‘what can we say and how can we say it.’”⁹

Of course, Eisenhower and his advisors were hardly free to deploy whatever words they liked. They were constrained, to some degree, by the interests of others and by events beyond their control. Their language must always be studied in its interplay with actual policy and all the other factors that shaped policy. They were also limited and constrained by the discourse that preceded them.

By 1952, most Americans embraced the fundamental principle of the Truman administration’s discourse—that the United States was locked in a mortal battle against an enemy determined to destroy their way of life. Virtually every study of cold war origins notes the Truman administration’s efforts to promote such apocalyptic language. During Harry Truman’s years in office, though it remained unclear whether there might be any apocalyptic resolution to this crisis, there was widespread agreement that the United States should wage cold war vigorously.

But how, and toward what goal? The Truman administration articulated its answer in a secret policy directive, NSC-68. Yet the document was frustratingly vague. The world had to move toward “some kind of order, on somebody’s terms,” it said. To ensure that those terms would be American, the United States had to provoke “a fundamental change in the nature of the Soviet system.” But NSC-68 never spelled out that fundamental change. It focused rather on “the first and perhaps the most important step”: “frustrating the Kremlin’s design” by forceful “containment.”¹⁰

The elites of the Truman era were not bent on triggering the kind of radical change that is always implied by apocalyptic language. On the contrary, as Paul Chilton has argued, the cold war discourse of containment was rooted in the tradition of political “realism,” which is linked to “the absence of motion, to stasis, and more precisely to the physical restraint of undesired motion.

Since spatial concepts map metaphorically onto time, we are also talking about absence of and prevention of undesired 'movement' in time, that is undesired change: 'security' is a guarantee of a particular state of affairs over time."¹¹ Yet Truman's policy of containment remained poorly defined. It could be read to mean gradual coercion to compel fundamental internal change in the Soviet Union. But it might mean only denying the Soviets any influence beyond their borders. The public's frustrations about Truman's policies in Korea reflected the public's uncertainties about the administration's cold war goals.

The Truman administration's blending of the apocalyptic and "realist" traditions, publicly cloaked in Wilsonian internationalism, gave cold war discourse its unique character. Threat construction was at the center of the entire discursive enterprise. "Realist" and apocalyptic patterns of language both require the perception of some dire threat.¹² Because the conflict between order and disorder was presented as absolute, every change in the status quo came to represent an apocalyptic change—a total chaos—and change itself appeared to be inherently threatening.

As a candidate in 1952, Eisenhower played on that sense of threat. He scored the Democrats for an unacceptably weak policy of mere containment, in Korea and elsewhere. But his own cold war goals were no more specific. Although he proclaimed, "We can save freedom by making the cause of freedom again a crusade," he never committed himself to rolling back communism or to a definite policy of containment.¹³ So the nature of the U.S. cold war goal remained unclear as the new president took office.

Apocalypse Management

Eight years later, the nation had achieved a certain kind of clarity. Many people contributed to this change, but no one as much as the president. Eisenhower had a preeminent power over the meanings of crucial words and events at the time when the cold war settled into a seemingly permanent way of life. His great contribution was to take fragments he inherited from Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Truman, and so many others and bind them together into a new discursive pattern, setting a new goal for America. There is no evidence that Eisenhower ever reflected on this process of synthesis. He was probably not consciously aware of it. Yet it is his most important and enduring legacy. For out of it emerged a new discursive foundation and a new goal for American public life.

Eisenhower called this goal by many interchangeable names: victory, stability, security, freedom, peace. I call it "apocalypse management." Before the end of his first term, U.S. public discourse largely assumed that apocalypse

management was unquestionably right and good, both as the nation's goal and as the only means to achieve it. The mainstream culture no longer offered any effective way to oppose apocalypse management. That was Eisenhower's greatest political triumph.

In Eisenhower's new discursive model, the cold war was still an apocalyptic struggle; communism, nuclear war, and economic mismanagement all threatened to destroy the nation utterly. But these threats had to be accepted as permanent facts of life. The best to hope for was to contain and manage them. As long as they were skillfully managed forever, the United States would (by definition) achieve both victory and peace. This way of speaking allowed Eisenhower to insist, quite sincerely, that he was fully committed to cold war victory and world peace at the same time. The postrevisionists focused on the resulting paradox. As Blanche Wiesen Cook has written, "Eisenhower introduced all the elements of detente while he pursued all the imperial activities demanded by the global ideology of the American Century."¹⁴ So the postrevisionists asked: Did he really want peace? If so, how could that be squared with his pursuit of U.S. preeminence and cold war victory?

I ask: What did he mean when he spoke of peace, war, and victory? Toward the end of the Eisenhower era, I. F. Stone noted that, thanks to the president, "quite suddenly peace has become a respectable word again." At the same time, though, C. Wright Mills warned: "Peace is such an altogether 'good' word that it is well to be suspicious of it. It has meant and it does mean a great variety of things to a great variety of men. Otherwise they could not all 'agree' upon it so readily and so universally. . . . Everybody agrees upon peace as the universal aim—and into it each packs his own specific political fears, values, hopes, demands."¹⁵

Historians have largely forgotten Mills's cautionary words; they have rarely problematized peace. Peace, war, victory, stability, security, and the other key terms in the vocabulary of national security discourse are not objects to be described, like trees or telephones. They are interpretive categories. Each word carries many meanings; each meaning carries with it a particular worldview and a particular set of cultural and political concerns. In this book I treat peace, war, victory, stability, and security as symbolic concepts with variable meanings. I ask how Eisenhower's presidency transformed the meanings of those words in ways that still profoundly influence American life.

Eisenhower's Faith

In a previous book I traced how Eisenhower developed his ideological vision before he became president.¹⁶ He wanted to base his work, and his life, on a

fixed set of clear and simple ideas. Once he crystallized his set of fixed ideas in the mid-1940s, he remained committed to it for the rest of his life. He was, to a greater extent than most historians have realized, an ideologue. In this book I find a relative coherency in Eisenhower's words and policies as president by setting them in the context of the ideological framework he brought into the White House. His ideology was, as Tom Wicker has written, "as ruthless in purpose as any foreign creed."¹⁷ Indeed, for Eisenhower it was a creed—or more precisely, as he often said, it was his faith.

Eisenhower was raised in a devoutly Christian home, although he seems to have abandoned specifically Christian practice for most of his adult life until he became president.¹⁸ His forebears took for granted an essentially Augustinian vision of life as a struggle between selfishness and self-restraint. They called the innate impulse to self-aggrandizement "original sin." Eisenhower eschewed the term *original sin* but retained its basic premise: selfishness could never be rooted out of any human being. He also embraced the contrary view that every human being could subdue the darker impulses through strenuous effort. But he assumed that everyone needed the help of societal institutions to restrain individual selfishness: "The basic purpose of all organization is to produce orderliness," he told a friend, "which means restriction upon irresponsible [i.e., selfish] human action."¹⁹

There was only one great question in Eisenhower's worldview: Would the selfish impulses be restrained voluntarily by the individual? If not, they would have to be restrained by some external force. He allowed no third possibility. He assumed that every religion was devoted primarily to encouraging people to choose self-restraint and supporting them in their voluntary effort. Democracy had the same goal. The essence of freedom was the freedom to restrain voluntarily one's own selfishness. The greatness of democracy was that it allowed every individual to choose self-restraint voluntarily. Wherever selfishness reigned, it would lead to chaos and conflict, which would inevitably elicit totalitarianism.

Since selfishness had to be restrained, either voluntarily or by force, every society had to be either democratic or totalitarian. This dualism grew directly from the other great influence on his ancestors' religiosity: the apocalyptic tradition. Eisenhower saw history as an uncompromising war between the selfish and the self-controlled, one that would have to be fought to the bitter end. But this led to a theological contradiction. Apocalypticism prophesied that historical tensions themselves would ultimately produce a climactic battle that would put an end to history. Augustinian theology, on the other hand, insisted that selfishness was not produced by historical circumstances and thus could not be ended by historical processes. Although it was very possible that evil might annihilate good, there was no way for good to annihilate evil within history.

(An excursus on terminology: My fellow historians of religion will recognize that, in the strictest sense, the words *apocalypse* and *apocalyptic* refer to a genre of literature, first developed in Judea in the fourth and third centuries BCE. Historically, the most influential apocalypses described a catastrophic end of the present world and the arising of a new world, all as an act of God. At least since August 1945, it has been easy enough for most people to imagine a humanly triggered destruction of “the world as we know it” without any new creation. The words *apocalypse* and *apocalyptic* have come to represent a Manichaeic dualistic struggle resulting in this absolute end. I use them in this current colloquial sense because, as I shall argue, the main influence of apocalypticism on Eisenhower was not hope for the destruction of everything evil but fear of the destruction of everything good. I have taken a similar liberty with the term *Augustinian*. Rather than using it in any technical sense, I use it merely to denote Eisenhower’s propensity toward what is often called “realism.” Its most eminent modern spokesman, Reinhold Niebuhr, described the Augustinian theology this way: “The selfishness of human communities must be regarded as an inevitability. Where it is inordinate it can be checked only by competing assertions of interest; and these can be effective only if coercive methods are added to moral and rational persuasion. . . . Thus society is in a perpetual state of war. . . . Its peace is secured by strife.”²⁰

There is no evidence that Eisenhower ever thought about the world in explicitly theological terms. Nevertheless, his discourse betrayed both a strong apocalyptic and a strong, countervailing Augustinian streak. He once boasted of the nickname fellow officers had given him before World War II: “Alarmist Ike.”²¹ He never stopped being “Alarmist Ike,” articulating and fearing worst-case scenarios triggered by humanity’s innate selfishness. To counter these effects of original sin, he charged leaders (including himself) to serve as models of self-restraint, teamwork, and devotion to duty. He told himself and his subordinates that leaders must never show even a hint of despair. Rather, they must speak public words that would inspire the confidence needed for self-sacrifice. Willed optimism was the emotional correlate of self-restraint.

By 1945, although the general spoke publicly of cooperating with the Soviets, he was privately convinced that communism was the new embodiment of the forces of selfishness that could trigger global conflict and chaos. Soon he was speaking of peacetime as merely “the period extending from the present until the assumed ideological war begins.” Yet he earnestly warned against another hot war. So he called for “a secure wall of peace”: an international order so stable that it would contain the threatening Soviet chaos forever. The alternative was the end of civilization, leaving the United States as an “island of freedom surrounded by a hostile sea of Communism.” The Augustinian

ideal of a perfectly inviolable “wall of peace” became his primary symbol of apocalypse management.²²

His speeches proclaimed that the way to win the ideological war without a hot war was to make U.S. domestic life an example of self-discipline that would inspire emulation around the world. But spreading “the American way” was merely a means to the ultimate end of safeguarding that way. The alternative was the demise of America, which meant the demise of civilization. The peace he described was, in effect, the stability and security of the “international corporate commonwealth,” made permanently inviolable because it had been made universal.²³

When Eisenhower left the military to become president of Columbia University in 1948, he felt free to talk publicly about domestic policy. In private as well as in public, he warned constantly that a growing federal government could soon lead to a socialist dictatorship, which would destroy the free enterprise system and all the freedoms that Americans cherished. He linked capitalism and democracy as the essence of civilization, because they offered the only economic-political system founded on, and guaranteeing, voluntary self-restraint. Without a thriving capitalism, the United States might be “fearfully plundered and laid waste by barbarians.” He saw his defense of capitalism as a spiritual crusade “to preserve our national life, if not civilization itself.”²⁴

During the late 1940s, Eisenhower settled on his life task. He would persuade his fellow citizens to renew their nation spiritually and strengthen its moral fiber by following a “middle way” between self-assertion and social cooperation. The essence of that spiritual renewal, as he described it, was widespread public affirmation of his own words advocating willed optimism, duty, and voluntary self-restraint. He hoped that the White House would give him the greatest platform of all for proclaiming his inspirational words.

Chapter 1 shows that, at the outset of his presidency, Eisenhower was actively affirming this relatively unified and coherent set of ideas (although he never indicated that he consciously understood the overall unity and coherency of the pattern). The rest of the book shows that throughout his eight years of decisions about the cold war, national security, and nuclear weaponry he continued adhering firmly to these basic assumptions. Even though he often embraced policies that seem contradictory in later historians’ eyes, his choices appear more consistent and comprehensible in light of his enduring pattern of discourse.

The National Insecurity State

In studying Eisenhower, I have problematized not only the notions of peace, victory, and security but also the notions of threat, danger, and insecurity. The

latter, like the former, are interpretive categories, always in the eye of the beholder. This approach has led me to this book's most important conclusion. The Eisenhower presidency locked the nation into the cold war's enduring paradox: A single-minded pursuit of national security consistently undermined the nation's sense of security.

In some respects, this outcome was inevitable from the day Eisenhower took office. His ideological discourse held out no hope for peace with the communists. So he neither initiated nor contemplated any concrete steps that would foster a closer relationship or any sense of mutuality between the two great powers. From Eisenhower's Augustinian perspective, the enemy's threat had to be eternal because it was a manifestation of the eternal power of sin. His apocalyptic inclination required a profound moral and ideological dualism. In both his public and private words, he attempted to foster hope for the good by warning of the growing power of evil. So his often-voiced hopes for the "free world" were bound to heighten fears of weakness and vulnerability. This pattern was not crafted merely for rhetorical effect. The same pattern also continued to form the foundation of his private discourse.

The form of Eisenhower's apocalyptic discourse also required that the enemy always be there, if only to render the discourse meaningful. The United States could appear orderly, and a unique agent of world order, only if juxtaposed with some threat of chaos. The more he spoke of peace and stability, the more he undermined the nation's chances of feeling stable or at peace. The crusade to abolish all enemies encouraged the nation to view itself as an island surrounded by a sea of enemies. That island, identified as the bearer of all moral and spiritual virtue, had to be intrinsically innocent of any wrongdoing. Having played no part in creating the world's problems, the United States could make no internal policy changes that would alleviate those problems. It could only build up its defenses to fend off foes who threatened "the American way of life."

Since the paradigm assumed that threats might come from anywhere on the globe, its ideal of peace and stability required the United States to control events everywhere. Each step toward stability evoked fearful images of instability. Each policy enacted for national security created new problems, which were defined as apocalyptic threats, eliciting new policies aimed at more effective management and control. However, efforts to shore up control in one area often meant risking a loss of control somewhere else. By 1956, Eisenhower saw that he had enmeshed himself in impossible situations, where every step toward his goals took him further away from his goals.

Perhaps it was inevitable that, after eight years in office, Eisenhower left his nation not at peace but at war. Although the war was largely a cold one,

blood had been shed during his years in office, and the seeds of a massive hot war in Vietnam had been sown. Therefore, he left his nation's situation in the world not more, but less, stable. And the awareness of growing instability left the nation not more, but less, certain that there could be any meaningful victory. The discursive structure of apocalypse management defined the nation's problems in a way that made them insoluble. This paradox was not merely the result of inept policies. It flowed directly from the way that the president taught the nation to talk about national security. The more the president spoke of the need to protect the American way of life, the more firmly he constructed an unending series of purported threats to its very existence. The discourse of the national security state became a highly effective system—one might call it a machine—for continuously and systematically producing national insecurity. So the policies and discourse of the national security state combined to ensure what H. W. Brands has aptly called a "national insecurity state."²⁵

National insecurity could grow more readily because it was relatively invisible. The public discourse of the Eisenhower era did not so much deny the growing state of national insecurity as ignore it. Amid the unprecedented affluence and the sense of relative social calm of the 1950s, the U.S. public felt no pervasive psychological state of anxiety. National insecurity is not primarily a matter of feeling. It is fundamentally a shared judgment about the nation's situation; it is a collective attitude or point of view. It is not primarily inside individuals. It is in the public sphere they share, the things they say and do with each other; it is a pattern of culture.

Could Eisenhower have done differently, under the circumstances? In principle, of course, yes. Though he could not control the choices of others, to which he had to respond, every "fact on the ground" gave him room to choose among a range of options. That includes the most important facts for any cold war historian: the choices made by the leaders of the Soviet Union, especially their choices to compete in the nuclear arms race. Eisenhower did far less than he might have to stem that race. Throughout his presidency, he promoted the interests of peace, if peace means only the avoidance of hot war. Several years before he became president, he told his father-in-law why he firmly opposed war against the Soviets: "We would be almost certain to lose that for which we fought—namely, the system of free enterprise and individual liberty. . . . Our own self-interests can be served only by a long period of peace."²⁶

But what if peace means reciprocal interaction among nations with mutual respect, compromising one's own interests to build relationships that benefit all? Eisenhower sometimes used this sense of peace in his public rhetoric. Many historians, correctly crediting him with wanting to avoid war, have mistakenly assumed that he was seeking peace in both senses of the word. Hence

the common view that Eisenhower was caught in self-contradiction. This is a profound misunderstanding. A single ideological vision drove all of Eisenhower's policies. Within this vision, hot war was an evil to be avoided, but not the greatest evil. Hot war was in fact an eminently thinkable possibility if Eisenhower thought it necessary to keep the United States dominant over the greatest evil—communism. This was a president who, as he once put it quite bluntly, "would rather be atomized than communized."²⁷

Whenever he had to respond to new external events and historical developments, Eisenhower chose the seeming safety of the familiar over the risk of innovation. On each of these occasions, old discourse proved more powerful than new events in shaping policy. And on each of these occasions, his response ensured that the nation and the world would live under an ever-growing cloud of nuclear threat and national insecurity.

Ultimately, though, the question of Eisenhower's options and judgments about his choices are irrelevant to my main purpose—describing the interaction between discourse and policy during his presidency, so that we can better understand the legacy of that presidency. I hope that future historians who write syntheses and evaluations of the Eisenhower presidency (and other presidencies)²⁸ will recognize apocalypse management as one crucial thread in the story. But synthesis and evaluation are not my task. My subject is not so much the history of Eisenhower and his administration, but the history of apocalypse management and its role in producing a national insecurity state. I focus on the Eisenhower era because it gave rise to apocalypse management and provides so many good examples of how apocalypse management can function in the policymaking as well as rhetorical processes of a presidency.

Today most of America's leaders and foreign policy elite of both political parties remain committed to the apocalypse management paradigm. Any leader or policy that seems able to contain a threat of destruction is considered successful. Little more is asked for; no higher goal is imagined. So (to cite a particularly important example) after the attack of September 11, 2001, when Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, among others, proclaimed that the war on terrorism would be in many ways like the old cold war, their words elicited little public objection, debate, or even comment.²⁹

No doubt there are people and groups in the world who would like to do the United States harm. Yet this fact does not, in itself, dictate that we must continue to respond by pursuing apocalypse management, a war on terrorism, or any other particular policies. Indeed, the persistence of the apocalypse management paradigm, embedded in the discourse of the war on terrorism, may very well block constructive efforts toward genuine stability and security.

Precisely because the paradigm of apocalypse management continues to shape U.S. public discourse so pervasively, its origin deserves the most careful consideration. If we can understand the language and ideology of the cold war in their relation to cold war policy, we can better understand the continuing effects of the cold war on U.S. policy, discourse, and culture in the post-cold war era. I hope that this study will help foster reevaluations of apocalypse management and the national insecurity state. Understanding the cold war as a discursive construction is a crucial first step toward escaping from the national insecurity state. A wide range of new alternatives for thinking, talking, and acting in the public sphere opens up when we focus on discourse. That is why Eisenhower's discourse deserves especially close scrutiny.