



Eisenhower a moment before giving the commencement address, "Don't Join the Book Burners," at Dartmouth College, 1953.

A STRATEGIST TAKES ON A DEMAGOGUE

Today airstrikes, interventions, sanctions, and cyberattacks are so commonplace that we have forgotten the range of other means at our disposal for prevailing over those who threaten us. Eisenhower understood from World War II that a smart strategist must do all he can to deny an adversary the ability to choose the timing, the battlefield, and the weapons of the fight.

This approach could be seen in the way Eisenhower applied it in a nonmilitary context; not with a foreign adversary but with a domestic demagogue. Eisenhower would deprive Sen. Joseph McCarthy of the opportunity to choose the conditions in which their battle would take place—and it would be Eisenhower, not McCarthy, who chose the weapons.

The challenge came early in Eisenhower's administration, with his appointment of foreign service officer Charles "Chip" Bohlen

as his ambassador to the Soviet Union. Joseph R. McCarthy, the Republican senator from Wisconsin, opposed Bohlen's appointment. Eisenhower would refuse, then and throughout this period, to use measures that seemed on the face of it appropriate—indeed satisfying. Eisenhower would resist all temptation to attack his adversary publicly. He was determined to deny McCarthy the one thing he wanted, and then without the senator's knowledge find another way to weaken his adversary's strength and dismantle his hold on the public imagination.

Chip Bohlen was debonair, a charming well-spoken diplomat. He had been schooled in the 1920s as a Soviet expert—just one of a handful to provide badly needed expertise on the USSR. Such credentials were urgently required when the United States granted diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union in 1933, the last of the world's major nations to do so.

Over time Bohlen became one of the most influential experts on that part of the world. Fluent in Russian, he served as translator and assistant secretary of state during the Roosevelt administration, and was the first to hear of and report on the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement between the Soviet Union and Germany, a pact that paved the way for the German invasion of Poland and the start of the war in Europe in 1939. Bohlen also served as an interpreter at the wartime Tehran and Yalta Conferences. He was a competent, informed anti-Communist.

Eisenhower had known Bohlen since the latter days of the war, and saw him episodically in Paris while Ike was at NATO and Bohlen served as U.S. minister to France. In keeping with the president's desire to get the best-qualified people available to fill key administration spots, he was quite certain that Bohlen was his man. Eisenhower spoke to Senate Majority Leader Robert Taft and was assured that Bohlen would be confirmed.

As events would unfold, this nomination proved to be one of the first battles between the new GOP president and the isolationist wing of his own party. To them Bohlen represented all the things they hated. He was Harvard educated, urbane, and well-

traveled—and a symbol of what they thought of as FDR's "Yalta appeasement." The right wing of the Republican Party was convinced that FDR had sold out Eastern Europe and part of the Far East to the Communists, by allowing the division of the world into zones of influence in the last days of the war.

"Bohlen had no illusions about the Soviet Union," according to historian H. W. Brands, but neither did he have patience with people who wanted to blame the cold war on Yalta. During the late 1940s, Bohlen became increasingly irritated at the exaggerations, omissions, and downright falsifications that obscured what actually happened at the conference, and enthusiastically seconded attempts to correct the erroneous allegations.¹

Just hours before Bohlen was to speak at his confirmation hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, word was beginning to filter out that Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin had had a stroke in Moscow. Not surprisingly, the Eisenhower administration wanted to send Bohlen to Moscow right away, but the committee decided to postpone the hearings for a week. By that time Stalin was dead.

In the intervening time opposition to Bohlen's nomination seemed to strengthen, and on March 13 Sen. Joseph McCarthy declared his opposition to the appointment. His accusations revolved around Bohlen's associations with the convicted perjurer Alger Hiss, a man accused of Communist sympathies and spying. The nomination was also imperiled when it was discovered that the State Department's security officer Scott McLeod had opposed it.

The administration could not allow the situation to spiral out of control in Congress and dutifully conducted a short investigation, negotiating with the Senate to allow Senators Robert Taft for the Republicans and John Sparkman for the Democrats to "look at but not copy" a summary of the Bohlen file. Taft found nothing that could be construed as disloyalty, and Bohlen was confirmed.²

Eventually the Bohlen hearing was held by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, with the unanimous approval of his appointment in a 15-0 vote: Taft had delivered.

The Bohlen vote in the full Senate, however, did not go as smoothly. All but two Democrats voted to confirm him, but as

many as eleven Republicans voted against both Taft's recommendation and their president's nominee. Joseph McCarthy's crusade against Bohlen was having its effect.

This surprised and perplexed Eisenhower. If he could not count on the support of the Republican Party on such crucial votes, he confided to his diary, perhaps he should reconsider an idea proposed to him only days before the vote: to look, quietly, into the formation of a new political party. The "method" for establishing such a new entity would entail appealing to every member of the House and Senate, to every governor, and to every national committee member whose general political philosophy and purpose seemed to belong to that school of thought known as the Middle Way. Ike acknowledged that such a proposal had possibilities, but that success in establishing a new political party would be a "vast" endeavor.

Realizing that undertaking such a radical step might be "forced upon us," however, Eisenhower fervently hoped that he would be able to commit the GOP "more deeply . . . to teamwork and party responsibility."³

To reduce and eventually nullify McCarthy's power, the president had to find a behind-the-scenes way to embolden McCarthy's fellow senators to censure their own renegade colleague. But McCarthy did not act alone. He was in essence the stalking horse for the isolationists in his own party, and a threat to international engagement.

Many of Ike's most vociferous exchanges with his brother Ed revolved around just this topic of international engagement. Ed had nothing good to say about foreign aid, and he employed all the predictable slogans to make his point. Ike resisted labeling, and frowned on his brother's use of such phrases as "give away programs." "[Those who oppose this foreign aid] have not the slightest idea as to what has been the effect of these programs in sustaining American security and prosperity," Ike wrote Ed.⁴

Ed also supported the so-called Bricker Amendment, which sought to limit constitutionally the powers of the presidency in making agreements with foreign powers. Reintroduced on January 7, 1953, the proposed amendment to the Constitution had considerable support in Congress. Named for the Republican senator

from Ohio, John Bricker, the measure was a direct challenge to the presidency itself, and the fight over it was later regarded as the zenith of American isolationism.⁵

Eisenhower and his team worked hard to find a compromise to the measure, until an even more restrictive amendment, the "Which" clause, was proposed. It would require any treaty or agreement with a foreign power to be ratified by each of the forty-eight state legislatures then in the Union.

This gross encroachment on presidential powers animated Eisenhower, and he was committed to ensuring its defeat. Not only was the measure unconstitutional, the president believed, but it would also tie the hands of the federal government in concluding relatively minor measures such as status-of-forces agreements—bilateral pacts related to the stationing of U.S. forces overseas and other such transactional measures.

Ed, in contrast, was an ardent supporter of the amendment, as were the American Bar Association and many other reputable institutions. When Ed sent the president yet another fulminating letter on the Bricker Amendment, asserting that the measure was not in conflict with the Constitution, the president shot back: "You keep harping on the Constitution; I should like to point out that the meaning of the Constitution is what the Supreme Court says it is."⁶

Given the Eisenhower administration's strong opposition to this amendment, and an all-out effort by the president to kill the "Which" clause, the measure was finally defeated—largely with support from the Democrats and with no help from many within the president's own party.

The fight had been so time-consuming and so aggravating that by February 2 the president was telling his press secretary, Jim Hagerly, "To hell with him." Then he added: "If it's true that when you die the things that bothered you most are engraved on your skull, I am sure I will have there the mud and dirt of France during [the] invasion and the name of Senator Bricker."⁷

Ed's skepticism about the United Nations also made Ike's temper flare. Even in the 1950s complaining about the UN was often code for deeper and darker views of any governing and regulating

bodies. Ed, like others who were adamantly opposed to the UN, saw the international institution as a threat to U.S. sovereignty. Many in the South also worried that the UN Declaration on Human Rights might be invoked at some point to address segregation in the South. Furthermore, isolationists were also skeptical of the United Nations since it had been under its authorization, not that of Congress, that President Harry Truman had sent troops to Korea. Fear of the UN and the Bricker Amendment were closely linked.

While this vocal minority opposed the international body, others still regretted the failure of the League of Nations, established at the end of World War I, and believed that the withdrawal from this global institution had contributed to the catastrophe of World War II. They argued that two world wars—in less than twenty-five years—gave such institutions an important role to play in helping to keep such cataclysms from ever happening again.

In countries where decolonization had begun, like India and other parts of the British, French, and Belgian Empires—not to mention outposts in Latin America—the UN provided a valuable outlet for such countries to find their voices. The tenuous condition of these newly emerging nations cried out for such a body. Other institutions, like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, both formed in 1945, were also established to offer help to emerging economies with trade and foreign investment.

Mindful that a stable international environment was crucial to American democracy and way of life, Eisenhower also supported free trade, voicing little concern about our allies' trading with Red China or countries in the East European bloc. He did not believe that we could dictate to our allies on such matters. More important, Eisenhower ardently believed that trade created interdependencies that could reduce the risk of war.

The biggest roadblock to unifying this country and ushering in a new era of engaged internationalism was Joe McCarthy and his ilk. The senator was determined to lay waste to the internationalists who had, in his view, "lost China" to the Communists in 1948 and given away Eastern Europe to Stalin. At home, he ranted that we had Communists in our ranks, "fellow travel-

ers," and other conspirators trying to bring an end to American greatness.

McCarthy's appeal resonated with many people. But he also tapped into the grievances of many small but outspoken groups like the John Birch Society and other reactionary organizations. He also sparked the interest and support of the *National Review*, run by William F. Buckley Jr.

McCarthy's support went far deeper than just the isolationists in Congress. He also had a devoted following among Roman Catholic voters. In fact, in his home state of Wisconsin, his most fervent supporters were among the Poles and the Catholics. On the East Coast other Catholic ethnic groups also supported McCarthy passionately.⁸

The Wisconsin senator was an unlikely crusader, with little charm and no particular gifts as a speaker. He was described by a Washington power broker as "an ill-mannered and unpredictable outsider" in the Senate "club."⁹

Elected to the Senate in 1946, McCarthy had a lackluster career, and by 1950 he was worried about his reelection prospects going into 1952. He was ambitious and tired of sitting in a Congress that had been dominated by Democrats.

He was said to be looking for "a dramatic issue" when it was suggested to him that he take up the cause of driving the Communists out of the U.S. government. McCarthy knew little on the subject—he did not even serve on the Foreign Relations Committee—but his instincts told him that just such an issue might catapult him into the presidency.¹⁰

In the immediate aftermath of the war, it was revealed that a Soviet spy, Klaus Fuchs, had worked on the U.S. nuclear weapons program and had passed sensitive secrets to the USSR. To address these concerns, in 1947 the Truman administration put in place, by executive order, the federal Loyalty-Security Program, a measure later supported and amplified by the Eisenhower administration. This measure would mandate screening for federal employees who had associations with "Totalitarian, Fascist, Communist or subversive" organizations—or were advocating the alteration or over-

throw of the U.S. government. In 1951, with the passage of the Internal Security Act of 1950, McCarthy recognized that exploiting America's fear of Communists and subversives was a winner.

In 1950, at a Lincoln Day dinner in Wheeling, West Virginia, McCarthy declared that he had the names of 205 then-current State Department employees who were Communists—and presumably spies. While this number was already known to the State Department, a Senate committee was established to investigate the allegations, and at once the obscure young senator was an overnight sensation, a media phenomenon, and a thorn in the side of the Truman administration.

After the Wheeling speech, Dean Acheson, Truman's secretary of state, took on McCarthy directly in the hopes of discrediting the man and putting an end to the hysteria that the senator had created around the State Department. President Truman also took many occasions to denounce the senator. This attention only served to make McCarthy into a bigger figure.

As we now know from the Venona Project, an American undertaking to decode classified Soviet cables, a couple of hundred Americans actually played some role in espionage for the Soviet Union or had passed along sensitive information to their Soviet interlocutors. And the Soviet Union allocated millions of dollars over the years to the American Communist Party (CPUSA). But many, perhaps thousands, were innocently caught up in this red scare.

For all the power McCarthy accrued over the years, it is ironic that his investigations never produced any hard evidence, nor did any convictions for spying arise as a result.¹¹ Yet, even before Eisenhower's election, McCarthy had already gone far in his accusations, fingering government employees at the State Department and the Government Printing Office, as well as many others. Eventually a range of distinguished public servants would be tarred with McCarthy's brush.¹²

During the 1952 campaign candidate Eisenhower had a few uncomfortable encounters with McCarthy. He did not want to see the man during the campaign, but Wisconsin could not be

written off. Inevitably Eisenhower was subjected to campaigning in the same state with a man whose views he abhorred.

On October 3, Governor Walter Kohler boarded Ike's whistle-stop train before it reached Wisconsin. He knew of Eisenhower's views and was concerned that it might appear that Ike did not support the local Republican Party. He persuaded Sherman Adams to join him in urging Eisenhower to remove an out-of-context paragraph in the candidate's forthcoming speech, in which he planned to make yet another defense of Gen. George C. Marshall, who had been accused of disloyalty. Regrettably one of Eisenhower's aides hinted to a *New York Times* reporter that Eisenhower would be including praise for Marshall in his speech.

Without knowledge of this leak, Eisenhower was talked into removing the paragraph for the sake of party unity. He was reluctant to do so, but naïvely thought that his many other past pronouncements in defense of his former boss would suffice. The inexperienced candidate was not ready for the ruckus that ensued in the press. Ike was angered and humiliated by the whole incident.

Eisenhower reflected on this miserable episode: "If I could have foreseen this distortion of the facts, a distortion that even led to some question of my loyalty to General Marshall, I would have never acceded to the staff's arguments, logical as they sounded at the time."¹³

After Eisenhower's inauguration, the president opted for a different strategy—what the historian Fred Greenstein called "containment without confrontation."¹⁴

Ike knew that McCarthy, whom he despised, had poisoned the atmosphere not only in the country but among members of his own party. The senator and his methods jeopardized everything the president was trying to accomplish. Yet Eisenhower also understood one fundamental fact: In a system of three equal branches of government, the president had no authority to discipline the behavior of a member of another government branch. The president might engage in a rhetorical battle, but he could do nothing to actually stop what was under way on Capitol Hill. In his view, he could win this battle only by other means.

A formula for dealing with McCarthy was of vital importance, especially since the loss of his supporters could threaten the GOP's leadership in the Senate. The GOP's slim majority was an asset that Eisenhower needed for the passage of key legislation during his first term. The GOP had only a one-vote margin.

Several factors were clear from the start. First, Senator McCarthy's Committee on Government Investigations was out of control. It would be incumbent on the president and his team to assure the American people that a responsible force—the executive branch—was protecting the country's internal safety, thus implying that McCarthy's tactics were superfluous. The administration had an internal security program, under the auspices of the attorney general.

Second it would be vital to deny the publicity-seeking senator the very thing he wanted most—more attention.

Third, Eisenhower would work behind the scenes to create a dialogue with the Republican leadership in the Senate—an interaction that would eventually have an impact.¹⁵

And fourth, the president would exercise patience, and give the senator and his team enough rope to hang themselves. Ike was confident that this approach would finally pay off. McCarthy had a very odd team of people working for him and their methods were unorthodox and unethical. Roy Cohn, the senator's legal assistant, a singularly unattractive man with many hidden agendas, would eventually be caught in a controversy he himself had initiated. McCarthy's methods were damaging and painful, but ultimately unsustainable.

McCarthy routinely brought suspected individuals before closed congressional interrogation, where he served as the sole examiner. This was followed by an account of the proceedings that came only from the committee itself. People's reputations were being sullied without due process or transparency.

Eisenhower was not inured to the trials that McCarthy, literally and figuratively, imposed on people. When the president heard that Ralph Bunche, a distinguished African American diplomat serving the United States at the United Nations, was under inves-

tigation he privately feared that the innuendo created by an FBI report that was being compiled might "kill [Bunche's] public career."

The president spoke in glowing terms about Bunche's public service. "I am not going to be parry to this, I am willing to bet he is no more Communist than I am," he told Max Rabb. Eisenhower wanted Bunche to know that he would support him however he could, so he sent Rabb, his cabinet secretary and adviser on minority groups, to visit the UN official. Rabb told the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize winner that the president was deeply upset about the suggestions of his disloyalty. Bunche, however, decided to fight the problem alone. But later, while the hearings on Bunche's case were under way, one day's session was brought to an early end. Bunche was excused so he could be on time for dinner with Eisenhower at the White House. While Bunche may have wanted to handle the false accusations in his own way, the invitation to dinner with the president made it plain what Eisenhower's views were.¹⁶

The allegations against Bunche were eventually dropped. Ike's public restraint was born of discipline, not indifference. "President Eisenhower had a sense of loathing and contempt [for Senator McCarthy] that had to be seen to be believed," recalled aide Arthur Larson. "At the peak of McCarthy's power, a Labor Department official was "explaining to the Cabinet a new kind of insurance being provided to government employees, called a 'sudden death policy.' Eisenhower immediately cracked: 'I know one fellow I'd like to take that policy out for.'"¹⁷

The president's apparent public silence on the subject, however, was deeply frustrating for people who were alarmed by these events. Eisenhower refused to mention the senator's name—ever. This inspired outpourings of criticism from newspaper columnists (some of whom called him a "coward"), academics, Democrats, and even a number of people working in the White House. Eisenhower simply refused to engage the senator directly—as much as he might have been tempted to do so. As McCarthy's antics became bolder and bolder, the president resolutely declined to rise to the bait.

In the year and a half that the president had to deal with

McCarthy he managed never—not once—to utter the senator's name publicly. Ike was convinced that if he took on McCarthy it would give the senator the headlines he so badly craved. It would also raise the junior senator from Wisconsin to the level of the president. Eisenhower was convinced that publicity was McCarthy's oxygen, and the source of his power and influence.

"McCarthyism was a much bigger issue than McCarthy," Eisenhower wrote in his memoirs. "This was the truth that I constantly held before me as I listened to the many exhortations that I should 'demolish' the senator himself." Eisenhower feared that for every personal jab he might take at McCarthy, the senator would gain new followers among the public, but also potentially in Congress. It was what Ike called "the underdog syndrome."¹⁸

While Eisenhower was roundly criticized for stubbornly refusing take on the senator directly, there might have been more to this approach than a simple refusal to get back at this despicable man. Whenever the senator received a rebuke from anyone, he would demand equal time. And equal time would assure him further headlines. Given McCarthy's probable interest in a future run for the presidency, it was imperative, in his mind, that he stay in the headlines. His instincts for drama, and his skillful use of innuendo and what is now called "fake news," strengthened the senator's power and influence.¹⁹

On October 9, 1953, the president, under increasing pressure to attack Senator McCarthy for his toxic methods, wrote his brother Milton:

Only a shortsighted or completely inexperienced individual would urge the use of the office of the Presidency to give an opponent the publicity he so avidly desires . . . Frankly in a day when we see journalism far more concerned in the so-called human interest, dramatic incidents, and bitter quarrels, than it is in promoting constructive understanding of the day's problems, I have no intention whatsoever of helping promote the publicity value of anyone who disagrees with me—demagogue or not!²⁰

Instead of publicly attacking McCarthy, Eisenhower confronted the issues raised by McCarthyism, but he did so as a matter of principle. With any demagogue, the issue he or she exploits is laced with falsehoods and extravagant conspiracy theories, but there is usually some element of truth or some fear that appears to justify such claims, and ultimately their power. Instead of highlighting the falsehoods, the president used his position to tell the American people about the dangers the current atmosphere posed to our democracy.

With McCarthy's failure to stop the appointment of Chip Bohlen as ambassador to the Soviet Union, McCarthy's "junketeering gumshoes"—Roy Cohn and a close personal friend and committee consultant, David Schine—went on a European boondoggle to "dig up dirt" on the subversive activities of the USIA's Voice of America. They also toured American overseas libraries to investigate their holdings.²¹ A list of "subversive" Communist authors had been issued, and the suggestion that the libraries might be stocking these "dangerous" works led many librarians to take the books down from their shelves. In some cases it was even said that these questionable books had been burned.

The president's response to the latest uproar came during a commencement speech at Dartmouth on June 14, 1953, in the midst of these unfolding events. Hearing about the torching of books overseas, Eisenhower abandoned his text just before he was to give his remarks, and spoke extemporaneously.

Ike started on a lighter note, speaking to the graduating seniors about "just fun in life." He also spoke about the courage to look at yourself with clear eyes and be honest about who you are.

"There will be tough problems to solve," he told the graduates:

You've heard about them. You can't solve them with long faces, they don't solve problems—not when they deal with humans. Humans have to have confidence; you've got to help give it to them.

This brings me up to my second little topic, which is

courage. You must have courage to look all about you with honest eyes . . . have you actually measured up? If you have, it's that courage to look at yourself and say, "Well, I failed miserably there, I hurt someone's feelings needlessly, I lost my temper."

And then he got to the topic of the day that was bothering him most:

Don't join the book burners. Don't think you're going to conceal faults by concealing evidence that they ever existed. Don't be afraid to go in your library and read every book as long as any document does not offend any of our own ideas of decency. That should be the only censorship. How will we defeat Communism unless we know what it is? What it teaches, and why [it has] such an appeal for men? Why are so many people swearing allegiance to it? It's almost a religion . . . And we've got to fight it with something better, not [by] trying to conceal the thinking of our own people. They are part of America and even if they [have] ideas that are contrary to ours, their right to say them, their right to record them, and their right to have them in places where they are accessible to others is unquestioned or it's not America.²²

The "Don't join the book burners" speech did nothing to quell criticism of the president. His critics exploded with accusations of "appeasement"—strong language directed against a man who'd beaten Hitler. The president's response frustrated and angered those who were convinced that the only way to finish McCarthy was through direct confrontation led by the president himself. Eisenhower stood firm.

Ellis Slater noted in his diary the evening of July 30, when a number of friends had gathered for a barbecue at the president's invitation, that the topic seemed to be mostly McCarthy and his tactics.

"Ike believes the newspapers made McCarthy," Slater noted, "and that he would fade out of the picture quickly if they would

ignore most of the furor he creates which is certainly not entitled to front page play any more than is the work of other congressional committees."²³

Then on August 31, 1953, McCarthy began a set of hearings into Communist infiltration in the United States Army. Sure to get a rise from the president, this attack on the army would, eventually, be the senator's undoing.

The hearings into the army had already been going on for months when, on November 24, Senator McCarthy spoke on a nationally televised news program. In his remarks, he went from lambasting the Truman State Department, to taking aim instead at the Eisenhower administration for retaining people who were still deemed to be security risks, especially John Paton Davies, a China hand considered by McCarthy to be one of those guilty of losing China to Communism. The newspapers asserted that McCarthy's was "an assault on the Eisenhower presidency itself." Some members of the president's staff were determined to get Ike to respond to some of his most ardent critics. Hagerty reported in his diary that the president refused, saying that all these people want is for him to "get down in [the] gutter" with Joe.²⁴

As the meeting progressed, Ike began to put his pen to the draft, and at his next press conference, he read his prepared remarks—again speaking at the level of principle, without engaging the senator. The president responded to a number of attacks made by McCarthy related to Britain's trade with China and on the perennial subject of Communists in government. Regarding McCarthy's attacks on free trade, the president said: "The most powerful of free nations must not permit itself to grow weary of the process of negotiation . . . If it should turn impatiently to coercion of other free nations, our brand of coercion . . . would be the mark of the imperialist rather than of the leader."²⁵

When asked, Eisenhower reassured the public that given the "effectiveness" of the administration's internal security efforts it would not be an issue in the 1954 election. Then he tried to move the conversation back to the importance of his Middle Way, noting that, "unless the Republican Party can develop and enact . . . a

[progressive legislative] program for the American people, it does not deserve to remain in power."²⁶

Ike was deeply concerned about the impact the corrosive political atmosphere in the country was having on its political culture. But he understood that Americans could not blame any outside force for what we were doing to ourselves. Our capacity to engage in civil debate was something we ourselves controlled. "Only Americans can hurt America," he once said during the 1952 campaign.²⁷ "[We] can't defeat Communism by destroying America."²⁸

McCarthyism and its rancor continued unabated. The president himself had been viciously accused by right-wing groups of being a Communist sympathizer, and some of Eisenhower's most important appointments were threatened by unfounded accusations from McCarthy and other extremists. But McCarthy extended his rampage. On March 16, as the drama was reaching its crescendo, the senator began to go after the president's family, accusing Milton Eisenhower of being "a New Deal member of the [Eisenhower] palace guard."²⁹ "New Deal" to McCarthy and others was synonymous with treason.

McCarthy again failed to provoke the president publicly.

What finally created the shift in the president's strategy was McCarthy's escalating attacks on the U.S. Army. Ever since November 1953, when the army drafted David Schine, the friend of McCarthy's wingman Roy Cohn, the senator and Cohn were none too happy. They were angry that Schine might be given typical army assignments. Behind the scenes Cohn was using the threat of further official inquiries into the army to demand easier assignments for Schine—no KP (Kitchen Police or Kitchen Patrol), no overseas travel, and no work on Sundays.

When Schine's assignments became a source of private frustration for Cohn, in apparent retaliation, McCarthy demanded answers from the army about one Maj. Irving Peress, a one-year draftee who served as a base dentist at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. He accused the dentist of Communist sympathies and demanded answers from the army.

Gen. Ralph Zwicker, a hero of D-day and commander of the

camp, refused to relinquish any information. McCarthy snapped back by declaring that Zwicker must have the "brains of a five-year-old child." And that he was "not fit to wear that uniform."³⁰

At least two Eisenhower administration figures tried to reason with McCarthy: Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson and Secretary of the Army Robert Stevens, but both got trapped by the senator in ways that made them look cowed and weak. The president was infuriated.

But perhaps most pivotal was a revelation by Army Counsel John Adams. In congressional testimony he revealed that on January 21, 1954, he attended a private meeting at the White House of key administration figures, including Herbert Brownell, Sherman Adams, and Henry Cabot Lodge—at which time he was instructed to keep track of McCarthy and Cohn's efforts on behalf of David Schine. Investigators wanted to know more.³¹

On March 11, under orders some scholars believe came from President Eisenhower himself, the Pentagon released the Adams report. When the army released this chronology of McCarthy and Cohn's interventions on behalf of Schine it became obvious that something had to be done about McCarthy's possible overreach. The release of the report placed before members of McCarthy's committee assertions of scandal, making it impossible for them to close their eyes to what may have transpired. In April they convened what are known today as the Army-McCarthy hearings. Since McCarthy's methods were under investigation, he was not, this time, the interrogator, but subject himself to cross-examination.

Behind the scenes Ike and Brownell worked hard to make sure the hearings were televised, and the president helped select the Boston lawyer Joseph Welch, to represent the army. When the hearings finally began—as General Goodpaster once put it to me—McCarthy was "a dead man walking and he didn't even know it."

Over the coming months McCarthy would demand information from the army and later the Eisenhower White House, insisting on private memorandums and other material supposedly pertinent to his investigations. Eisenhower made it clear behind

the scenes that he saw no reason why the army should not provide the information for the senator on the basis that transparency, where feasible from an administrative and national security perspective, was always the best policy. Army Chief of Staff Matthew Ridgway, however, "violently objected," fearing that it would subject officers to "virtual persecution by congressional committees."³²

On May 14 Eisenhower evoked executive privilege, bowing to Ridgway's concerns. The executive branch would refuse to relinquish any information on the matter, a measure in their view that was necessary to protect the confidential counsel Eisenhower was getting from his advisers. Despite the novel declaration, the Senate did not challenge the president.

Executive privilege was a measure that went back all the way to the presidency of George Washington. Yet the Eisenhower administration and the president himself understood that it was also limited. Years later Herbert Brownell and William Rogers, both attorneys general during the Eisenhower administration, agreed that the president would never have attempted to withhold evidence necessary for an investigation of a crime.³³

According to Herbert Brownell, after the imposition of executive privilege, Eisenhower met with Senate Majority Leader Everett Dirksen and other congressional leaders and urged them to make efforts to restrain the renegade senator.³⁴

Despite these developments, the televised hearings went on for nearly three months. In the meantime, Eisenhower made sure to show support for his team by having his photograph taken with army secretary Stevens, who had been under fire from McCarthy.

On May 28, McCarthy, by this time growing desperate, went over the president's head during the hearings and appealed to federal workers, including those in the executive branch, to "disregard Presidential orders and laws and report directly to him on graft, corruption, Communism and treason."³⁵

That same day Jim Hagerly wrote a diary entry chronicling the president's reaction to McCarthy's appeal to federal employ-

ees, saying that the president was really angry at what he termed "the complete arrogance of McCarthy." Walking up and down behind his desk and speaking in rapid-fire order, Eisenhower said:

This amounts to nothing but the wholesale subversion of public service. McCarthy is making exactly the same plea of loyalty . . . that Hitler made to the German people. Both tried to set up personal loyalty within the government while both were using the pretense of fighting Communism. McCarthy is trying deliberately to subvert the people we have in government, people who are sworn to obey the law, the Constitution and their superior officers. I think this is the most disloyal act we have ever had by anyone in the government of the United States.³⁶

On May 31, 1954, the two hundredth anniversary of Columbia University's founding, in a speech to the campus community, Eisenhower alluded to the accusations hurled at people who were sometimes deemed "guilty" simply by association:

Amid . . . alarms and uncertainties, [citizens] begin to fear other people's ideas—every new idea. They begin to talk about censoring the sources and the communications of ideas. . . . We know that when censorship goes beyond the observance of common decency . . . it quickly becomes for us, a deadly danger.

Without exhaustive debate—even heated debate—of ideas and programs, free government would weaken and wither . . .

Effective support of principles, like success in battle, requires calm and clear judgment, courage, faith, fortitude. Our dedication to truth and freedom . . . does not require—and cannot tolerate—fear, threat, hysteria, and intimidation.

As we preach freedom to others, so we should practice it among ourselves.³⁷

The hearings ground on. As the days rolled by McCarthy increasingly wilted under the bright hearing-room lights, and the public watched as the curtain was torn away from this Wizard of Oz. He had been accustomed to being the accuser; he was now in the witness chair as the accused.

When McCarthy denounced one of the lawyers in Joseph Welch's law firm as having been associated with a Communist-affiliated organization, Welch dramatically addressed the senator by rebuking him for tarnishing the name of a man who was not even on the case: "Have you no sense of decency, sir?"—an expression that continues to resonate in history.

During the hearings the tide had turned. It became apparent at one point that McCarthy and his team had doctored a photograph and an unprecedented viewing audience made their own conclusions about McCarthy demeanor throughout the hearings. And the Senate, now mindful of the growing public hostility to McCarthy, prompted Republican senators Ralph Flanders and Arthur Watkins to open another investigation to determine if McCarthy had been in violation of Senate rules. This and public opinion compelled the Senate eventually to censure the Wisconsin senator—a reassuring outcome, if not for the fact that the Republican leadership did not vote in favor of the measure. Nevertheless the Army-McCarthy hearings marked the end of McCarthy's influence as a political force.

Years later Ambassador Bohlen spoke about his nemesis and this strain of thinking in the country: "McCarthy was a product of sixteen years of being out of office," he told a State Department interviewer. "Eisenhower had not been alone in thinking that McCarthy's crusade against Communists in the government was a tactic he used for getting the attention he craved after ten years of serving in obscurity in a Democrat-controlled Congress. The Senator, in fact, apparently had help in crafting his first speech on the subject in Wheeling, West Virginia in 1950. His charges were resonant with the times, though not everyone saw the Communist threat as a force that [was likely] to distort our own institutions."³⁸

Conscious of the grave injustice done to those who had been falsely accused, Eisenhower no doubt realized it must have been cold comfort to them that the national nightmare had taken this long to end. Discrediting McCarthy had taken time, while the majority party in Congress still supported the senator. There had been little choice on how to resolve this matter.

At the same time the president understood that damage from McCarthy's populism had not been wholly a domestic issue. While Ike had, behind the scenes, gone into battle to destroy McCarthy's influence, our allies abroad, countries that only less than ten years earlier were still under the Nazi yoke, were repelled by the developments inside the United States.

Ike noted this concern and specifically referred to it in his diary. The transcript of a German radio program caught his attention: "McCarthy makes it so easy to hate Americans," the German broadcaster had said, "that it is necessary that all of us who understand America's decent motives and basic friendliness should speak up on behalf of the things she is doing in our own countries."³⁹

Eisenhower never accepted credit for the senator's political demise, yet it is hard to imagine any other presidential strategy that might have worked as effectively, noted Fred Greenstein. Ike was bitterly criticized for failing to take McCarthy on directly, but Eisenhower's refusal to do so in this case was based on his belief that it would have produced counterproductive results.⁴⁰

The president knew he had been the one holding the cards. He had the power over the thing McCarthy had most deeply desired—to engage Eisenhower in this circus, thus legitimizing his own status as an important leader while raising himself and his shameful shenanigans to the level of a coequal branch of government. Eisenhower's approach eventually ended McCarthy's power, and in that process, avoided the senator tarnishing and belittling the very office of the presidency itself.