

THE DOMINO THEORY IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY,
1947 - 1968

THE TIES THAT BIND:
THE DOMINO THEORY IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY,
1947 - 1968

by
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ABSTRACT

American foreign policy is guided by many interests and ideas. The strongest of these interests is national security, and one of the most persistent ideas of Cold War policy, the domino theory, is inexorably linked to it. Since World War Two, the United States has intervened in civil wars, revolutions, and political uprisings in non-aligned and Third World nations on the assumption that it has strategic, economic, and ideological interests in these areas. It has frequently used the domino theory to justify these interventions.

Operating on the assumption that the domino theory was globally applied, this thesis examines the use of the domino theory in three such interventions. Chapter 1 explores the formulation of the Truman Doctrine for Greece and Turkey in 1946; Chapter 2 is an analysis of "Operation PBSUCCESS", the CIA's coup in Guatemala in 1954; and Chapter 3 examines the growing commitment to contain Vietnamese Communism from 1949 to 1968. Within each of these chapters, media reaction to the domino theory, and the effect that this attention may have had on the theory's fortunes is also considered.

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INTRODUCTION
THE DOMINO THEORY AND NATIONAL INSECURITY

A nation's foreign policy is based on numerous assumptions, interests, and fears, many of which persist from one generation to another. For example, the fear that the defeat of one small state at the hands of a larger, stronger power could result in the chain reaction collapse of neighbouring states -- the domino effect -- goes back to the Bible. In a matter of days, Joshua secured victory over the cities of Makkedah, Libnah, Lachish, Gezer, Eglon, Hebron, and Debir. All of these cities Joshua "smote with the edge of the sword" and his armies "utterly destroyed all the souls that were within."¹ Thucydides, one of whose aims was to create a historical record so that future generations might better understand their own time, believed that the Peloponnesian War was precipitated by the inordinate power of Athens and the fear of smaller city-states such as Corinth that Athens might overwhelm them. In Book Six of The Peloponnesian War, the Athenian general Alcibiades drew up a battle plan on the assumption that "... if Syracuse falls, all Sicily falls with it, and Italy soon afterwards So do not imagine that it is only the question of Sicily that is under discussion; it will be the question of the Peloponnese."² And Demosthenes warned his fellow Athenians

against Philip II, saying that "he cannot rest content with what he has conquered; he is always taking in more, everywhere casting his net round us, while we sit idle and do nothing."³

Fascination with and belief in the domino effect has been especially strong in the second half of the twentieth century. In the wake of the Second World War and the post-war creation of an ideologically bipolar world, Americans in particular began to base policies on the assumption, and the domino theory -- the notion that Communist aggression in one state must be met and defeated in order to forestall its organic spread elsewhere -- was born. The domino metaphor was first coined by Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was asked in his press conference of 7 April 1954 to explain the strategic value of Indochina to the United States. His characteristic answer was to be one of the earliest attempts to define the domino theory:

You have, of course, both the specific and the general when you talk about such things.

First of all, you have the specific value of a locality in its production of materials that the world needs.

Then you have the possibility that many human beings pass under a dictatorship that is inimical to the free world.

Finally, you have the broader considerations that might follow what you would call the "falling domino" principle. You have a row of dominos set up, you knock over the first one, and

what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have the beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.⁴

The domino theory, as used by makers of American foreign policy during the Cold War, holds that unchecked Communist activity in one state will spread to neighbouring states, triggering the sequential collapse of their political systems and their replacement by Marxist clients of Communist China or the Soviet Union.⁵ The United States feared such a disintegration for two basic reasons. First there was loss of "real estate"⁶ as entire geo-political units (such as Southeast Asia) succumbed to Communism. Such a collapse would bring with it the loss of allies, raw materials, and markets. Secondly, there was that most basic of considerations for a nation battling an ideological opponent: the possible loss of influence and prestige as nations were "picked off", so to speak, one by one. Jonathon Schell calls this the psychological domino theory.⁷

The domino theory was a very limiting approach to foreign policy. In effect, it caused the United States to view any indigenous political movement in the third world as potentially Communist, and so part of a Soviet-led international conspiracy. The State Department made this very clear in 1957:

...[M]ost national Communist parties masquerade as normal, patriotic political parties, purporting to reflect

indigenous political impulses and to be led by indigenous elements.... By appearing to support the interests of the common man, Communists endeavor to direct his energies along lines which serve their basic purpose: to discredit the established society and ultimately to seize power on behalf of the Kremlin.⁸

Why was there such a surrender to so constricting a view of the world? As Bernard Brodie has demonstrated, the domino theory analyzes cause and effect on a superficial level, often exaggerating "causal links" and denying the possible intervention of chance in the final outcome of a series of events.⁹ It was, however, for exactly those reasons that the domino theory was utilized. Simple, dramatic, and readily visualized, the domino image played upon precisely the same fears of Communism that spawned and sustained McCarthyism. The theory did not ask Americans to think; instead it gave them a paradigm with which to judge all foreign uprisings. In so doing, it also provided implicit support for and justification of American economic, diplomatic, and military interventions overseas.

For all the historical importance of the domino theory, there has been surprisingly little published about it, and much of what has appeared in print deals specifically with Vietnam. No survey or general history of the conflict ignores the theory; all devote a page or two to its discussion. These references, which hardly constitute a

body of theory, might be supplemented with several articles devoted to the domino theory and Vietnam. These vary widely in quality. Rocco Paone's "The Afro-Asian Ocean Heartland", which appeared in 1966 is, for example, of little analytical value. Paone, a professor of International Relations at the Annapolis Naval Academy, had crafted little more than a defense of Lyndon Johnson's Vietnam policy based on the domino theory, which he, surprisingly, saw as a "seldom-reported reason why we must fulfill our commitment in Southeast Asia."¹⁰ At the other extreme of the spectrum of opinion is Ross Gregory's analysis of the domino theory in The Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy, published in 1978. Gregory recognizes the theory's post-World War II origins, but limits his discussion to Vietnam, and optimistically asserts that

in the mid-1970's the domino theory lingered for most Americans as a bad memory of a sorrowful and fruitless war, of a troubled time in the nation's life -- a memory to be filed alongside An Loc, Da Nang, "Search and Destroy", and other verbiage of the Vietnam war.¹¹

Actually, the domino theory was not peculiar to Vietnam and did not pass out of use when the conflict came to an end.

One school of thought which recognizes the persistence of the domino theory beyond Vietnam also focusses on "lessons of the past" and their use in decision making. Basic assumptions of this school, as Thomas G. Paterson sees them, are that Americans believe that the

present is to a great degree predetermined by the past, yet they "are notoriously lacking in an informed historical consciousness." This critical view is shared by other revisionist diplomatic historians, notably William Appleman Williams.¹² Ernest R. May's "Lessons" of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy" (1973), his and Richard E. Neustadt's Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision Makers (1986), and Göran Rystad's Prisoners of the Past? The Munich Syndrome and the Makers of American Foreign Policy (1982) all examine the link between Hitler's unchecked aggression in the 1930s and the evolution of the domino theory after 1945.¹³ Not surprisingly, politicians and diplomats are condemned for their simplistic reasoning. May, Neustadt, and Rystad point out the false analogies drawn by American decision-makers. Europe in the 1930s bore no resemblance to the nuclear, bipolar world of the 1950s and 1960s. Paterson and political scientists such as Stan Persky (America, the Last Domino, 1984) have in turn shifted the focus of this school away from explaining the involvement in Vietnam as a product of Hitler's aggression. Now they study American attitudes towards Central America as having been shaped by Vietnam.¹⁴ There is little with which to quibble in this line of argument; by the same token, there is little to add. One might question, however, how complete a history of the domino theory this type of narrow, intellectual analysis

provides, since it does not really take into account popular and media conceptions. Paterson, who does discuss popular perceptions in an article coauthored with Les K. Adler, "Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930s -- 1950s", is an exception in this regard.¹⁵ Nevertheless, a broader picture of the domino theory's fortunes is needed.

That broader picture has not yet arrived, although scholars such as Gabriel Kolko and Jerome Slater have argued that the containment policy and its justification, the domino theory, were at the heart of America's post-war policy for the Third World. Kolko writes that "geopolitical analogies and linkages in the form of the domino theory" were more instrumental in shaping some policies --his best example is Vietnam-- than the "traditional" economic and political stakes, although these always remained the basis of any policy.¹⁶ Slater argues that the most important element of the domino theory was national security, which he cites as being "implicit" in the theory.¹⁷ Actually, national security was the one unifying theme in the various permutations of the domino theory, and was explicitly stated in public pronouncements of the theory. Defined by the United States' ideological, political, military, and economic interests, national security was not exclusive to the domino theory, and it did not set the theory apart from the rest of America's Cold War rhetoric. As Kolko

insinuates, something else was superimposed on the traditional basis of policy. Decision-makers searched in the past for guidance, and their fear for the future of the world and their country led them back to Hitler and the folly of appeasement. They sought to dispel their fear, but succeeded only in enlarging it. That exaggeration and self-perpetuation is what best characterizes the domino theory.

This study proposes to analyze the relationship of the domino theory to three American interventions abroad: the provision of aid to Greece and Turkey in 1947, the execution of a counter-revolutionary coup in Guatemala in 1954, and the campaign against Communism in Vietnam from 1949 to 1968. While the three cases under consideration by no means constitute the only applications of the domino theory in this period -- it was, for example, a prime consideration in Harry S Truman's decision to intervene in Korea in 1950¹⁸ -- they aptly demonstrate that the theory was applied on a global scale. Using them as guideposts, it is also possible to examine the interaction between the media and decision-makers and to understand how media attention affected the use and the credibility of the theory. A comparative analysis also provides the opportunity to follow its origins and the changes that it went through from 1947 to 1968. The domino theory was, in many ways, a caricature. Exactly how it was drawn, and the

response it generated over a twenty year period will be examined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER ONE
THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE: CREATION OF A THREAT

In presenting this situation to the American people, President Truman has put in official words what has been apparent to any observer of the international scene for many months. But the fact that he did so, and the manner in which he did so, make his address an event of the first magnitude.¹

The domino theory, although it was to achieve enormous hold on the minds of some diplomats, was never a formal statement of policy. Rather, it was a broad assumption based on the anti-Communism that inspired much of U.S. foreign policy in the period after 1945. The experience of facing up to Hitler's Germany was not lost on the Americans in their postwar dealings with the Soviet Union. Truman spelled this out in 1947: "There isn't any difference in totalitarian states. I don't care what you call them, Nazi, Communist, or Fascist...."² Labelling the Soviets "Red Fascists", Americans genuinely feared Communist subversion of the United States. Francis P. Matthews of the American Chamber of Commerce asserted that "...the greatest current danger, now that the Fascist and Nazi axis was defeated in World War Two, comes from the Communists."³ The post-war fear of Communism is evident too in Gallup poll results of the period. Surveys conducted in mid-April 1947 found that

61% of Americans questioned believed that members of the American Communist Party were more loyal to the Soviet Union than to the United States; the same percentage also felt that membership in the American Communist Party should be forbidden by law.⁴ The war-ravaged Soviet Union was identified as an unscrupulous totalitarian power capable of posing a threat to the security of the United States.

What was the basis for this identification of the Soviet Union with Nazi Germany? The answer lies partly in the so-called "Munich Syndrome"⁵ and its application to post-war Soviet policy in Eastern Europe. The Munich Syndrome held that yielding to aggression would only beget further aggression, as in the case of Czechoslovakia. For American policymakers, however, the "lesson" of Munich was not simply that aggression bred aggression, but also that a totalitarian aggressor determined to spread its ideology was a threat to freedom and security. As Ernest R. May notes, not only were Truman and his advisers repelled by Communist ideology, they also measured Stalin on the same moral scale they had used to calibrate Hitler.⁶ Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, calling for an in depth study of the "moral and philosophical foundations" of Communism in order that the United States might better understand the purpose of Soviet foreign policy and thereby better counter it, noted in January 1946 that it might be tempting to ridicule such an analysis but, "... we should always remember that we also

laughed at Hitler."⁷ Implicit in the "lessons" of Munich was the idea that appeasement would result in a chain reaction (or domino-like) collapse of nations.⁸ Whether the aggressor was a Nazi or a Communist state made little or no difference. Incidentally, the Soviets, having created a "buffer" zone in Eastern Europe, devised their own domino theory, which Nikita Khrushchev outlined in his memoirs:

...if the counter-revolutionaries [in Hungary in 1956] did succeed and NATO took root in the midst of Socialist countries, it would pose a serious threat to Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Rumania, not to mention the Soviet Union itself.⁹

For Americans, however, it was their own application of the Munich Syndrome that was valid. When the decision was made at the Yalta Conference to allow the Soviet Union three votes at the United Nations, Republican Senator Arthur Vandenberg (and others) were furious, as Vandenberg related in his diary entry of 2 April 1945: "There is a general disposition to *stop this Stalin appeasement*. It has to stop *sometime*. Every new surrender makes it more difficult."¹⁰ Gallup recorded in May 1946 that 58% felt that "Russia is trying to build herself up to be the ruling power of the world," while only 29% felt that the Soviets were pursuing a defensive policy. Sixteen months later, only 18% thought Russian policy to be one of self-defense; 76% decided that the Russians were bent on world domination.¹¹ The Munich Syndrome, combined with the intense anti-Communism of Cold

War America, was therefore a contributing factor to the emergence and development of the domino theory.

The first milestone in this process came early in 1947. The persistence of a Communist insurgency in Greece and pressure from the Soviet Union on the Turkish government to share control of the Dardanelles, combined with the British decision to pull out of the area for financial reasons, made the Truman Administration fearful for the maintenance of Western influence in that region. It was essential to keep a foothold in the Balkans and the Near East not only to maintain the balance of power, but also to safeguard American access to the oil reserves of the Middle East. A domino-like collapse of this "Northern Tier", which included Iran as well as Greece and Turkey, would seriously compromise these interests. The Truman Doctrine reflected this worry, although it avoided detailed economic and strategic analyses. Thanks to an energetic public relations campaign, it provided the American public with easily understood, dramatic images of the Communist threat to Greek freedom, and thereby rallied support around the government position. It is difficult to determine to what extent officials sincerely believed in the possibility of a domino-like collapse of nations. What can be ascertained, however, is how often and in what form domino images (or "domino thinking") appeared in policy papers and memoranda. By examining such documents, it should be possible to get

some idea of how widely this form of thinking prevailed. A parallel analysis of the press should indicate the extent of popular acceptance of domino thinking outside the foreign policy establishment.

On 21 February 1947, the State Department received formal word from the British Foreign Office that Great Britain, financially crippled by her war debt, faltering industrial economy, and a brutal winter, could no longer provide the \$250 million in military and economic aid that had been guaranteed to Greece and Turkey.¹² On 12 March, President Harry S Truman appeared before Congress to announce what would soon become known as the Truman Doctrine: a request for \$400 million in aid to the two nations and the commitment of each American citizen to battle Communism on every front, to "...help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes."¹³ What had transpired in the intervening nineteen days was not, as Truman himself has asserted, a sudden and radical re-orientation of American foreign policy.¹⁴ Other crucial stages in the evolution of the post-war policy of containment included George F. Kennan's "Long Telegram" of 22 February 1946, his article on containment and Soviet conduct which appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in July 1947 under the pseudonym 'X', and American

reaction to Soviet activity in Iran and Turkey in 1945 - 1946. The innovatory significance of the Truman Doctrine was that it introduced the domino theory to American foreign policy. While the basic objectives in the Near East were to maintain Western influence in the balance of power and to safeguard American trade and oil interests, the presentation of the program to Congress and the American people had to be altruistic in tone, while at the same time making the exigency of the situation immediately apparent. A rhetorical device was needed, one that would play on the anxiety of post-war America and transform that fear into a crusade. Recalling the Franco-British appeasement of Hitler, and the rapidity with which he subsequently engulfed Europe, members of the White House staff were struck by the prospect for sequential collapse. Dwight D. Eisenhower's actual metaphor was not invoked, but the domino theory was well on its way.

Why did it originate in the Near East less than two years after the end of the war? Summarizing his decision to aid Greece and Turkey, Truman recounted in 1956 the "lessons" of Munich and World War II:

We had fought a long and costly war to crush the totalitarianism of Hitler, the insolence of Mussolini, and the arrogance of the warlords of Japan. Yet the new menace facing us seemed every bit as grave as Nazi Germany and her allies had been.¹⁵

The antagonism that the United States felt towards the Soviet Union was based on more than this dubious analogy with the past, however. In February 1946, the American chargé d'affaires in Moscow, George F. Kennan, was asked to explain the sources of Soviet conduct, specifically the Kremlin's refusal to contribute to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Kennan's reply, the "Long Telegram" of 22 February, provided Washington with a model for interpreting Soviet activities and an advisement on how to deal with the Soviet Union.¹⁶ The Soviets, wrote Kennan, believed that they lived in an environment of "capitalist encirclement". Their "neurotic view of world affairs", he continued, was based on a "... traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity."¹⁷ Having noted this, Kennan made a crucial jump from defining the insecurity to explaining the Soviet method of dealing with it. Not only would the Soviets be unwilling to negotiate with the United States, but they would protect their borders through a "patient but deadly struggle for [the] total destruction"¹⁸ of the United States. Kennan then clearly outlined the rationale for the identification of reformist or revolutionary movements with international Communism:

... Soviet purposes must always be clothed in [the] trappings of Marxism....[I]n [its] new guise of international Marxism, with its honeyed promises to a desperate and war-torn outside world, it is more dangerous and insidious than ever before.¹⁹

Arguing that the most likely targets of Soviet expansion were going to be politically and economically weak nations, Kennan invoked a metaphor which prefigured the domino theory in its likening of world communism to a "malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue."²⁰

Kennan made this appraisal in the middle of the first Near Eastern crisis faced by the Truman Administration. Between November 1945 and June 1946, the Americans and British faced off against the Soviets in Iran, the site of a "unique exercise in Allied co-operation"²¹ during World War II. In an attempt to guarantee an Allied supply route to the U.S.S.R., a joint British - Russian invasion of Iran was undertaken in August 1941, and Russia occupied the northern provinces of Iran. This occupation was to become a source of Cold War conflict. At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, Stalin declined to consider the possibility of withdrawing Allied troops from Iran. Once victory had been achieved in Europe, Iran requested a total Allied withdrawal within six months, but troops were pulled out only from Teheran. Further discussions were postponed until September, when an exchange of notes between Britain and the Soviet Union agreed to a pull-out date of 2 March 1946. In the meantime, the Soviets, hoping to exact a large oil concession, tightened their control of the Northern provinces, where they had already limited the the power of

Iranian administrators, police, and armed forces. The United States, regarding a consolidation of Soviet power as a threat to Iranian sovereignty and therefore American trade and investment, reacted quickly to these measures and to a Soviet call for the independence of the province of Azerbaijan.²² When, on 9 November 1946, Iranian and Soviet troops clashed at Qazvin, Loy Henderson, chief of the State Department Division of Near Eastern Affairs, expressed concern about a possible loss of American prestige. If the United States did not support Iranian protests against the Soviet Union, he argued, then other small nations would lose confidence in the United States, and come to regard its assurances as so much empty rhetoric.²³ Henderson was in effect articulating the psychological domino theory a full twenty years before it was to cripple the Johnson Administration's policy making process in Vietnam. The Americans also foresaw the possibility of sequential collapse if the Soviets were allowed to "...sweep unimpeded across Turkey ... into the Mediterranean and across Iran ... into the Indian Ocean."²⁴ The United States took the case to the U.N. General Assembly, which in March 1946, when the Russians had amassed troops at the Iranian border, ordered them to withdraw. By December, the Soviet troops were gone, and the Iranians had put down the uprising in Azerbaijan. America celebrated a Cold War victory.

The next crisis of the Near East intensified the American commitment to keeping the Soviet Union out of the Mediterranean. In August 1946, Stalin informed the Turkish government that the Soviet Union wished to share control of the Dardanelles Straits, a strategic link between Soviet ports on the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Despite the fact that Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill had assured Stalin in October 1944 that he had every right to this access to the Mediterranean, the United States interpreted Stalin's request in 1946 as a threat to the integrity of the Near and Middle East.²⁵ U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Edwin C. Wilson concluded that Soviet interest in the Straits was merely a disguised effort to subsume Turkey. He noted that a takeover of Turkey would represent the loss of "...the last barrier...in [the] way [of] Soviet advance to [the] Persian Gulf and Suez."²⁶ Following quickly upon Wilson's analysis came a more detailed breakdown by Acheson, Forrestal, and Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson. They feared that the Soviet Union was moving troops into Turkey for "the ostensible purpose of enforcing the joint control of the Straits", but were actually planning a takeover. Having made this assumption (not an unreasonable one, given the Soviet reluctance to move out of Iran), Acheson, Forrestal, and Patterson envisaged a sequential collapse of the Near East. Control of Turkey, they pointed out, could make it "extremely difficult, if not impossible, to prevent

the Soviet Union from obtaining control over Greece and ... the whole Near and Middle East." The memo did not demonstrate undue concern for economic interests in the area, but it did express the fear that "American and, in fact, all Western influences" might be lost there if the Soviets were allowed to assert predominance. Echoing Henderson's 1945 fear that Iran and other small nations would lose faith in the United States' ability to defend them, Acheson, Forrestal, and Patterson worried that "...without [the] assurance of support from the United States", Turkey's faith in the United Nations might be shaken.²⁷ The most significant aspect of the memo, however, was the firm grounding that it gave the domino theory. Soviet troops in Turkey, or bases in the Dardanelles, it was argued, would

... in the natural course of events results [sic] in Greece and the whole Near and Middle East, including the Eastern Mediterranean, falling under Soviet control and in those areas being cut off from the Western world.²⁸

Carrying the possibilities for collapse further, they indicated that a "foothold" in the region would facilitate a Soviet effort to convert India and China to Communism.²⁹ In a response to the perceived challenge, Truman strengthened naval units in the area, and moved in the aircraft carrier *Franklin D. Roosevelt*. The Soviets backed off.³⁰

The Iranian and Turkish crises were full of implications for the development of the domino theory. Successful diversion of the Soviets solidified belief in the folly of appeasement, and consequently bolstered the American conviction that the Soviet aggression should be quickly and forcefully met. But the "victory" of Iran and Turkey was ambiguous. Although the Soviets had backed down, there was no guarantee that they would not try again to gain control of the Straits. Nor was it safe to assume that they would not try breaking through other pressure points in the Balkans. The Americans were not convinced that Soviet expansionism had stopped with Turkey. There was, of course, another volatile nation in the Balkans: Greece, which was in the throes of civil war. Following on the heels of the Soviet manouvers in Iran and Turkey, Truman and his Cabinet saw the internal clash between the Right and the Left in Greece as a Soviet-inspired conspiracy to eventually gain control of the Near and Middle East. The events of 1945 - 1946 defined the Near East as the first battle zone of the Cold War, and had committed the Truman Administration to the defense of the region. Having decided that the Soviets were in fact trying to absorb the region into their sphere of influence, and having twice guaranteed Near Eastern nations that the United States would prevent this from happening, the Americans became trapped by the psychological domino theory. If the United States did not continue to guarantee

protection, these nations would lose faith and thus be lost for democracy anyway.

The situation in Greece was a legacy of the German occupation which had lasted from April 1941 to September 1944.³¹ The Germans had invaded Greece as part of the Balkan campaign, MARITA, and resistance to their occupation, composed of a monarchist minority and a Leftist majority, the National Liberation Front (EAM), developed almost immediately. The EAM, although formed by the Greek Communist Party (KKE), was not itself exclusively communist. It was an extremely strong and popular movement, with an estimated 1944 membership of about 1.5 million people, about 90% of the total involved in the Resistance. In addition, it had recruited and trained the National Peoples' Army of Liberation (ELAS), a guerilla army of about 50,000 men. Although Greece was liberated by the British in the autumn of 1944, the Resistance movement did not end. Britain, the Allied partner entrusted with the reconstruction of Greece, supported the monarchist Right, afraid that the EAM, on the basis of its wartime popularity, might assume a strong role in Greek politics. Britain therefore continued the war against the EAM and ELAS, assuring the Right's accession to power. The Right was not confident of its hold on the reins of government, however, and undertook a campaign of violent repression to consolidate its position. Such activity only served to strengthen resistance to the Right

and support for the EAM. By the summer of 1946, the KKE was directly involved in the rebellion, which, it appeared, would become a victory for the Left.³² Truman and his advisers incorrectly assumed that the KKE was being supported by the Soviet Union. The KKE was receiving external support, but from Yugoslavia, not the Russians.³³ Echoing Kennan's February 1946 assessment of the Soviet Union as a parasite, but failing to recognize the beginnings of the Tito-Stalin split, Truman noted in his memoirs that "[t]he Communists, of course, thrived on the continuing conditions of misery, starvation, and economic ruin. Moscow and the Balkan satellite countries were now rendering open support to the EAM."³⁴

This was a distinct change from the wartime analysis of the EAM, which was characterised by U.S. Army Intelligence in 1943 as having no direction from the Soviet Union.³⁵ The point is that the intellectual and political milieu had changed since 1943. Kennan's telegram was certainly influential, but so were examples of Soviet attempts at aggrandisement in Eastern Europe, Iran, and Turkey. Despite the facts that the Soviets had quieted down since the Turkish incident (recognized by the United States as a "'temporary retreat'"), that "'hundreds of thousands'" of Soviet soldiers were being discharged, and that Stalin had indicated in 1944 that he was not especially interested in administering Greece after the War,³⁶ the Americans and

the British continued to link the EAM with the USSR, particularly when it became apparent in 1946 that ELAS was winning the Greek Civil War. Dean Acheson believed that an ELAS victory was synonymous with Soviet victory, as he indicated in October 1946:

... strained international relations focussing on Greece may result in early major crisis which may be a deciding factor in [the] future orientation of Near and Middle Eastern countries. It is of importance to US security that Greece remains independent and in charge of her own affairs, and we are prepared to take suitable measures to support [the] territorial and political integrity [of] Greece.³⁷

By February 1947 it had become impossible for Britain to continue in her role as guarantor of the Greek Right. Turning to the United States, she found a partner with full knowledge of the situation and quite prepared to take over the full burden of Greece. The British had first indicated that they would require American economic assistance in the fall of 1945; in January 1946, Truman had urged the Greeks to undertake a policy of economic stabilisation. The United States also contributed \$260 million in aid in 1946, and had offered "technical advice on ... economic problems" through an economic mission headed by Paul Porter.³⁸ Truman noted in 1956 that he was expecting the British to ask for further aid in 1947, as he had reports on 3 February that British troops would be pulling out of Greece, and on 20 February that Britain could no longer afford to provide aid to

Greece. The actual request, however, "came sooner than ... expected."³⁹ The problem now lay in explaining the decision to aid Greece to the Congress and the American people.

Truman apparently feared a renewal of American isolationism in 1947, and felt that he had "a very good picture" of the global repercussions of such an eventuality. Without American assistance, peripheral countries such as Greece and Turkey would be sucked into the Communist vortex, while democracy in key nations like France and Italy would gradually wither away as their Communist parties, under the careful eye of Mother Russia, grew in influence.⁴⁰ Truman did not, however, think that Congress and the American people were as aware as he of the gravity of the international situation. He therefore decided to make his 12 March speech announcing the program of aid for Greece and Turkey as strong as possible. He "...wanted no hedging in this speech. This was America's answer to the surge of expansion of Communist tyranny. It [had] to be free and clear of double talk."⁴¹ Truman's device for frightening Americans out of their supposed isolationist shell was, of course, the portent of sequential collapse, the progression of dominoes tumbling headlong across Europe and then up to the doors of the White House itself.

But was Truman really preaching to an isolationist audience? In his memoirs, he linked his fears of post-

World War II isolationism, naturally enough, to the strong isolationism that had followed World War I.⁴² This was an erroneous connection, for the two post-war situations were remarkably dissimilar. The United States' retreat from world affairs in 1919 was accompanied by the belief that the League of Nations would be capable of defusing international tensions. That of course turned out not to be the case. It also became apparent with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that the United States' geographical position no longer assured national security. Isolationism was definitely *not* on the agenda in October 1945, when Gallup asked whether or not it would be best for the United States to take an active part in world affairs. While 10% of the respondents had no opinion, 71% felt that the United States should remain active; only 19% favoured isolationism.⁴³ And if Truman felt that aid to Greece and Turkey was to be post-War America's first demonstration of her commitment to internationalism, he was wrong on that count as well. The formation of the United Nations, and utilization of the Security Council for resolving the Iranian and Turkish crises had surely been evidence of this new internationalism, as was Truman's threat to make the Soviets back down through military intervention. While it cannot be asserted that isolationist sentiment did not exist among the American populace or in the Republican controlled Senate, it is certain that Truman was preaching the virtues of his

Doctrine in a much different atmosphere from that which he described in his memoirs. He overestimated the danger that the American people were reverting to isolationism.

So Truman did not really have to convince Americans that internationalism was the one and only path to creating a world safe for democracy. He did, however, need to explain the sources of Soviet conduct and thereby rationalize his policy. He also had to mobilize support for making this internationalism a crusade and Americans the lionhearted crusaders. These two problems could be solved together. Truman and his advisers truly believed that the Soviet Union was determined to create a communist world, and they felt that if the Soviets were able to get this process started in the Near East, a chain reaction would follow. His speech neatly divided the world in two: a free half, ruled by the "will of the majority" and characterised by free institutions, representative government, and free elections; and an unfree half, governed through the "forceful imposition of the will of a minority", and characterised by "terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio, fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms."⁴⁴ Only one half of the world would survive, Truman continued. The United States could assert itself as the defender of freedom, or it could be subsumed, along with the rest of the world, by the unnamed menace, the Soviet

Union. .

It is necessary only to glance at a map to realize that the survival and integrity of the Greek nation are of grave importance in a much wider situation. If Greece should fall under the control of an armed minority, the effect upon its neighbour, Turkey, would be immediate and serious. Confusion and disorder might well spread throughout the entire Middle East.

Moreover the disappearance of Greece as an independent state would have a profound effect upon those countries in Europe whose peoples are struggling against great difficulties to maintain their freedoms and their independence while they repair the damages of war.⁴⁵

So spoke Truman before a joint session of Congress on 12 March 1947, thus providing the first public enunciation of the domino theory. The fall of Greece would cause the fall of Turkey, still under Soviet pressure to relinquish control of the Dardanelles. There would also be psychological effects: most likely on France and Italy, grappling with increasingly influential Communist parties. This public pronouncement, as has been shown, came after initial concerns for the integrity of Iran and Turkey. The handling of these events was not as significant to the development of the domino theory as the announcement of the Truman Doctrine was, because the fear of sequential collapse was not cited as the *raison d'être* of the policy. Neither were Iran and Turkey as significant in terms of actual policy, since they were treated as isolated incidents.

The United States was not convinced that its actions

in Iran and Turkey had brought Soviet aggrandisement to a complete halt. The American Ambassador to the U.S.S.R., Walter Bedell Smith, analysing the effectiveness of American action in Iran and Turkey, doubted that the appeal to the Security Council and the strengthening of naval forces in the Mediterranean had accomplished any long term goals. "We have no doubt," he telegraphed Secretary of State James F. Byrnes on 8 January 1947, "that [the] Kremlin will resume attempts to encroach on Iranian sovereignty and that it will continue attempts to encroach on Turkish sovereignty."⁴⁶ Smith defined the reasons for Soviet aggression in the Near East in much the same manner as had Acheson, Forrester, and Patterson in August 1946. Also reflecting the influence of Kennan, Smith acknowledged "considerations of security", as Turkey represented to the Kremlin, "a corridor for attack on [the] U.S.S.R.", but emphasized that the Soviets had economic motives as well. He then added that there might be a vindicatory element in Soviet strategy: they were "determin[ed] to sever [the] British Empire jugular at Suez."⁴⁷ The most significant part of the telegram explored the psychological impact of Soviet activity (and American inactivity) in the area. Once again, it was made very clear that smaller nations *depended* on the security promised by the United States and the United Nations. Smith was

... inclined to conclude that Turkey can
rely only -- as must all of us menaced by
[the] Kremlin's predatory policy -- on

[the] wider assurance of indivisible security of [the] non-Soviet world guaranteed by [the] UN.^{4a}

It was therefore the duty of the United States and the UN to guarantee Turkey's defense. On 20 January Byrnes, still concerned about Soviet pressure on Turkey, and undoubtedly influenced by Smith's analysis, cabled the American embassy in Ankara that the United States' position was and always had been that Turkey should be responsible for the Dardanelles. This would not sit well with the Soviet Union, and Byrnes consequently feared that the Soviets might actually attack Turkey. He defined the implications of such an attack only vaguely, stating that the "resulting situation would constitute [a] threat to international security."⁴⁹ Byrnes was no doubt alluding to the possibility of the collapse of the Near East, which would seriously compromise the integrity of Europe and the Middle East.

In those crucial days leading up to the formation of the Truman Doctrine (the announcement of British withdrawal from Greece was just over a month away), Turkey was not the only Near Eastern nation under the State Department's close scrutiny. Byrnes, apparently already committed to aiding Greece, expressed concern about the viability of an American aid program. On 2 January 1947, he outlined the American interpretation of the Greek political crisis. It was not a picture of Communist strength that he suggested; instead, he argued, the problem was that international Communism was

infiltrating left wing groups and polarising them. Those leftists and centrists who could not accept Communism would gravitate to the Right. Therein lay the problem: the American people would not support aid to a Rightist government,⁵⁰ especially if they knew that the opposition to that government was not necessarily Communist-dominated.

Byrnes' estimation of the Greek political environment was not echoed by Mark Ethridge, the American representative on the UN Commission of Investigation in Greece. Ethridge argued that the Soviets, "feverish" in their desire to remain in Greece, were directly fomenting discontent there in order to delay the work of the Commission,⁵¹ namely, stabilising Greece. He made a bold statement concerning Greece's future, one which implied a universal acceptance of the domino theory. He was, he said,

...convinced and this conviction is shared by other members of [the] Commission that [the] Soviets feel that Greece is [a] ripe plum ready to fall into their hands in a few weeks.⁵²

Contrary to Byrnes' earlier analysis, Ethridge argued that in the wake of decreasing Greek Army enlistment and morale, and increasing numbers of desertions and losses, "Communist membership and boldness [were] increasing." He agreed with Byrnes that the Right-wing government of Greece was not popularly supported.⁵³

But Ethridge might very well have been exaggerating the situation. George C. Marshall, who took over as

Secretary of State in February, received a communiqué from the American chargé d'affaires in England two days after Ethridges's note of 17 February. Waldemar J. Gallman was curt in his dismissal of what he considered a panicky appraisal by Ethridge:

Reports from British sources in Greece do not confirm seriousness of internal Greek position as presented by Ethridge. Neither British Embassy nor [Richard T.] Windle [a British representative on the Commission] have indicated [that] they consider Greece a ripe plum to fall into Communist hands in [a] few weeks.⁵⁴

Gallman also questioned Ethridge's estimation of decreasing morale and support for the Government, and the increase in support for the Communists.⁵⁵ Gallman's communiqué suggests the peculiarly American nature of domino-thinking. Apparently, it was not shared by the British government, which was facing the same threat and which had always had a stake in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The note certainly points to a degree of division in the Administration regarding the immediate vulnerability of Greece, but it does not necessarily indicate that the possibility of the Near East's overturning was rejected out of hand by Gallman, or that his message cut more ice in Washington than Ethridge's did. On the contrary, Ethridge's assessment went over more successfully because it reflected the domino-thinking that had begun with Iran and Turkey. Gallman's assessment of the Greek political situation was

capable of raising too many doubts about the direction that American policy should take. Ethridge, on the other hand, knew that he was presenting a dramatic analysis to a sympathetic audience when he wrote that "[the State] Department of course understands all implications as to Near East."⁵⁶ Although he felt that the concept of a sequential collapse of contiguous nations in the Near East was fully comprehended in Washington, Ethridge did not credit strategists there with a full understanding of the psychological impact of Greece's collapse. He said that conversations with fellow commissioners from Britain, France, China, and Colombia made clear their concerns that distant states were as tied to the future of Greece as were Turkey and Iran. The French ambassador, he reported,

said to me this morning that he was sure France could not stand [the] pressure if Greece through inadequate support of Britain and America fell into [the] Soviet orbit.⁵⁷

Furthermore, Ethridge did not even feel that these nations had been totally assured by America's rebuff of the Soviets in Azerbaijan and Turkey. To them, the matter had "gone beyond [the] probing state and [was] now an all-out offensive for the kill."⁵⁸

Ethridge did not let go of the domino theory when he received word of Gallman's criticism. He dismissed Windle's point of view because, in his estimation, Windle was not reliable and disagreed with every other member of the

Commission. According to Ethridge, Windle "blows hot and cold but he has said to me three or four times that [the] situation is 'sticky' and 'extremely bad'"⁵⁹ Ethridge certainly operated on the assumption that the domino theory was valid; he informed Marshall that he was framing his discussions with his fellow commissioners around that pattern of thought. Ethridge was convinced that the Americans had to take a firm stand in Greece, or else see the progress made in Turkey and Iran reversed. He paused to wonder:

If that force is released, where does it stop? At France? Italy? The Middle East and North Africa? Or does success make it go beyond that to China and the Far East?⁶⁰

Ethridge then bolstered his argument even further with eloquent reference to the psychological domino theory. "If we let [Greece] go," he wrote, "I think we must realize that there also goes the hope of many other nations, including the small ones who gratefully look on the U.S. at the moment as a colossus."⁶¹

The notes that H.M. Sichel, First Secretary of the British Embassy in Washington, delivered to Loy Henderson on 21 February dealt with the internal consequences of the "collapse" of Greece and Turkey: poverty, starvation, and degeneration of the military, as well as (specific to Turkey) the possibility that outside aggression could not be repulsed. Washington's reaction was as predictable as Joseph

M. Jones has argued the British withdrawal to be. The men who had "lived daily, hourly -- had so lived for several years -- with the problems arising out of the crumbling of British power from the eastern Mediterranean ... and the relentless probing and pressing of the Soviet Union"⁶² immediately began drafting the policy that would become the Truman Doctrine. Marshall was away from Washington when the notes were received by Henderson, who in turn relayed the information to Under-Secretary Dean Acheson. Acheson gave Marshall a breakdown of the request on Monday, 24 February. He exhibited full faith in the analyses provided by Ethridge earlier in the month and advised Marshall that

The notes point out that, without this aid, the independence of Greece and Turkey will not survive. This of course means that they and the rest of the Middle East will fall under Russian control.⁶³

Acheson did not feel that he had to resort to analogy to make his point. He could not have been any more emphatic in his conviction that the Near and Middle East would surely collapse if either Greece or Turkey turned to Communism. In addition to taking Ethridge's analysis of the Greek situation at face value, Acheson also believed that the British were "wholly sincere" and that "the situation [was] as critical as they state[d]". Marshall accepted Acheson's point of view, as did Forrestal and Patterson.⁶⁴

A special committee to study the granting of

assistance to Greece and Turkey was formed immediately. In its first meeting, John D. Hickerson, Deputy Director of the Office of European affairs, picked up on the suggestion that the program be announced as part of a global policy, and recommended that it be presented to Congress "in such a fashion as to electrify the American people." Although the entire committee was not in agreement on this,⁶⁵ Hickerson's point was taken,⁶⁶ and the drafting of the Truman Doctrine speech centered around "electrifying" the Congress and the American people. Truman felt that his first task was to gain the support of Congressional leaders before he went to the Capitol on 12 March. He invited the "'leaders of Congress'", including Senator Vandenberg, to the Oval Office on 27 February. George Marshall was the first to attempt an explanation of the perilous Greek situation. Having stated that American interest in the area was "by no means restricted to humanitarian or friendly impulses," Marshall drew a map of sequential collapse that ranged from the Middle East to India, and back again through Hungary, Austria, Italy, and France.⁶⁷ "[M]ost unusually and unhappily", according to Acheson, Marshall failed in his mission⁶⁸. Acheson, who had been involved in the affair since the British notes were received ("This was my crisis. For a week I had nurtured it."⁶⁹), asked for the chance to speak. He may not have felt that he needed metaphoric language to make his point to Marshall on 24 February, but

he certainly used it to the utmost when speaking to Vandenberg and company:

In the past eighteen months, I said, Soviet pressure on the Straits, on Iran, and on Northern Greece had brought the Balkans to the point where a highly possible Soviet breakthrough might open three continents to Soviet penetration. Like apples in a barrel infected by one rotten one, the corruption of Greece would infect Iran and all to the east. It would also carry infection to Africa through Asia Minor and Egypt, and to Europe through Italy and France, already threatened by the strongest domestic Communist parties in Western Europe.⁷⁰

Acheson and Truman both report that the legislators gave their immediate support to the aid proposal. Vandenberg was, however, puzzled by the situation, although he did believe that Greece was symptomatic of a global problem to which the United States had to react. He felt that the U.N. was incapable of effectively dealing with the situation.⁷¹

The drafting of Truman's actual speech also demonstrates a firm reliance on the domino theory. This is especially evident in a draft prepared by Loy Henderson. Although the text of this draft was not reproduced in the speech of 12 March, there was certainly a continuity of ideas between the two. Henderson linked the Greek crisis directly to World War II, much as Truman would do himself.⁷² The collapse of Greece, he wrote, would precipitate a "chain of events the consequences of which are still unfathomable," but it

...would be certain to bring profound discouragement to the peoples of neighbouring countries who are struggling for the preservation of their own independence and ...[would] render still more effective those forces bent on the undermining of democratic governments and the destruction of free human institutions. Following the collapse of one or two countries, extensive areas might in rapid succession pass to the control of these areas. Such a series of events would be disastrous to world tranquility and economy and would threaten our very national security.⁷³

It seems clear, then, that the domino theory was beginning to take shape in the thought processes of the American diplomatic corps and White House staff. While there were minor disagreements among individuals as to the relative strength of Communism in Greece, all parties were agreed on the point that Communism, in whatever concentration, would or could in the future present a threat to democracy in Greece. The only voice among Truman's advisers which argued against the domino theory at this time, Gallman's, was for the most part ignored, as the theory, in a number of forms, began to shape policy. The United States was as worried about the psychological effects of Greece's possible collapse as it was fearful of widespread physical collapse. The psychological domino theory went beyond Jonathan Schell's interpretation, however, and involved much more than a simple loss of prestige for the United States. A second psychological domino was setting itself up for a fall. Nations like

France and Italy, which because of their geographical position were not in immediate physical danger, would, as a result of further Communist victories, lose confidence in their own democratic traditions and thereby go the way of Greece and Turkey. The fear that this might happen was clearly evident in the thinking of Truman Administration officials during the 'crisis' of 1947.

But what of the other players in American foreign policy, those who through their registration of approval or disapproval at the polls, sanctioned or rejected the foreign policies of the President? How did the American people and the American press feel about events abroad in the first months of 1947? Truman's strategy worked. There was an almost universal acceptance of the Truman Doctrine and little questioning of its presumptive basis, the domino theory, in the contemporary press. In fact, popular news magazines such as Time and Newsweek, well in tune with the hearts and minds of the Administration and reflective of the national mood, were actually broadcasting their own version of the domino theory in advance of the fateful meeting before the House and Senate on 12 March.

Newsweek was particularly dramatic. On 10 March, its lead story explained the "implications" of the Greek situation in much the same terms used by Truman on 12 March. The only significant difference was that the magazine named the Soviet Union as the "totalitarian aggressor". Communism

and the Soviet Union were inseparable in the point by point analysis of the Greek Civil War that could "possibly" result after a British withdrawal, and which would definitely be won by the "Communist-inspired guerillas". Having "outflank[ed]" Turkey, "the Soviet Union would move into the Mediterranean and Adriatic and eventually would dominate all Europe." The piece ended on a dramatic note:

The cards that Britain had laid face up on the table could not be misread: It was not a question of Greece alone, but of the stability of the entire world.⁷⁴

Ernest K. Lindley's "Washington Tides" column in the same issue is as purple an example of Cold War rhetoric as can be found. His version of the domino theory is worth quoting in full:

...Either we go in, or Greece tumbles into the Communist basket.

If Greece is lost, a Communist scythe will curve around the head of Turkey, which already has Communist bayonets at its back. Russia would, or could, control the Eastern Mediterranean. The whole Middle East would be blocked off.

The potential effects do not stop there. They reach into Italy, France -- into all of Europe and other areas where Communism has a foothold.⁷⁵

He also believed in the psychological domino theory, which he felt was more important than simple physical loss.⁷⁶

Time harked back to the Greek invention of democracy (never mind that it bore little resemblance to the democracy of the twentieth century), and then contrasted its romantic appraisal of Greek politics with a hard-edged analysis of

Soviet designs on the region, and the significance of this for the rest of the world:

... The Greece of 1947 was a strategic spot in democracy's worldwide, defensive struggle.

Greece is a key to the eastern Mediterranean and to the Dardanelles (which Russia wants). It is the only Balkan country still outside the Iron Curtain and its frontier with Slav lands to the north (Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania) is in fact a frontier between two worlds.⁷⁷

Congress and the American people had to act, or "...expanding Russia [will] take over."⁷⁸ In the 17 March issue, which went to print before Truman made his speech, Soviet aggrandisement was described as "piecemeal."⁷⁹ The parallel issue of Newsweek was more explicit in its description of that piecemeal aggression, listing the names of eleven nations which had, since the war, become "dominated" by the Soviets, who, "working at fever pitch" with European Communists, now aimed for a "toehold" in the Mediterranean. According to Newsweek, the "...germ disease of another world war had already taken root -- this time in Greece."⁸⁰ The mainstream American press's belief in the domino theory remained unquestioned after the announcement of the Doctrine. The enemy was Soviet imperialism, and American influence had to "expand to contain it; otherwise the U.S. might be engulfed." All players in the drama knew that there was more than the Near and Middle East at stake.⁸¹ Time definitely saw a path of dominoes toppling

towards the White House steps. Newsweek feared that Americans were "hesitant" about Truman's bypass of the U.N., but argued that at the root of Truman's decision was the estimation of State, War, and Navy that "...the political integrity of [Greece and Turkey] is essential to U.S. security." The Truman Doctrine was characterized as a prototype policy which would see the future use of American money, technology, and personnel to achieve "... the containment of Soviet expansion and the spread of Communism in the world."⁸²

"TRUMAN ACTS TO SAVE NATIONS FROM RED RULE" ran the New York Times headline on 13 March.⁸³ The Times was clearly enamoured not only of the domino theory, but of the psychological domino theory as well. It had evidently learned its lesson at Munich, as an editorial on 11 March made clear:

... the issue of Greece is bigger than Greece itself. Like Austria and Czechoslovakia in 1938, Greece is today one of the cornerstones of the balance of power on which peace must rest. If Greece, the last citadel of Western ways and influence in the Balkans, falls under Russian domination it will be notice to the world that the West is either unwilling or too weak to maintain that balance.⁸⁴

On 12 March, it stated its view that what was at stake was not merely Greece and Turkey, but "a world security system." The Times was very critical of what it considered to be an isolationist Congress, pointing out that "[t]he danger of a

Communist flood [worldwide] is apparent, but the idea still prevails on Capitol Hill that it can be stopped by putting somebody's thumb in the dike."⁸⁵ The lead editorial on 12 March characterised the Doctrine as the beginning of a new era in foreign policy, the era of the "political loan", whose purpose it was to enable weak states to "...withstand the growing pressure exerted against them by Russia and her puppets, seeking to engulf them in the Russo-Communist tide." The United States was seeking to halt that expansion and bolster the security of the West.⁸⁶

Editorial comment from around the nation seemed to back Time's claim that the policy had received a collective nod of approval from the nation, and also indicated its acceptance of the domino theory. The Rochester Democrat and Chronicle argued that "...we must check the spread of Communism and the totalitarian government that aggressively has been fostering it." "Relentless logic will not let us escape the fact that drawing back and doing nothing was the Western world's answer when it first encountered Hitler," said the Hartford Courier, also reflecting the "lessons" of Munich. The Cleveland Plain Dealer, St. Paul Pioneer Press, L.A. Times, and the Dallas News (which explained the Doctrine as an extension of the Monroe Doctrine to the rest of the world) all expressed faith in Truman's policy and the domino theory.⁸⁷

But there was a negative response as well. Left wing

intellectual journals such as the New Republic complained that the doctrine "widened" the U.S. - U.S.S.R. conflict, and that henceforth

every reactionary government and every strutting dictator will be able to hoist the anti-Communist skull and bones, and demand that the American people rush to his aid.⁸⁸

This criticism was not, however, directed against the domino theory. Henry Wallace, who would soon suggest a policy analogous to the Marshall Plan⁸⁹, was criticizing the potentiality for abuse of the Truman Doctrine; he was not denying that its precepts were valid. The press, therefore, played a vital role in the creation of the domino theory. It reflected and reinforced the belief that the Soviet Union was an ideological threat to the United States. Critics like Wallace who spoke out against the prevailing current in foreign policy were not successful in altering it. Wallace's prophecy came true; the United States did extend a helping hand to every reactionary government and every strutting dictator from Syngman Rhee to Manuel Noriega.

What, then, in the context of the Truman Doctrine, did the domino theory represent? On one level, Truman's use of the theory reflected the mindset of the time, the feeling that the security of the United States was truly jeopardized by the Soviet Union. That type of thinking was certainly influenced by the recollection of appeasement, as the fears which were expressed for the integrity of the Near and

Middle East between 1945 and 1947 demonstrate. It cannot be denied that some sort of domino theory existed in the minds of American diplomats and the contemporary press before Truman's decisive announcement of the Doctrine on 12 March 1947. Yet Truman still felt that he had some convincing to do. What he had to do was not just guarantee support for a limited aid program to Greece and Turkey, but rather sustain support for a global policy of unilateral American containment of the Soviet Union. Truman recognized that the decision to aid Greece and Turkey was a momentous one, with far greater implications than his policy towards the Iranian and Straits crises. He was no longer asking that Americans call the Soviets' bluff; he demanded that they now stand behind that dare with a firm policy. He recognized, and so did the New York Times, the burdensome nature of the task he was laying before the American people:

Like a young man suddenly pushed out on his own and forced to assume the responsibilities he has always thought would be comparatively easy, the legislators are finding the reality of world leadership more troublesome than the theory....⁹⁰

A way to make the Congress and the American people accept the burdens of this policy was to reveal it to them in terms that they understood, believed in, and to which they could, supposedly, relate from experience. The fact that Truman and his advisers actually believed in their own rhetoric was a bonus. A policy paper prepared for 18 September 1947,

seven months after the policy was announced, exhibited a firm reliance on the principles of the geographic and psychological domino theories. The paper outlined what American policy towards Greece should be in the event of a Communist victory, and it centered around the argument that the "loss" of Greece would constitute a serious skew in the balance of power. If the United States did not attempt to "recut" the boundaries, the Soviets

...will conclude that they have us on the run and we may look for rapid action on their part, designed to complete the collapse of our position on the Eurasian land mass. Effective reaction by political means will be largely beyond our power because we do not possess the requisite techniques. The only effective answer would therefore be some actual extension of U.S. military strength in that area designed to make clear to the Soviet leaders and to the world that extensions of Soviet military power, by means of concealed aggression, beyond the high water mark mentioned above will be countered by corresponding advances of the bases of U.S. strategic power.

The Staff can think of no other action which could have any real effect on the Russians and any chance of preventing a wide-spread collapse of our influence and prestige throughout Europe and the Middle East in consequence of the contingency here envisaged, with corresponding implications for U.S. security.⁹¹

It is, therefore, fair to conclude that by 1947 the domino theory and the psychological domino theory were pervasive in the thinking of the American foreign policy establishment and the press. The press in particular had accepted the theory without question. It remains to be seen whether or

not this dynamic of the relationship would change; whether or not Truman's successors would be able to persuade themselves and the press, (and through it, the public) that the same simplistic analyses of complicated events that had worked in the selling of Containment in 1947 were applicable to other ventures in international politics.

CHAPTER TWO OPERATION PBSUCCESS

The case of the 1954 CIA coup in Guatemala ("Operation PBSUCCESS") demonstrated the fusion of policy making and public relations under the rubric of the domino theory. The Revolution and the government that the CIA overthrew had once been favourably received by the United States. Between 1950 and 1954, however, the administration of Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán was bent on making labour and land reforms, including the vast expropriation of unused lands belonging to the American-owned United Fruit Company (UFCO). To the United States, such policies reeked of Communism, and by the standards of the Rio Pact and Declaration of Caracas, threatened the integrity of the Western hemisphere. The Eisenhower Administration was extremely worried, and as plans for the execution of PBSUCCESS progressed, the press picked up and embellished government fears for inter-American security. The Latin American domino theory was born.

The domino theory was certainly not the first expression of fear for hemispheric security. A much broader apprehension -- that European nations might attempt to colonize the Americas further -- had governed the conduct of foreign policy since 1823. Efforts to impose foreign

political systems in the Western hemisphere, stated President James Monroe, were to be considered "...the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States," and a threat to American "peace and safety." In May 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt expanded the Monroe Doctrine which had heretofore been a simple warning. Angered by French and Italian action to protect nationals in the turbulent Dominican Republic, Roosevelt said that it was the United States' duty to maintain -- or impose -- order in the Western Hemisphere. "[I]f we intend to say 'Hands off' to the powers of Europe," he argued "sooner or later we must keep order ourselves."¹

What then, differentiated the principles of the domino theory from the Monroe Doctrine? If theologian and historian Reinhold Niebuhr's exposition of the irony of American history offers any direction, the answer might lie in the different attitudes of the two periods. Sensing an increase in national insecurity since the days of the fledgling Republic, Niebuhr explained that

Our own nation ... is less potent to do what it wants in the hour of its greatest strength than it was in the days of its infancy. The infant is more secure in his world than the mature man is in his wider world.²

A comparison of the Monroe Doctrine with the domino theory appears to lend plausibility to Niebuhr's characterization. The domino theory, unlike the Monroe Doctrine, was never a

formal principle of foreign policy. The only true "doctrine" of the Cold War was containment. The domino theory was also more global in its application, brazenly asserting the universality of American interests and the right of the United States to interfere in any geographic area that it deemed vital to its security. The Monroe Doctrine, on the other hand, was applied exclusively to the Americas. Why had the security zone widened, and why, consequently, can we accept Niebuhr's notion of a less secure America in the twentieth century? The main reason, of course, was that it had become a bipolar world divided along ideological lines. The great fear dictating foreign policy and public opinion was no longer that the United States might be encircled by colonialist powers, but that the internal subversion of economically and politically weak states would eventually lead to the piecemeal collapse of the West. This implied that nothing could be taken for granted, especially nothing so volatile as a reordering of the *status quo* in Central America.

As early as 1948, the Department of State was afraid that the security of the United States could be breached through Communist infiltration of Latin America. George F. Kennan's Policy Planning Staff released a paper on 22 March 1948 which concluded that although Soviet imperialistic designs on the Americas posed a "potential rather than a

immediately serious" threat, it was still somehow "...a direct and major threat to the national security of the United States, and to that of all of the other American republics." Kennan's staff recommended that U.S. policy towards Latin America be dictated by considerations of national security.³ Six years later, their recommendations were followed. In the name of national security, the United States overthrew the Guatemalan Revolution to pre-empt a domino-like collapse of the Western hemisphere.

Guatemala did not threaten to tilt the delicate balance between the United States and the Soviet Union in 1954. Nevertheless, in June of that year, the United States covertly organized and exercised a coup -- Operation PBSUCCESS -- which removed from power the democratically elected administration of Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán.⁴ Part of the rationale for the coup was certainly economic, for the United Fruit Company, in control of Guatemala's transportation system and most of its arable land, and with direct links to the highest levels of the Eisenhower Administration, had recently come under reformist "attack" by Arbenz.⁵ However, just as economic explanations do not fully explain the Truman Doctrine's evolution, neither do these same considerations tell the entire story of Operation PBSUCCESS. Operation PBSUCCESS belonged to the larger political-diplomatic context of containment. As an example of containment in action (although it was termed "rollback")

PBSUCCESS, despite its covert nature, was another platform from which to preach the domino theory. Much as the Eisenhower Administration believed that Arbenz' economic and labour reforms were harmful to the Guatemalan operations of UFCO and other American capitalists, so too did he and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles believe these reforms to be indicative of strong Communist influence in Guatemala. That influence they believed to be part of an international Communist conspiracy directed at gaining a "toehold" in the Americas.

Arbenz was elected in 1950 to succeed the "spiritualist socialist"⁶ President Juan José Arévalo. The Arbenz Administration represented the second stage of a Revolution that had come to life in 1944. At that time, businessmen, professionals, and students (all members of the middle class), coalesced to oppose the repressive dictatorship of Jorge Ubico who had ruled Guatemala since 1931. Inspired in part by the actions of contemporaries in El Salvador who had removed strongman Maximiliano Hernández Martínez from power, Guatemalan protesters asserted themselves to the point where Ubico ordered their violent repression. Such a response did little more than exacerbate the crisis. Protests increased, and, in the face of popular disapproval, Ubico surrendered power to a military junta on 1 July 1944. When it became apparent that the dominant member of the junta, General Federico Ponce Váldes, was

consolidating power and would not permit elections to be held as promised, the junta found itself faced with civil demonstrations, the threat of a general strike, and an uprising by the military. In October a second junta, dominated by Arbenz and Major Francisco Arana, who had led the military opposition to Ponce, was formed. It oversaw the election of Arévalo.⁷

The events of 1944 were greeted with caution by the Roosevelt Administration. The American Ambassador to Guatemala, Boaz Long, was as surprised by Ponce's surrender as he had been by Ubico's fall from power. He had assumed that under Ponce, despite the potentiality for future unrest, "...the machinery of government is continuing to function smoothly and the outward life of the country has apparently settled back to normal."⁸ The rise of the Arbenz - Arana junta and the election of Arévalo, however, appeared to throw a wrench into the tidy record of American cooperation with Guatemalan and other Latin American dictators.⁹ Despite the fact that the United States was worried about possible anti-American sentiment in the new Administration, the junta received formal recognition on 7 November, and was assumed to harbour no ill will towards the United States and to pose no threat to American economic interests in Guatemala.¹⁰

The political and diplomatic climate outside Guatemala began to shift significantly during the Truman years. That shift, and a complementary change in the way Americans perceived the world was due in no small part to the Truman Doctrine and its accompanying program of economic aid, the Marshall Plan. The domino theory was further expanded and legitimized in the drafting of NSC-68 in April 1950. NSC-68, prepared in response to the Soviet acquisition of nuclear weapons capability, operated on the premise that while history had borne witness to many examples of different nations' attempts to achieve hegemony over other societies, none of those attempts had been quite like the current efforts of the Soviet Union, because

... the Soviet Union, unlike previous aspirants to hegemony, is animated by a new fanatic faith, antithetical to our own, and seeks to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world.¹¹

NSC-68 was thus a variation on the theme which held that the Soviet Union posed an ideological threat to the United States. The Kremlin was gunning for "the complete subversion or forcible destruction" of non-Communist governments and societies, the grand prize in this contest being the United States itself:

The United States, as the principal center of power in the non-Soviet world and the bulwark of opposition to Soviet expansion, is the principal enemy whose integrity and vitality must be subverted or destroyed by one means or another if the Kremlin is to achieve its fundamental

design.¹²

The use of the words "bulwark" and "integrity" were significant, for they characterized the entire Western world (including, presumably, the Americas) as vulnerable to sequential collapse if the Soviets were able to gain a toehold. NSC-68 was peppered throughout with the fear of sequential collapse: Western Europe and Southeast Asia were also examined in this light, and the Near East was still treated as the first domino, still upright three years after the announcement of the Truman Doctrine. The essential difference between 1947 and 1950, of course, was that the Soviets now had the A-bomb. If a war were to break out in 1950, NSC-68 warned, the Soviets would immediately take Britain, the United States' bulwark in Europe. Scandinavia and the Iberian peninsula would follow; pressure on the Near East would intensify, and the integrity of the Western hemisphere would be breached through "certain vital centers of the United States and Canada."¹³ As for Southeast Asia, it was concluded that

...the Communist success in China, taken with the politico-economic situation in the rest of South and Southeast Asia, provides a springboard for a further incursion in this troubled area.¹⁴

The proposals of NSC-68 were extremely limiting: the United States should avoid negotiation with the Soviets, develop the hydrogen bomb to offset the effectiveness of the

Soviet atomic bomb, increase conventional forces, build a system of alliances, and mobilize the American people behind the policy.¹⁵ Notably, these analyses and recommendations met with criticism from George Kennan and fellow State Department Russian expert, Charles E. Bohlen. They felt that the document over-estimated Soviet aggressiveness, and that it would lead to excessive rigidity and militarism in American policy. Their argument that NSC-68 should not be adopted as policy was overruled by Secretary of State Dean Acheson.¹⁶

NSC-68 therefore strengthened not only bipolarity but also the American sense of national insecurity. "It is apparent," ran the line of reasoning "...that the integrity and vitality of our system is in greater jeopardy than ever before in our history."¹⁷ The stage was set for a Soviet sweep through the West; a collapse of nations one by one (primarily through subversion, but also possibly through conventional military or atomic attack) was now very much in the cards. Furthermore, according to Acheson and other disciples of NSC-68, the Soviet Union had grown in power so significantly since the end of the war that such an attack was likely not only in Eurasia, but throughout the entire non-Communist world. Domino-thinking had taken on global proportions. NSC-68 sponsored its growing importance in the making of foreign policy.

It was inevitable that the intensification of the ideological contest between the Soviet Union and the United States would have an effect on the way Americans viewed the Guatemalan Revolution of 1944. Reforms undertaken during the Arévalo regime were built upon by Arbenz after 1950; under the scrutiny of the State Department they were taken as evidence of unacceptable levels of Communist influence. The reforms were varied and typical of a twentieth century welfare state. The Constitution of 1945 legalized the organization of trade unions, and after April 1946, Guatemalans were assured of workers' compensation, maternity benefits, and subsidized health care under the Social Security Law. The most important reform of the Arévalo Administration was the Labour Code of 1947. It legislated wages and hours, and granted employees the right to strike. In addition, it set controls on child and female labour.¹⁸ Arévalo came under attack by Guatemalan conservatives -- the Roman Catholic Church, landowners, and the military -- who labelled him a Communist, despite his protests that Communism sought to destroy human achievements and was therefore "'contrary to human nature'".¹⁹ The most important reform of the Arbenz period was the Agrarian Reform Law of 1952, which had the immediate effect of reclaiming almost a million acres of unused land from over a thousand large landholders. This land was in turn distributed to individual farmers, who received credit from

the newly organized National Agrarian Bank. Jim Handy asserts that one long term effect of this shift in the country's economic base was an intensification of political activity at the grass roots level, especially radical politics. Many of the people supervising the implementation of the new programs in the countryside were members of the Communist Party, the Guatemalan Workers' Party (PGT).²⁰

This would pose problems for Arbenz. Although the 1945 Constitution had made the organization of a Communist Party illegal on the grounds that it was necessarily part of a foreign, international political organization, opposition to organized Communism gradually slackened.²¹ Arbenz, who said that patriotism, not ideology was what was important in the formation of his government,²² was aided by the PGT in the formation of a parliamentary coalition, and he was indebted to them for their assistance in implementing agrarian reform. Nevertheless, neither he nor Arévalo ever appointed members of the party to cabinet posts. The Communist party was certainly powerful at the grass roots and union level, and it did have some influence with Arbenz, but as historian Cole Blasier has pointed out, "[i]nfluence is one thing, control is another."²³

In October 1950, the Office of Intelligence Research at the State Department prepared and released a report entitled Guatemala: Communist Influence. The report acknowledged the poor living conditions that had prevailed

until the 1944 Revolution, which it said "symbolized the hopes and aspirations of large sectors of Guatemalan society[and was] deeply rooted in indigenous reality." Although the leaders of the Revolution were considered to have been influenced by "socialist and communist ideas and programs from Europe," nationalism was still assumed to be their driving force.²⁴ The Revolution was, therefore, acceptable to the United States. Although the report stopped short of accusing Arévalo and Arbenz of being controlled by International Communism, it did criticize Arbenz for accepting the support of Communists in his election campaign, and remarked that "President Arévalo has shown a tolerant attitude towards communists and fellow travellers."²⁵ He was accused of "lightly brush[ing] aside" the matter of the PTG's existence, and downplaying the "danger and extent of Marxist infiltration". Although Arévalo had at times suppressed overt communist activity, it was assumed that this was done so as to avoid an identification of his Administration with the furtherance of Communist ideas.²⁶

Arévalo's supposed indifference towards the Communist 'threat' within his own country had, according to the Office of Intelligence Research, serious implications for the rest of the hemisphere. The report accused Guatemalan Communists of "...receiv[ing] Soviet propaganda material, and presumably directives" from other Latin American Communist

sympathizers, most notably those in Mexico.²⁷ Literature of the Guatemalan Communist Party "reflect[ed] Soviet influence and suggest[ed] in many cases the possibility of its being directed from abroad."²⁸ From this, the OIR went on to conclude that Guatemala "has...served as a base of operations for the spreading of extreme leftist or communist influence in neighbouring countries," citing El Salvador as the most important example of this activity.²⁹ The relative success of Salvadoran Communism was "due largely to the more than benevolent attitude of Guatemalan officials, including President Arévalo."³⁰ Arévalo, it was determined, had not acted on the orders of Russian officials in Mexico, but a connection between that embassy and "lesser" Guatemalan officials was hinted at.³¹ By the end of 1950, then, Guatemala was regarded as a potential source of danger to the security of the United States. Although not a Communist state itself, it was assumed to have committed the crime of tolerating Communists and their fellow travelers, who for their part were determined to spread Communist ideology throughout the hemisphere. Guatemala, therefore, had the potential to initiate mischief in Central America.

Between October 1950 and June 1954, the conviction that Guatemala was a Communist outpost in the Americas intensified. A National Intelligence Estimate released on 11 March 1952 opened on an ominous note:

The Communists already exercise in Guatemala a political influence far out of proportion to their *small numerical strength*. This influence will probably continue to grow during 1952. The political situation in Guatemala adversely affects U.S. interests and constitutes a political threat to U.S. security.³²

NIE-62 also addressed the problems facing UFCO, and in turn directly linked the security of the United States to the stability of that company. Should UFCO agree to Arbenz' reforms and expropriations, then Arbenz, acting under Communist influence, would pressure other American interests, such as the International Railways of Central America (IRCO). The danger of such a progression was that economic collapse would surely follow, and Arbenz would become more dependent on organized labour, and therefore, the Communist contingent. This could not be tolerated, on account of the PGT's being "in open communication with international Communism."³³

NIE-62 was followed by NSC Guatemala, a draft policy completed in August 1952. Explaining more fully the connection between UFCO's well-being and national security, this document stands as evidence of the certain link between economic interests and foreign policy. Yet it also demonstrates that this link was not the sole determinant of policy. There were also very real concerns for the security of the nation, and this was expressed in images of sequential collapse beginning in Guatemala:

In Guatemala Communism has achieved its strongest position in Latin America, and is now well advanced on a program which threatens important American commercial enterprises in that country and may affect the stability of neighbouring governments. Continuation of the present trend in Guatemala would ultimately endanger the unity of the Western Hemisphere against Soviet aggression, and the security of our own strategic position in the Caribbean, including the Panama Canal.³⁴

The Americans were also worried that a deterioration of UFCO's and IRCO's positions (consequently, a victory for Arbenz and the Communists) "...would be damaging to American interests and prestige throughout Central America."³⁵ To that end, it asserted that

The underlying Communist objectives in Guatemala are to prevent collaboration of that country with the United States in event of future international crisis, and to disrupt hemisphere solidarity and weaken the United States' position.³⁶

NSC Guatemala set in motion the plans for PBSUCCESS, which would be carried out in just under two years, when it asserted that the Communist problem in Guatemala was not an immediate threat to the United States but that the "uninterrupted trend in its favour [was] of serious concern to [U.S.] interests and future security."³⁷ It was imperative that the United States recognize this to forestall a collapse of the Western hemisphere. One policy objective was to "Prevent the spread of Communist influence to other countries in the hemisphere..." through collective

security and increased military aid to Guatemala's neighbours.³⁸

The U.S. was, in fact, already thinking about overseeing Arbenz' downfall as early as 1952. Officials from the State Department Office for Inter-American Affairs were approached by Nicaragua's Ambassador to the United States, Sevilla Sacasa, who told them of

...a plan whereby Nicaragua, with the support of several of its neighbours, as well as the Dominican Republic, Colombia, and Venezuela, would take indirect military action against Guatemala which they considered to be a threat because of communist influence in that Government.³⁹

The other Central American nations were, then, worried about the possibility of a toppling effect originating in Guatemala. The American response to the Ambassador's proposition indicated that the United States was concerned about this as well. Sevilla Sacasa was told by Deputy Assistant Secretary Thomas C. Mann and Assistant Secretary Edward G. Miller that "...the United States could never condone military action on the part of an American State against one of its neighbours."⁴⁰ This seemed to have been said merely for the record, however, as Mann added, tellingly:

The Ambassador was told, however, that the United States has been concerned with the communist influence in the Guatemalan Government.⁴¹

Nicaragua was not the only nation in Central America fearful for its safety. CIA Director Walter Bedell Smith advised Undersecretary of State David Bruce on 12 December 1952 that the government of El Salvador was so concerned about the strength and insidiousness of Guatemalan Communism that it too was planning an invasion for later in the month, or early January.⁴²

The United States had damned Arévalo with faint praise for his efforts to curb the growth of Communist influence in Guatemala, but it criticised his successor much more sharply, and interpreted the threat from Guatemala to be far greater in the Arbenz years. Even the titles of the two OIR reports dealing with the two Presidents' relationships with the PGT reflected the significant shift in thinking: no longer concerned with mere "Communist Influence" in Guatemala, the State Department examined in April 1953 "Guatemalan Support of Subversion and Communist Objectives."⁴³ This report judged that the influence of the PGT had grown dramatically since 1950, so dramatically that it now controlled organized labour, dominated "the more radical intellectual circles of the country", and had "infiltrated" the Arbenz Administration. There could be no question as to who was responsible for this turn of events: "This has been accomplished through the toleration, protection, and even assistance of the Guatemalan

Government, particularly under President Jacobo Arbenz."⁴⁴ Furthermore, Guatemala had, under Arbenz' lax leadership, become much more than just an inspirational centre for Latin American Communists; it had evolved, in the minds of American diplomats at least, into the Soviet toehold in the Americas:

The solidification of the Communists' internal position has in turn enabled the PGT to increase its aid to Communist and front groups in neighbouring countries and hence to become the organizational centre for subversive activities in the area.⁴⁵

Report #6185 echoed the 1950 analysis that El Salvador had been the most successfully "penetrated" of the Latin American countries, but it warned that "all the other countries covered in this study have also been subjected to Guatemalan Communist interference."⁴⁶ According to the thought patterns of the time, this did not bode well for the security of the United States, already made vulnerable by the ideological battle it was fighting with -- and possibly losing to -- the Soviet Union.

During 1953, the Eisenhower Administration became more and more pre-occupied with "the safeguarding of the hemisphere", and it was convinced that Central America was a center of anti-American subversion. Central American nations had to be made aware that "their own self-interest require[d] an orientation of Latin American policies to [U.S.] objectives." The Western hemisphere had to stand

united against the onslaught of Soviet imperialism.⁴⁷ Mann met with three Costa Ricans (the ex-President, José Figueres, George Hazera of the Costa Rican embassy, and a national, Omar Dango) in late May 1951; they agreed that the integrity of the Western hemisphere had been compromised by Guatemala. Arbenz, they felt, had to be convinced "...of the nature of Communism and how it threatened the sovereignty and well-being of the hemisphere."⁴⁸ The following day, a Joint Chiefs of Staff - Department of State meeting was held and the Guatemalan version of the domino theory was spelled out. General Omar Bradley, questioning the rationale for extending military aid to the other Central American nations was told point blank by John M. Cabot, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs that

We have a serious situation in Guatemala with the Communists infiltrating and influencing the Government. Our first task is to keep this Communist nucleus from spreading and our second task is to eliminate it.⁴⁹

The State Department clearly had its collective mind made up about the situation, but remarks made in the meeting suggest that the JCS were unaware of their supposed vulnerability in Central America. Nevertheless, having 'discovered' it, the military leaders of the Eisenhower Administration felt as threatened as the diplomats did. General Thomas D. White's panicked response to Cabot's statement was "Can't we do something about Guatemala? It

seems to me we shouldn't tolerate a Communist country in Latin America."⁵⁰ It is significant that the JCS were easily persuaded by Cabot's vision of collapse and accepted it as military justification for increased aid to the region. More significant for the history of PBSUCCESS, White's query almost seems to have been a plea to go one step beyond aid.

The United States carefully monitored the response of the other Latin American nations, and took indigenous reflections of the domino theory as justification for its policy for Guatemala. John C. Shillock, First Secretary of the American Embassy in Asunción, Paraguay, circulated to all embassies in the region a paraphrase of an editorial which appeared in the local La Union on 23 July. It read in part that Nicaragua, Honduras, and Costa Rica were "alert to the danger of the spread of this disease."⁵¹ The pace was picking up, fears were intensifying, and the State Department was beginning to feed them directly to the American people. One individual, about to embark upon a lumber export venture in Guatemala, was matter-of-factly advised by Raymond G. Leddy, the Officer in charge of Central American and Panama Affairs, that

The Department of State has observed with concern the growth of Communist influence in Guatemala, where Communist leaders who have achieved some prominence in the political life of that nation have displayed solidarity with the international manifestations of the Communist

conspiracy against the free world.⁵²

Senator Homer Ferguson of Michigan received an impassioned letter from one of his constituents in November 1953:

Why must we, the most powerful nation in the world, allow a foot in the door in this western hemisphere? We sat placidly by when Chamberlain appeased Hitler; again we are constantly doing little deeds which are defensive....⁵³

The letter, from a Dr. Hugh Stalker of Grosse Point, is significant for a number of reasons. Not only does it demonstrate the persistence of the "lessons of Munich" well into the 1950s, but it indicates the existence of this type of thinking outside the corridors of "high diplomacy". The domino theory appeared to be fulfilling its public relations role well. Even more significant, however, was the State Department's response to Stalker's reasoning, for it gave no indication that his analogy was anything but correct. When Senator Ferguson approached the State Department for guidance in answering Stalker's letter, he was told that:

It has been the policy of our Government to bring home to the Government of Guatemala at every opportunity the danger of the course it is pursuing, to its own independence, the security of its neighbours and the unity of this hemisphere.⁵⁴

Even UFCO was concerned about more than its Guatemalan operations. In January 1954, a United Fruit official in Guatemala City relayed to the head office in Boston that the PGT was holding a Congress in order to

determine the logistics for "extend[ing] the radius of action of the Communist Party in Central America and the Caribbean."⁵⁵ A copy of the letter was passed on to the State Department, which had, incidentally, received another piece of homegrown advice, this time from a resident of Kingston, N.Y.. Joseph J. Morgan's letter of 20 February is of interest because of the link its author made between the Guatemalan situation and the developing crisis in Indochina. Having criticised Dulles for his "complacent" reaction to the "onward march of Communism in South America", Mr. Morgan concluded thus:

You do, of course, realize that if it is our business to stop the spread of this scourge in Asia, it is doubly important that we give immediate attention to the red-infested countries to the south of us.⁵⁶

It would be mistaken to conclude from these examples that the planning of foreign policy in general and of Operation PBSUCCESS in particular were driven by public opinion. On the contrary, wooing the public was another element of that strategy, just as it had been in the creation of the Truman Doctrine. Despite the fact that PBSUCCESS was a covert operation, and that the overthrow of Arbenz and installation of Carlos Castillo-Armas as President were supposedly indigenous 'achievements', the United States still wanted the public to approve of these actions. The Eisenhower Administration wanted to maintain,

in this year of the Army-McCarthy hearings, a strong reputation for anti-Communism. Having garnered support for its covert activities, it would presumably have no difficulty maintaining it for its open sorties against the Red Menace.

As June and PBSUCCESS approached, there were more and more public announcements of the threat from Central America. The first of these were made at the Tenth Inter-American Conference in Caracas, Venezuela, in March. The major issue before the foreign ministers of the 21 American states was to determine how any form of Communist activity in one state should be interpreted and how it would be dealt with. The United States already had the answers to these questions, and set about to secure at the Conference a reiteration of the Monroe Doctrine. The Conference opened on 5 March, and by 13 March, John Foster Dulles had the support he required. With Mexico and Argentina abstaining, the states voted to adopt the declaration that:

... the domination or control of the political institutions of any American state by the international Communist movement, extending to this Hemisphere the political system of an extra-continental power, would constitute a threat to the sovereignty and political independence of the American States, endangering the peace of America....⁵⁷

The Declaration, and indeed the entire Conference, had been designed to discredit Guatemala and legitimize the Americans' negative policy towards that nation. When

Guatemala voted against adopting the declaration, that was taken as further proof that it had yielded to the Red tide. Three days after the Declaration of Caracas, Dulles justified it by explaining that it could

... have a profound effect in preserving this hemisphere from the evils and woes that would befall it if any one of our American states became a Soviet Communist puppet. That would be a disaster of incalculable proportions.⁵⁸

Dulles knew all too well what this 'incalculable' disaster would look like: one by one, Guatemala's neighbours would fall. Whether they were overrun by troops from Guatemala, undermined from within, or simply swept along in the reformist tide that might flow from the resurgent ex-banana republic was irrelevant. What mattered was that they would all fall. The United States, the last domino, would finally stand alone.

The characterization of Guatemala as a Communist outpost in the Americas was intensified when, in April of 1954, it received a shipload of arms from Czechoslovakia.⁵⁹ An editorial in the New York Times on 1 June praised Eisenhower for his crusade against Communism's "highly organized campaign of force and fraud, of deceit, subversion and terrorism to conquer the nations still free." Five days later, the Times invoked the Monroe Doctrine to protest the arms shipment.⁶⁰ Smaller voices dissented: the Nation criticized the Eisenhower Administration for creating an

international incident where none really existed. Similarly, it damned the United States' "town bully attitude it tried so hard to hide at Caracas under a camouflage of pan-American 'unity.'"⁶¹

As a result of the arms shipment, the OAS determined to hold a meeting where it would, under the provisions of the Caracas Declaration, decide what action to take against Guatemala. Sydney Gruson, in Mexico City for the New York Times, asserted that the United States already had its mind made up, much as it had in Caracas. It "...want[ed] Communism in Guatemala condemned by the organization as a menace to hemisphere peace."⁶² Dulles subsequently addressed a Rotary International convention in Seattle and presented a sharp image of sequential collapse:

It is my earnest hope and belief that the Organization of American States will be able to help the people of Guatemala to rid themselves of the malignant force which has seized on them.... If they do not succeed, the whole body of the Organization of American States may be corrupted and we shall see in the American continents the same forces which have brought war and captivity and misery to so many hundreds of millions in Europe and Asia.

That is the evil design. I believe it will be thwarted by peaceful, collective processes.⁶³

As the day of the invasion approached, the State Department increased its domino rhetoric. By this time, Eisenhower had already made his famous enunciation of the domino theory as it pertained to Indochina, and on 17 June, the State

Department linked "'the threat of Communist aggression in Europe and the open aggression of the Communists in the far East'" to the Guatemalan situation.⁶⁴ The next day, Guatemala was invaded by a makeshift army under the leadership of Carlos Castillo-Armas, a former Guatemalan Army officer who, immediately preceding PBSUCCESS, was a furniture salesman in Honduras.⁶⁵

With the invasion underway, domino rhetoric increased both in official circles and the media; its new buzzword was "beachhead". Given the fact that it was a covert operation, the United States Government certainly could not undertake an open public relations program as it had for the Truman Doctrine. The press therefore became extremely important in shaping public opinion. Having worked diligently since 1950 at convincing Americans that Guatemala was Communist, the Eisenhower Administration passed the ball to another member of the team and let it run with it. According to the New York Times, Guatemala had "in recent years become the vortex of a mounting pressure in Central America and throughout the American continents." Washington had "for many months ... fear[ed that] the Communists might succeed in taking over Guatemala and using it as a beachhead to infiltrate other Latin American nations and the vital Panama Canal zone."⁶⁶ The United States did, of course, continue to provide the press with ammunition. When, on 20 June, several Latin American states, with the backing of the

U.S., voted to move the Guatemalan issue from the halls of the UN to the OAS, the Soviets vetoed the proposal. American representatives lashed out, accusing the Soviets of trying to establish a foothold in the Western hemisphere.⁶⁷ The Times responded to the Soviet veto with a resoundingly indignant editorial that explained for all those who had not been reading carefully before the implications of Communist successs in Guatemala:

The Guatemalan situation is part of a developing hemispheric situation which directly involves only the twenty-one nations of North and South America....It concerns not only Guatemala, which is now the hot spot, but every other nation in the two continents. If the Communists were to control Guatemala, that little nation would be more than ever a source of infection and danger to all her neighbours.⁶⁸

The United States quickly proceeded to issue a warning to the Soviets to keep out of the Western Hemisphere and hemispheric affairs. In calling for the warning, Senator Lyndon B. Johnson proclaimed, in a typically exaggerated statement, that in addition to Guatemala, the Communists were "seeking to establish a beachhead in the Americas now!" He also said that there was a "pattern for the conquest of the Western Hemisphere." Guatemala represented the advanced stage of that pattern. The text of the warning differed little from Johnson's comments. "[T]he pattern of Communist conquest," it read, "has become manifest."⁶⁹ The Guatemalan issue had gone before the Security Council again

on 25 June, at which point the American Ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, indulged in some hyperbole himself:

There has recently been evidence that international communism, in its lust for world domination, has been seeking to gain control of the political institutions of the American states.⁷⁰

Lodge also noted the possibility of there occurring "a chain of disastrous events" if the Arbenz government were supported at the U.N.⁷¹

Finally, on 28 June, John C. Dreier, the American Representative at the OAS, made a dramatic statement before the OAS Council. Painting with broad strokes, Dreier created a canvas showing the loss of fifteen nations to the Kremlin since 1939. Very effectively, he conveyed that these losses and many other Soviet attempts at aggrandisement were all part of a calculated scheme:

Following World War II, in which millions of men died to free the world from totalitarianism, the forces of Communist imperialism took on a freshly aggressive aspect. The first objectives of this new drive for domination were the countries of eastern Europe and the Balkans. Efforts to overcome Greece and Iran failed....

Communist forces then turned their attention to Asia. Following the fall of China came the stark aggression of the Korean War where once more the united forces of the free world, acting through the United Nations, stemmed the tide of Soviet Communist imperialism.

More recently, we have seen the combination of Communist subversion and political power, backed with weapons from the Communist arsenal, strike deep into Southeast Asia and threaten to engulf

another populous area of the world as it emerges from colonialism.

And now comes the attack on America.⁷²

Part of the significance of Dreier's speech was that it made clear that the United States had only one foreign policy. Happenings overseas, no matter where they occurred, were all to be treated as part of a calculated Soviet plan to tear the West apart limb by limb.

Since domino-thinking had been sustained since 1947 by NSC-68, the Korean War, and the developing tensions in Indochina, it is certainly fair to say that its application to other geographic areas, including one as close to the United States as Central America, was inevitable. But was its application to Central America logical? The United States was not naïve about the socio-economic and political conditions in Latin America. It was fully aware that the poor economic conditions and dictatorial leaderships of men like Jorgé Ubico and Anastasio Somoza provided fertile ground for dissent and reform, often under Marxist leadership. This basic understanding did not, however, lead to logical analyses of the region, or fair and prudent policies towards reformist groups or governments in the countries of Central America.

What has intervened to prevent the formulation of such policies? Revisionist scholars of American diplomatic history like to argue that it was the clash of the

capitalist and communist economic systems, but this is an insufficient explanation. What, for example, of the concept of national security? In the case of Guatemala, the fact remains that the United States was determined to ouster Arbenz for a number of reasons. Some of these were, of course, economic. But there was also an ideological war going on in Guatemala, and the United States was determined that the PGT would not see its influence grow in Central America at the expense of American prestige. The United States knew that its influence was diminishing in Latin America, and felt that it had to gain it back, but it was also concerned that an extension of Communist influence in the Americas would cause its prestige to decrease overseas.

And what of national security? Did the Eisenhower Administration fear a collapse of Central America and, possibly, an attack on the United States? On these points, the United States' extension of the domino theory to Central America seems to have been less than logical. With regard to Central America itself, the two things that the United States feared were that Guatemala's neighbours might be infiltrated by Communist agents or overthrown militarily by Guatemalan troops, and that the Communist ideology might, if allowed to succeed in Guatemala, spread like wildfire to the neighbouring states, especially El Salvador and Honduras, thus triggering off a series of revolutions. These fears were quite similar to those expressed in justification of

the Truman Doctrine, and were equally exaggerated. Nevertheless, if the entire context of the period is taken into consideration, it can be seen that the Eisenhower Administration's application of the domino theory to Central America was not, to them, illogical. NSC-68 demonstrates that the United States felt itself to be more vulnerable after 1950 than it had ever been before. It was safer, therefore to exaggerate, even if that exaggeration meant portraying the Arbenz Administration to be something that it was not.

The Latin American domino theory did not end with Arbenz' exodus and the installation of Castillo-Armas as President of Guatemala. Daniel James constructed a marvellous piece of propaganda later in 1954. Entitled Red Design for the Americas: Guatemalan Prelude, James' book had an ominous opening: "The Battle of the Western hemisphere has begun."⁷³ James examined the nature of Guatemalan Communism -- it was, he felt, a Macist interpretation of Lenin, designed to appeal to the agrarian poor -- but he also asserted the domino theory at every turn:

The Red beachhead which was founded on Guatemalan soil in June 1944 was washed away in the anti-Communist revolution of June 1954, but the Red design for the conquest of the Americas which was designed over the intervening decade survived. Out of the shambles it created in Guatemala, Communism emerged with something more lasting than a beachhead:

an ideology specially adapted to Latin America.⁷⁴

As late as 1957, the Eisenhower administration was still using its success in Guatemala as anti-Communist propaganda. The coup in Guatemala was not proof that the Communist threat in Latin America had been extinguished:

A part of international Communism's master plan is to gain a solid political base in this hemisphere, a base that can be used to extend Communist penetration throughout the new world.⁷⁵

The Eisenhower administration would, within the next two years 'discover' what the Soviet Union's next target was, and who its accomplice would be: Cuba, and Fidel Castro. Having created a prototype policy in 1954, it would, in conjunction with the Kennedy Administration, launch the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion. PBSUCCESS, however, achieved its goal, and the domino theory had served it well. Its next battle was to be its toughest: the last years of the Vietnam war.

CHAPTER THREE
THE UNITED STATES AND VIETNAM, 1949 - 1968:
"DOING ALL WE CAN ...TO ERADICATE THE CANCER"

In his spirited defence of John F. Kennedy's tenure in the White House, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. had little difficulty justifying the President's application of the domino theory to Southeast Asia. Although Schlesinger questioned Dwight D. Eisenhower's wisdom in enunciating the theory and therefore committing the United States to Indochina in 1954, he concluded that

Whether the domino theory was valid in 1954, it had acquired validity seven years later, after the neighbouring governments had staked their own security on the ability of the United States to live up to its pledges to Saigon. Kennedy ... had no choice now but to work within the situation he had inherited.¹

Two years later, in 1967, when his own belief in the psychological domino theory had been cast aside, Schlesinger eloquently, and with precise logic, damned Lyndon B. Johnson for doing exactly what Kennedy had done, namely working within the situation he had inherited:

The rapidity with which reality outstrips our perceptions of reality is an underlying source of our troubles with foreign policy. I do not suggest that, if our perceptions were kept up to date, this would solve all our problems, because many of the great problems of the world are in their nature insolvable. But I am sure that we cannot make much

sense at all in the world as long as we continue to base policy on anachronism. We must be forever vigilant to prevent transient strategies from turning into cherished and permanent verities.²

But Schlesinger's plea for the abandonment of the domino theory was asking a lot of Lyndon Johnson. It demanded that he ignore twenty years of (for the most part, successful) foreign policy and adopt an entirely new *Weltanschauung*.

America's longest war had its roots in nineteenth century imperialism and World War Two. Indochina had been the jewel in the French imperial crown since 1862. Although Japan had occupied Indochina in September 1940, French colonial rule was not dismantled until March 1945, when the Japanese took over the reins of government. In 1941, a resistance to both the French and the Japanese was formed. Founded by Ho Chi Minh, himself a Communist, the Viet Minh was an alliance of nationalist and Communist elements. Upon their defeat in 1945, the Japanese passed authority on to the Viet Minh. Ho formed a provisional government in Hanoi on 29 August, retaining the French puppet emperor of Annam province, Bao Dai, as counsel. He then declared Vietnamese independence on 2 September. Eleven days later, British forces, authorized at the Potsdam Conference to disarm Southern Vietnam, arrived in Saigon, and handed authority back to the French. A bitter and bloody struggle between the nationalists and the French ensued. By December 1945, Ho

conceded that his government had been a failure. "Though five months have passed since we declared independence," he said, "no foreign countries have recognized us." In order to preserve his vision of Vietnam, Ho reached an accord with the French on 6 March 1946, guaranteeing recognition of Vietnam as a Free State within the French Union. But the continuing French assertion of authority in Vietnam resulted in further conflict, and negotiations to finalize the agreement broke down in November 1946. Bao Dai, who had fled Ho's Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1946, returned, and was installed as president. This did nothing to stop the Indochinese War. Ho fought the French until May 1954, when he scored a decisive victory at Dien Bien Phu. In June 1954, the stage was set at Geneva for the second phase of the Vietnam War. After weeks of discussion, it was agreed on 19 June that Vietnam would be divided along the seventeenth parallel. Ho was acknowledged as President of North Vietnam, but he continued to claim authority over the entire nation, and encouraged opposition to the successive régimes in the South.³

When he was presented with the news that Britain was pulling out of Greece in 1947, Truman acted quickly; Eisenhower was equally decisive in 1954 once he became convinced that Guatemala was a Communist beachhead in the Western hemisphere. Although the United States would be quick to identify Indochina as the source of a security

threat, it would not develop a military policy quite so promptly. This delay was due in some part to Truman's reluctance to appear to condone French colonialism, but it was also, especially during the first year of the Eisenhower administration (coincidentally, the final year of the first Indochinese War), the result of domestic politics. Eisenhower had campaigned against the Korean War more than against the Democratic Presidential candidate, Adlai Stevenson, and his conduct during the campaign made it impossible for him to immerse the United States in another Asian war.⁴ The U.S. would only gradually increase its commitment to Vietnam. Although aid and advice were provided from 1950 on and American lives would be lost in the process, direct military intervention would not come until August 1964, after the muddled Gulf of Tonkin incident. What did remain constant in those fifteen years were the decision to contain Ho Chi Minh at the seventeenth parallel and the justification for this containment policy -- the domino theory.

The American reaction to the first Indochinese war had been both realistic and fanciful. On the one hand, Ho's insurgency was interpreted as a broad-based expression of nationalism, and French colonialism was criticised, in some cases implicitly, as in this 1949 OIR report:

The Communists in Indochina are among the

principal leaders of an armed struggle for national independence now being waged against the French, who are seeking to reestablish their prewar control. The Communists participate in a coalition government known as the Vietnam Democratic Republic, which claims sovereignty over the three predominantly Vietnamese-populated provinces of Indochina: Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina. While the Communists are dominant within the leadership, the Vietnam Democratic Republic derives its strength and following from a mass nationalist movement comprising many parties and groups.⁵

The United States was wary of identifying itself with colonialism. The Truman State Department recognized the formation of Bao Dai's government as French colonialism in another guise, but Dean Acheson remarked in 1950 that Bao Dai was the sole alternative to "Commie domination of Indochina."⁶ This concern about the "Commies" and the implications of their success in Indochina led to a less than rational interpretation of the Indochinese War. The United States' recognition of the Viet Minh insurgency as a nationalist movement was made in August 1949; in October, Mao Zedong proclaimed the People's Republic of China. Not surprisingly, the Chinese Revolution precipitated a change in American attitudes. The domino theory was first applied to Indochina in December 1949, in a draft policy paper, NSC-48/1. This document, although not making use of metaphor, noted a potential threat to American security and prestige:

... it is now clear that Southeast Asia is the target of a coordinated offensive

directed by the Kremlin The extension of Communist authority in China represented a grievous political defeat for us; if Southeast Asia is also swept by communism we shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia.⁷

A week later, the Truman administration adopted the principles of NSC-48/1 as policy, including the recommendation that the State Department "scrutinize more closely the development of threats from Communist aggression, direct and indirect" and repel such threats with "political, economic and military assistance and advice where clearly needed."⁸ The fear of Communist expansion thus quickly overrode American distaste for colonialism. Although direct aid was not provided to France until the spring of 1950, the Truman and Eisenhower administrations turned a blind eye to France's diversion of Marshall Plan funds and surplus military equipment to Indochina.⁹ In 1950, U.S. aid to France represented 15% of the total war cost; by 1954, it represented 82%.¹⁰

Why did the United States fear collapse in so distant a region? No matter how much the risks in Greece and Guatemala might have been exaggerated, those nations were at least in close proximity to Western Europe and the United States respectively. Their link to national security was not nearly as tenuous as Southeast Asia's appeared to be.

Eisenhower's famous declaration of 7 April 1954 spelled out a basic consideration of the Southeast Asian domino theory, namely, access to raw materials, an argument which recurred in the 1960s.¹¹ There was also, according to historian John Dower, another important factor: Japan, the "superdomino".¹² NSC-48/1 demonstrated the Truman Administration's concern for Japan:

If Japan, the principal component of a Far Eastern war-making complex, were added to the Stalinist bloc, the South Asian base could become a source of strength capable of shifting the balance of world power to the disadvantage of the United States.¹³

It was not so much the Japanese nation that the United States wanted to protect as its "power potential", which consisted of an "industrious, aggressive population, ...a demonstrated potential for an efficient merchant marine, ... [an] already developed industrial base and [a] strategic position."¹⁴ Demarcating Southeast Asia as an area of strategic sensitivity was not therefore a difficult task. The superdomino made another appearance in April 1950, when the Joint Chiefs of Staff presented the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, James H. Burns, with a strategic assessment of the situation in Southeast Asia. "In light of U.S. strategic concepts," it read, "the integrity of the offshore island chain from Japan to Indochina is of critical strategic importance to the United States."¹⁵

If Harry Truman and his advisers were responsible for

introducing the domino theory to American foreign policy in general, history also finds that it was they who put its specific application to Southeast Asia on a firm footing. The State Department made two important conclusions in February 1950: that the domino theory supplied a valid interpretation of politics and revolution in Southeast Asia, and that the United States was therefore committed to the region. Bao Dai, while not ideal, was the only alternative to "opening] the door to complete Communist domination of Southeast Asia."¹⁶ The United States could either support the French in their war against Ho Chi Minh, or "face the extension of Communism over the remainder of the continental area of Southeast Asia and, possibly, farther westward."¹⁷ This was the conclusion of a report which recommended that the United States provide the French with as much military aid as it could "uniquely" offer, short of troops.¹⁸ At the end of February, the Truman Administration formalised its Indochina policy in NSC-64, which has mistakenly been taken as the original statement of the domino theory.¹⁹ NSC-64 was a brief, repetitious exposition of the theory, significant in part because it linked the Indochina policy with Kennan's containment of European Communism in 1947:

It is recognized that the threat of Communist aggression against Indochina is only one phase of anticipated Communist plans to seize all of Southeast Asia. ...A decision to contain Communist expansion at the border of Indochina must be considered as a part of a wider study

to prevent Communist aggression into other parts of Southeast Asia.²⁰

The paper duly noted that it was "important to United States security interests that all practicable measures be taken to prevent further communist expansion...."²¹

Thus far, then, the Truman administration's consideration of the economic and strategic value of Indochina has been assessed. As with Greece and Guatemala, however, there was an additional concern. On 7 March 1950, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, Livingston T. Merchant, expressed his concern about the psychological effects of a Communist success to the Assistant Secretary, W. Walton Butterworth when he said that Indochina was important to the U.S. because of

The certainty that the prestige of psychological results of another Communist triumph in Asia, following on the heels of China, would be felt beyond the immediate area and could be expected adversely to affect our interests in India, Pakistan and even the Philippines.²²

Clearly, the Truman Administration had laid the groundwork for succeeding administrations to rely on the domino theory in all its ramifications for Southeast Asia.

When Eisenhower assumed the Presidency in January 1953, the French war effort was faltering. Disillusioned with the French inability to deal with and win over ardent Vietnamese nationalists, but at the same time adamant that

Ho Chi Minh fail in his efforts to unite nationalists in the North and South, Eisenhower increased U.S. aid to France in September and lent support to a French strategy which included luring Viet Minh forces to Dien Bien Phu and defeating them in difficult battle conditions. The plan failed miserably. The Viet Minh, under the command of General Vo Nguyen Giap, dug in and isolated the French. A siege ensued; it lasted eight weeks, and the French, who were unsuccessful in obtaining direct military aid from Britain and the United States, were soundly defeated.²³

Dien Bien Phu was a milestone in the history of the domino theory. Eisenhower's metaphor was articulated in the middle of the siege, and in it he expressed what can be seen as an otherwise pragmatic concept's idealism. He lamented that "...you have the possibility that many human beings pass under a dictatorship that is inimical to the free world." Four days later, Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith, asked whether or not the falling domino metaphor was accurate for Southeast Asia, noted the importance of strategic bases and raw materials in the area, but said that

... while they are of enormous importance, the most important thing of all is the possible loss of millions and millions of people who would disappear behind the Iron Curtain. There are enough millions behind the Iron Curtain now. So what's at stake in Indochina? It is the human freedom of the masses of people for all that enormous area of the

world.²⁴

Eisenhower and Smith probably were genuinely distressed at the thought of those millions disappearing behind the Iron Curtain, but their idealism was tempered by their realism. To them, the possibility that the huge population of Southeast Asia could be transformed into a Communist army was, understandably, frightening.

Having witnessed the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, members of the Eisenhower administration put their faith in a proposed collective security organization for Southeast Asia. At his press conference of 12 May 1954, the President made a fumbling attempt to articulate why Indochina was indispensable to the defense of Southeast Asia and how a Southeast Asian version of NATO would keep the dominoes from tumbling:

Again I forget whether it was before this body that I talked about the cork and the bottle. Well, it is very important, and the great idea of setting up an organization is so as to defeat the domino result. When, each standing alone, one falls, it has the effect on the next, and finally the whole row is down. You are trying, through a unifying influence, to build that row of dominoes so they can stand the fall of one, if necessary.²⁵

Soon after the defeat at Dien Bien Phu and the partition of Vietnam, John Foster Dulles oversaw the creation of SEATO, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. The SEATO treaty was concluded on 8 September 1954 with Australia, Britain,

France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, and the U.S. as signatories. The treaty stated that these nations

Desir[ed] to strengthen the fabric of peace and freedom and to uphold the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, and to promote the economic wellbeing and development of all peoples in the area [and]

Intend[ed] to declare publicly and formally their sense of unity, so that any potential aggressor will appreciate that the Parties stand together in the area.²⁶

In its implicit division of the world into two separate spheres and its insistence that the West remain vigilant to the threat to democracy, the rhetoric of SEATO was similar to that employed by Truman in his 1947 speech to Congress. The threat of communism, it implied, had become even more insidious. Not only were these states open to armed attack, but the "inviolability or the integrity of [their] territory or [their] sovereignty or political independence" was open to subversion. SEATO assumed that an attack on or subversion of any one state constituted a threat to the peace and security of all the signatories.²⁷ A protocol declared that Cambodia, Laos and "the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam", although not signatories, were also covered by the treaty.²⁸ SEATO thus became the legal basis for the American intervention in Vietnam. In 1969, a Newsweek article

determined that, after 1954, the domino theory "never really became solidified in government thinking", and that Dulles' creation of and faith in SEATO represented a retreat from Eisenhower's April musings. Newsweek took as evidence of this Dulles' statement that "As nations come together, then the 'domino theory' ... ceases to apply."²⁹ However, the concept of collective security did not, as Newsweek argued, replace the idea of sequential collapse. Collective security and the domino theory were two pieces of the same puzzle: SEATO was a means of preventing an otherwise inevitable collapse of Southeast Asia.

The American public relations campaign around SEATO was exaggerated. It preyed on fears of Soviet expansion and exploited the nation's historical love for and pursuit of liberty. Dulles released a statement on 6 September which declared that

The United States itself has no direct territorial interests in Southeast Asia. Nevertheless we feel a sense of common destiny with those who have in this area their life and being.

We are united by a common danger that stems from international communism and its insatiable ambition. We know that wherever it makes gains, as in Indochina, these gains are looked on, not as final solutions, but as bridgeheads for future gains.³⁰

The treaty and Dulles' statement both clearly reflected the fear that once it gained a foothold in Southeast Asia, Communism would mount an offensive radiating out from

Vietnam, toppling first Laos and Cambodia, then other mainland states, and finally the island states of the Pacific. The effect was not at all unlike that postulated for Central America earlier in the year.

The Eisenhower Administration had crafted a very successful public relations campaign around the domino theory. More than that, however, they believed what they were saying to the American people. Eisenhower knew, just as Truman did in 1947, that he did not have to convert an audience to activism and anti-Communism. What he, like Truman, did have to do was reinforce and sustain that emotion. This was not a difficult task. A sense of national insecurity had guided policymakers since men like Truman and Kennan felt and encouraged it in 1947. Surely if they continued to repeat the maxims that they believed in to the American people and to embellish them whenever it was deemed necessary, support for their policies would be sustained.

The Eisenhower administration retained its interest in Vietnamese affairs. Between 1954 and 1961, it oversaw Ngo Dinh Diem's installation as President of South Vietnam and provided economic and military assistance to the Diem regime in its struggle against the Viet Cong in the second Indochinese war. Into this situation stepped John F. Kennedy, who was not unfamiliar with the history of American

involvement in Vietnam. While serving in the Senate, he had visited Southeast Asia and spoken out against increased American participation there:

I am frankly of the belief that no amount of American military assistance in Indochina can conquer ... 'an enemy of the people' which has the sympathy and covert support of the people ... For the United States to intervene unilaterally and to send troops into the most difficult terrain in the world, with the Chinese able to pour in unlimited manpower, would mean that we would face a situation which would be far more difficult than even that we encountered in Korea.³¹

Like Truman and Eisenhower, Kennedy was wary of the growing American role in Vietnam,³² but he did not doubt the validity of the domino theory, and was not averse to using it while running for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 1960, and later in the White House. Speaking before Congress on 29 February, he argued that America's nuclear arsenal was not capable of deterring Soviet aggression:

In short, it cannot prevent the Communists from gradually nibbling at the fringe of the free world's territory and strength, until our security has been steadily eroded in piecemeal fashion -- each Red advance being too small to justify massive retaliation, with all its risks.³³

Once he had the nomination and was battling Richard Nixon for the Presidency, Kennedy questioned SEATO's measure of success, and proclaimed the need for

... some kind of regional group over Southeast Asia which gives these smaller countries the feeling that, in spite of

their distaste for a military alliance, they will not be left to be picked off one by one at the whim of the Peiping regime.³⁴

Schlesinger was correct to conclude that once he became President, Kennedy was trapped by the policies that had preceded him. And he was trapped by the attitudes of the entire generation to which he belonged, which is why, when shortly before Kennedy's death David Brinkley asked him whether he "had any reason to doubt this so-called 'domino theory'", Kennedy was able to say:

No, I believe it. I believe it. I think that the struggle is close enough. China is so large, looms so high just beyond the frontier, that if South Viet-Nam went, it would not only give them an improved geographic position for a guerilla assault on Malaya but would also give the impression that the wave of the future in Southeast Asia was China and the Communists. So I believe it.³⁵

Kennedy's presidency began with a surge of anti-Communist foreign policy. The day before he took office, he met with Eisenhower, who told him "with considerable emotion" that Southeast Asia must not be allowed to fall to Communism. Eisenhower also indicated that the immediate threat at that point was not South Vietnam, but Laos, where an American-sponsored Right wing government appeared to be endangered by a Communist insurgency.³⁶ Kennedy had also met with the president soon after the election and was advised of a planned invasion of Cuba.³⁷ In April 1961, Kennedy opted to go ahead with Eisenhower's second Latin

American counter-revolution, the invasion at the Bay of Pigs, which failed dismally. This did not alter his belief that there was a Communist conspiracy to dismantle the Western alliances piece by piece, and neither, consequently, did it change his mind about meeting that threat. On 20 April he outlined some of the "useful lessons" of the Bay of Pigs. Kennedy warned against underestimating the tenacity of Communism both in Cuba and around the world; he reiterated the Latin American domino theory, and he adamantly asserted that the United States was fighting a global war, one governed not by nuclear armaments, but rather by "subversion, infiltration, and a host of other tactics steadily advanc[ing], picking off vulnerable areas one by one in situations which do not permit our own armed intervention."³⁸ The President who had run a campaign on the themes of challenge and vigour in foreign policy lent an idiosyncratic tone to the domino theory:

We dare not fail to see the insidious nature of this new and deeper struggle. We dare not fail to grasp the new concepts, the new tools, the new sense of urgency we will need to combat it -- whether in Cuba or South Viet-Nam. ...

The message of Cuba, of Laos, of the rising din of Communist voices in Asia and Latin America -- these messages are the same. The complacent, the self-indulgent, the soft societies are about to be swept away with the debris of history. Only the strong, the industrious, only the determined, only the courageous, only the visionary who determine the real nature of our struggle can possibly survive.³⁹

Kennedy spoke of a "new and deeper" struggle, but he must have known that subversion and infiltration were not in the least novel, not to the Soviet Union and China, and certainly not to the wise men of American foreign policy. His version of the domino theory -- that nations lacking the requisite "vigour" would be swept away by Communism -- illustrated the growing importance of the theory as a public relations tool to maintain support for what was seen as a potentially unpopular policy. In the last six months of 1961, Kennedy struggled to decide whether or not to commit ground troops to Vietnam and was aware that the "loss" of South Vietnam could endanger him at home. In an 11 November 1961 memo, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and Secretary of State Dean Rusk linked the psychological domino theory to the stature of the Kennedy Administration at home, and determined that a reunification of the two Vietnams would

...not only destroy SEATO but would undermine the credibility of American commitments elsewhere. Further, loss of South Vietnam would stimulate bitter domestic controversies in the United States and would be seized upon by extreme elements to divide the country and harass the Administration....⁴⁰

Belief in the domino theory solidified during Kennedy's presidency. Fidel Castro's rise to power and emerging partnership with the Soviet Union, with its presumed implications for the future of the American

continents, was not the only factor contributing to this process. In January 1962, the Joint Chiefs of Staff prepared a memorandum on the strategic importance of Southeast Asia, detailing the specific path they feared a Communist sweep through the region would take. Thailand was pinpointed as the "next major target" of a coordinated offensive that would then move to ensnare a "'pink' Burma and a vacillating Cambodia." The ultimate result would be the collapse of SEATO and the loss of Malaya and Singapore.⁴¹ This document, JCSM/33-62, was excessively concerned with the future of small, peripheral nations. Of what consequence could the political future of a nation like Singapore be to the United States? The Joint Chiefs made it very clear that these nations were valuable only for their military or strategic potential:

Loss of the Southeast Asian Mainland would have an adverse impact on our military strategy and would markedly reduce our ability in limited war by denying us air, land and sea bases, by forcing greater intelligence effort with lesser results, by complicating military lines of communication and by the introduction of more formidable forces in the area.⁴²

They went on to extend the domino effect to Australia and New Zealand, and argued that the Philippines and Japan would "be pressured to assume at best, a neutralist role...." while "India's ability to remain neutral would be jeopardized." Africa would then stand ready to tumble.⁴³

Lest this dramatic scenario fail to illustrate the profound effect that the JCS believed would emanate from Southeast Asia ("a most natural and comparatively soft outlet"), a thumbnail sketch of the world situation was quickly drawn:

... the military and political effort of Communist China in South Vietnam and the political and psychological thrust by the USSR into the Indonesian archipelago are not brushfire tactics nor merely a campaign for control of the mainland area. ... It is, in fact, a planned phase in the communist timetable for world domination. Whereas, control of Cuba has opened for the Sino-Soviet Bloc most ready access to countries of South and Central America, control of Southeast Asia will open access to the remainder of Asia and to Africa and Australia.⁴⁴

During the time that Kennedy was President, then, the domino theory became solidified in foreign policy thinking. It continued to be applied to Latin America, but more importantly, it had become second nature to utilize the theory when discussing American fortunes in Vietnam. Significantly, Kennedy was not just party to the formalisation of the physical domino theory, but the psychological domino theory as well. Elements of this thinking had developed with respect to Greece and Guatemala, but they were never as fully articulated as they were by Kennedy's advisers in the JCS. Consequently, when Lyndon Johnson assumed command of the nation in November 1963, he was presented with a looking glass (however distorted its lens) with which to observe and interpret

political upheaval in the Third World in general, and Vietnam in particular.

In an effort to identify himself with Kennedy, Johnson began by entering the plea, "Let us continue."⁴⁵ As far as Vietnam was concerned, it seems likely that LBJ was intending to follow Kennedy's path of rigid anti-Communism. Johnson was a realist, however, and was not willing to risk the 1964 election over Vietnam. His initial tactic, as Kennedy's had been when he succeeded Eisenhower, was to supplement the assistance that already existed.⁴⁶ Although there was no reason to doubt that Johnson would question the principles of the Vietnam policy -- sent to Southeast Asia on a fact-finding tour after the Bay of Pigs, LBJ had reported that the United States must, "with strength and determination" join the battle against Communism there or "inevitably ... surrender the Pacific and take up defenses on our own shore."⁴⁷ -- the transitional period between Kennedy's and his administration nevertheless saw a reiteration of the domino theory by its most ardent admirers, the JCS. Their Chairman, Maxwell D. Taylor, drafted a memo in January 1964 which repeated the 1962 opinion that neutrality was as potentially destructive to the free world as communism was, and the belief that the psychological effects of South Vietnam's fall ("the first real test of our determination to defeat the communist wars

of liberation formula") would spread to Africa and Latin America. Taylor also noted the physical weakness of nations proximate to Vietnam, such as Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia.⁴⁸

As Kennedy had been, Johnson was asked directly whether or not he believed in the domino theory. His answer to Eric Sevareid is significant not just because of his statement of his firm belief in the theory, but because of the light it shed on its dimensions. Just as Eisenhower had attempted to bring the human factor into play, so too did Johnson:

... I share President Kennedy's view, and I think the whole of Southeast Asia would be involved and that would involve hundreds of millions of people, and I think it's -- it cannot be ignored, we must do everything we can, we must be responsible, we must stay there and help them, and that is what we are going to do.⁴⁹

Like his predecessors, Johnson saw an altruistic aspect of the American involvement in Vietnam. The fact that he chose to discuss this instead of alluding to strategy, territory, and raw materials -- the most significant considerations of the domino theory -- was significant. Johnson was increasingly using the theory as a public relations tool. Such statements were obvious attempts to placate those who would criticize Johnson's foreign policy. At the same time, however, the Administration was willing to indicate what its real motives in Southeast Asia were. "The ultimate goal,"

stated Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, was "... to help maintain free and independent nations which can develop politically, economically, and socially, and which can be responsible members of the world community."⁵⁰

Simultaneously with this came an attempt at historical justification of the American involvement in Vietnam. McNamara's argument was, at best, circular. The United States' goal, he asserted, was a "independent non-Communist Vietnam." It was not a requirement that Vietnam function as "a Western base or as a member of a Western Alliance," but it was crucial that it "be free ... to accept outside assistance as required to maintain its security."⁵¹ Should the United States fail to achieve this goal,

almost all of Southeast Asia will probably fall under Communist dominance (all of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia), accommodate to Communism so as to remove effective U.S. and anti-Communist influence (Burma), or fall under the domination of forces not explicitly Communist but likely then to become so (Indonesia taking over Malaysia).⁵²

McNamara listed as further possible casualties Thailand, the Philippines, India, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan. He then claimed that this chain of events would "probably" have proceeded had the United States not become so "heavily engaged" in Vietnam after 1954 and "especially since 1961." Again he said that Vietnam was "a test case of U.S. capacity to help a nation meet a Communist 'war of

liberation!" and concluded that "only the U.S. presence after 1954 held the South together...."⁵³ One wonders whether or not he realised the irony of his statement, whether or not he recognised the artificial nature of the South's cohesion. In any case, self praise was better than none, and the Johnson Administration had convinced itself that it was following the right path in Vietnam.

The appeal to history continued as the Administration persisted in its efforts to sell its view of Vietnam to Americans. In May 1964, Adlai Stevenson went before the U.N. Security Council to call for frontier patrols to dispel skirmishes on the Cambodia-Vietnam border. Stating that American policy in Vietnam was not anomalous, Stevenson drew a parallel between what was rapidly becoming the most infamous application of the domino theory and its first post-war application, Greece, when he said that the Vietnamese policy was not an anomalous one. He said that when the Greeks were fighting what was perceived to be an insurmountable enemy in 1947, the Americans came to their aid, and that they should now do the same for the Vietnamese.⁵⁴ On the same day, McNamara said that military assistance programs were directed at eleven countries "under the Red shadow", including Greece, Turkey, and South Vietnam. Striving to maintain continuity between current policy and that which was followed at the end of World War II, McNamara pointed out that the "Sino-Soviet bloc" was

"contained" in the North by the Arctic, and to the West by a "revitalized" Western Europe. That revitalisation, achieved through the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan and thereby a reflection of the first postwar application of containment, must now be matched in the "forward defense nations" of the Middle East and Southeast Asia, those nations forming "an arc along which the free world draws its frontline of defense."⁵⁵ On 4 June, LBJ himself stated what he considered the four basic points of the Vietnam policy: that the U.S. keep its word, that the integrity of Southeast Asia be assured, that this should be accomplished without threatening peace, and that the United States commit itself to defending freedom "on every front." Then he sought some justification. This policy, he said, had been followed for ten years, and throughout three administrations.⁵⁶

Although the various branches of the Johnson administration seemed in agreement about the validity of the domino theory, there were a few who felt that it might have been an over-simplification. First among them was the Central Intelligence Agency. The President was told on 9 June 1964 that "no nation in the area would quickly succumb to Communism as a result of the fall of Laos and South Vietnam." The CIA felt sure of this because, as they argued, "any spread which did occur would take time," and in that interval, any number of unanticipated factors might

adversely affect the Communists' position.⁵⁷ In late 1964, the NSC Working Group on Southeast Asia, chaired by William P. Bundy, prepared a paper on "U.S. Objectives and Stakes in South Vietnam and Southeast Asia", which took a sceptical view of the "so-called domino theory." As far as the psychological domino theory was concerned, Bundy's group felt that "Greece and Turkey might be affected to some degree," and that "serious adverse repercussions" were possible in India and Iran.⁵⁸ They were confident, however, that the "faith and resolve" of the NATO nations would not be shaken as long as NATO forces were not deployed in Southeast Asia, and that

In ... the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, either the nature of the Communist threat, or the degree of U.S. commitment, or both, are so radically different than in Southeast Asia that it is difficult to assess the impact.⁵⁹

As long as the United States maintained its current level of support in Southeast Asia, the results would "probably not be too serious." This argument met with a curt reply from the JCS, which did not "share [this] feeling of reassurance."⁶⁰

But Bundy and the NSC were by no means free of the domino theory and the constraints it had placed on strategic analysis. In this same document, they expressed the fear that if Thailand or Malaysia were to fall, then "the rot would be in real danger of spreading all over mainland

Asia."⁶¹ The paper ended on an ambiguous note:

In sum, there are enough "ifs" and enough possibilities of offsetting action ... that it cannot be concluded that the loss of South Vietnam would soon have the toally crippling effect in Southeast Asia and Asia generally that the loss of Berlin would have in Europe. Nonetheless, the loss could be extremely serious, and it *could* be as bad as Berlin, driving us to the progressive loss of other areas....⁶²

Two weeks later, Bundy and Under-Secretary of Defense John McNaughton argued that the "so-called 'domino' theory is oversimplified," but stopped short of a blanket rejection of the paradigm. It would be valid, they argued, only if Communist China entered the fray "in force" and if the United States were "forced out ... in circumstances of military defeat."⁶³ As for what would happen if South Vietnam collapsed without the interference of the Chinese, it did not differ at all from the classic domino theory:

... Communist control of South Vietnam would almost immediately make Laos hard to hold, have Cambodia bending sharply to the Communist side, place great pressure on Thailand (a country which has an historic tendency to make 'peace' with the side that seems to be winning), and embolden Indonesia to increase its pressure on Malaysia.⁶⁴

Not only did policymakers vacillate between rejecting and accepting at face value the assumptions of the domino theory, they also continued to rely on the psychological domino theory. For example, although Bundy had, in the

earlier NSC document, questioned the psychological ramifications of South Vietnam's fall, by 26 November, he and McNaughton noted that "[e]ssentially the loss of South Vietnam to Communist control would be a major blow to our basic policies. U.S. prestige is heavily committed to the maintenance of a non-Communist South Vietnam...."⁶⁵

This ambiguity continued on into 1965. On 3 January, Dean Rusk noted that from the moment that North Vietnam was "organized as a Communist nation", Laos and South Vietnam became pressure points. "Now, this is the nature of the appetite proclaimed from Peiping," he explained. "One doesn't require a 'domino' theory to get at this."⁶⁶ In February, Bundy told reporters that he was "not using what's sometimes called 'the domino theory'" when he explained that the "independence and freedom of Thailand, Cambodia, of Malaysia, and so on" would be difficult to guarantee if South Vietnam came under Communist control. Presumably, neither was he using the psychological domino theory when he feared that other Southeast Asian nations might lose confidence in the United States.⁶⁷ This pattern of behaviour indicated that although policymakers were beginning to analyse the assumptions underlying their policies critically, they were at this point unable or unwilling to disengage totally from such assumptions. Johnson, seeking to justify his escalation of the war in April 1965, reached back into the past for an example:

The central lesson of our time is that the appetite of aggression is never satisfied. To withdraw from one battlefield means only to prepare for the next. We must say in Asia --as we did in Europe-- in the words of the Bible: 'Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.'⁶⁸

George Ball argued in June 1965 that the United States should begin to move away from Vietnam, and that a gradual phase-out would not mean defeat. While Thailand could conceivably totter, Southeast Asia as a whole would not fall. Ball sat back and observed the mess that surrounded him:

It should by now be apparent that we have to a large extent created our own predicament. In our determination to rally support we have tended to give the South Vietnamese struggle an exaggerated and symbolic significance (*Mea Culpa*, since I personally participated in this effort).⁶⁹

Despite such appearances to the contrary, however, the domino theory was still firmly entrenched. William Bundy, for example, rejected Ball's analysis automatically.⁷⁰ In July, Ball advised that the United States cut its losses and get out of South Vietnam; he did not think that this would adversely affect American prestige. Dean Rusk replied that he did not know where the Soviet Union and China would "stay their hand" if they thought the United States was backing out of its commitments, while Henry Cabot Lodge reached back to the past, asking "Can't we see the similarity to our own

indolence at Munich?"⁷¹

It was the psychological domino theory that had become the primary reason for remaining in Vietnam. In March, McNaughton presented McNamara with a breakdown of American aims in South Vietnam: 70% of the effort was to "avoid a humiliating U.S. defeat (to our reputation as a guarantor), 20% was to "keep South Vietnam (and then adjacent) territory from Chinese hands", while only 10% of the effort was devoted to permitting the South Vietnamese to enjoy a "better, freer way of life."⁷²

It seemed that once McNaughton had spelled out the real reasons for remaining in Vietnam, there was little reason to tell the American people anything different. Press conferences and personal appearances on news shows brought forth no lamentations for the people of Southeast Asia, no catalogue of the strategic resources and bases that might be lost. Vietnam was now a matter of American pride, as Dean Rusk explained to ABC's John Scali on 11 July:

Well, suppose that our 41 other allies -- or 42 allies -- should find themselves questioning the validity of the assurance of the United States with respect to their security?

... What would you think if you were West Berliners and you found that our assurance on these matters did not amount to very much?

... Now, this is something that we cannot ignore because this begins to roll things up all over the world if we are not careful here.⁷³

On 28 July 1965, the President himself told the nation that American power was a "very vital shield" for the non-Communist nations which could not themselves resist "the grasping ambition of Asian Communism." He argued that should the United States be defeated in the field, then "no nation [could] ever again have the same confidence in American promise or in American protection." Johnson discussed the lessons of appeasement and reiterated that the United States was the last domino: "...an Asia so threatened by Communist domination would certainly imperil the United States itself."⁷⁴ In February 1966, he used the domino effect to persuade Americans that it was their moral duty to fight in Vietnam.⁷⁵

But Americans were tiring of the war and the rhetoric. Senator William Fulbright, commenting on the "Arrogance of Power" on 5 May 1966, said that he believed the President and his deputies when they told the American people that they were fighting to preserve South Vietnam's right to self-determination, but that he didn't believe the United States could achieve its goal in Vietnam. "We are still acting like boy scouts," he said, "dragging reluctant old ladies across the streets they do not want to cross."⁷⁶ Johnson had ordered the sustained bombing of North Vietnam -- Operation ROLLING THUNDER -- on 24 February 1965, and this had continued on into 1966 without much success. There had

been 15,000 American advisers in Vietnam when Johnson came to office; by the end of 1966, 400,000 ground troops were committed.⁷⁷ Still, the diligent boy scout had trouble convincing the little old lady to cross the street, and observers at home were beginning to think that maybe he should leave her alone. "Teach-ins" to oppose the war had begun in 1965. Fulbright had begun televised hearings into the conduct of Vietnam policy on 8 February 1966, and George F. Kennan told him that containment was an appropriate policy for Europe, but not for Southeast Asia. Demonstrations took place across the nation from 25-27 March, and there was a march on Washington on 15 March. In a March poll, 25% said that the war was a mistake; by November, this had risen to 31%.⁷⁸ The dissent progressed, aided by television reports from the field, demonstrating exactly how harsh and ignoble this war was turning out to be. The surprise of the Tet offensive at the end of January 1968 proved to be the turning point. Tet was certainly no military victory for the Viet Cong, but the fact that they took the Americans completely by surprise --Tet was the Vietnamese New Year, and the Americans were expecting a holiday ceasefire-- proved to many in the anti-war movement that Fulbright and Ball were correct in asserting that the Americans could not win a guerilla war.⁷⁹

But the anti-war movement was more than simply a response to the spiralling commitment -- both human and

financial -- to the government of South Vietnam, and the increasing number of casualties. Newspapers began to question the basis for the war as early as 1965. Following air raids on North Vietnam in early February, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch wrote that while "it may be nationally humiliating to admit it," the United States was risking world war for absolutely no reason. The New York Times had also called for a diplomatic rather than a military settlement. Commenting on the ideological division among the nation's newspapers, Time remarked that

... some experienced journalists seemed to be saying that they did not know the basic reason why the U.S. was in Vietnam. They have been writing about that ever since Harry Truman sent troops into Korea to halt the spread of Communism in Asia.⁸⁰

Time, out of its loyalty to Johnson and its own historic belief in the domino theory and the doctrine of containment, criticised these liberal papers for their lack of understanding. In fact they understood only too well that the policy was based on anachronism; that was why they were turning against Johnson and his war. Also aware of and angered by LBJ's misuse of the past was Walter Lippmann. He commented privately in 1965 that Dean Rusk was "a very intelligent stupid man. ...His reasoning is based on misplaced historical analogies, like what happened in the 1930s or in World War II." Publicly, Lippmann was also on the attack, writing in his "Today and Tomorrow" column that

White House officials totally misunderstood the meaning of revolution and were misrepresenting the Vietnamese crisis.^{e1}

Soon after the liberal criticism and conservative support of the FLAMING DART raids, Commonweal offered an examination of "Vietnam and Reality", criticising what it considered the general "lapse of forceful intelligence and of will in Washington's political offices." Eisenhower had made the commitment to Vietnam too casually, and "with terrible insouciance", Kennedy had tried to solve a century-old Vietnamese crisis. Johnson, therefore was not entirely to blame, but it was up to him now to think logically, and cease to rely on the past.^{e2}

The common cry of those coalescing against the war was that the United States should negotiate its way out of Vietnam. Such a process was honourable, and would not damage American prestige. Time reacted bitterly against such a notion on the grounds that it "leaves out of account the fact that the Communists use negotiations only as a tactic to make further gains." If LBJ allowed the United States to be bullied out of Vietnam, "Americans would only have to make another stand against Asian Communism later, under worse conditions and in less tenable locations."^{e3} In retrospect, it is difficult to imagine what setting could have been worse than the jungles of Southeast Asia. As late as November 1965, eight months after ROLLING THUNDER had begun and a month after the Americans and the Viet Minh

clashed at Ia Drang, Saturday Review defended Johnson's actions as "policy continuity" and praised the President for having "fully recognized the need to avoid the runaway train of consequences that could be set in motion in Indo-China."⁸⁴

In April 1966, Commonweal published an examination of the analogy between Southeast Asia in the 1960s and Europe in the 1930s. Its author, William Pfaff, argued that the analogy was faulty because it misrepresented the situation in Europe in the 1930s.⁸⁵ Two months later, The New Republic observed that "Vietnam has become a chronic disease, debilitating and seemingly incurable."⁸⁶ The article noted Johnson's difficulties at home and abroad; namely, his fear that a pull-out from Vietnam would trigger a decline of national prestige and personal popularity. All of this, it concluded, was the result of ill-conceived policy and an overall senseless situation. The journal went on to bemoan that

... the heart of the tragedy...is that all of us --in Vietnam and here at home-- are sacrificing for a cause that is not worth it. The Viet Cong may be foolish to go on fighting for their country. We are worse than foolish. We are waging a war that is none of our business and which cannot be justified by any moral imperative or threat to our national security.⁸⁷

In February 1967, The New Republic again argued that China, having "all the appearance of being in the throes of a civil

war", could not pose a threat to security and economic interests of the United States.⁸⁸

There were still those periodicals -- Newsweek among them -- which remained in favour of the war. In the 13 February 1967 issue, columnist Kenneth Crawford reacted angrily to Kennan's and former ambassador to the Soviet Union Edward Reischauer's testimony at the Fulbright hearings. Crawford doubted their opinion that the Communist bloc was shattered and could not be reassembled into a monolithic force. He sneered at their recommendation that the United States "'lower the level of violence'" and postulated that if this advice were taken, "there will almost certainly be experts to contend ten years from now, also with pedagogical certitude, that lowering the level of violence was a stupid mistake committed in 1967."⁸⁹ In November 1967, Newsweek's foreign editor, Robert Christopher, acknowledged the domino theory and psychological domino theory, concluding that "...the cost of fighting the war is far smaller than the long-range costs we would incur by a retreat."⁹⁰

Newsweek was out of step with many other newspapers and periodicals, however; by the Fall of 1967, the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, Time-Life, and Saturday Evening Post were all turning towards an anti-war stance. The next to go --an apparently fatal blow for LBJ-- was Walter Cronkite, who on 27 February 1967 told the

American people that the war was not winnable.⁹¹ When the press finally deserted the Vietnam cause, one of the casualties was the domino theory. This rejection was slow in coming, however; the theory had enjoyed twenty years of respectability in both Democratic and Republican Administrations and liberal and conservative sides of the press gallery. Nor was the rejection based on sound reasoning; no-one, after all, had pointed out the fallacies of the Munich analogy when it first surfaced, and no-one had questioned the validity of transferring concepts originally designed for the Near East to Latin America and Southeast Asia. Neither had anyone bothered to point out that the state of the world -- nuclear and bi-polar -- was exceedingly different after World War II from what it had been when Hitler danced on the Munich agreements. The press' rejection of the domino theory in the late 1960s was really due to the fact that Vietnam was turning into a hideous, unwinnable war. As it became less likely that the United States could win the war or leave Southeast Asia with its pride intact, the rationale for the war seemed more anachronistic and far-fetched than ever. Yet its rejection only went so far, and the foreign policy making establishment as a whole continued to base policy on it into the 1970s. Lyndon Johnson, unwilling and unable to redefine the American world view, passed to Richard Nixon a legacy more dangerous than that which he inherited in 1963.

CONCLUSION
THE DEATH OF A DOGMA?

Even after his Presidency had become a casualty of the war in Southeast Asia, Lyndon Johnson was able to write that in the context of Vietnam it had been correct to search in the past "for lessons, for ideas, and for principles."¹ To a certain extent, he was right; a knowledge of history is a key dimension of statesmanship. The decision-maker who is aware of past events and policies is also more fully aware of his own options. While he should not look to the past for laws, models, or solutions, he can acquire from history a sense of direction. However, the history of the domino theory shows that American decision-makers, including Johnson, sought more than simple direction. They often believed that they could pull the answers to the problems of their time from the past. Their actions would be seen by most historians not only as ahistorical, but also as dangerous.

But scholarly opinion is not the driving force behind either broad public opinion or official policy. Ample proof of this lies in Ronald Reagan's 1980 outburst that if the Soviet Union "weren't engaged in this game of dominoes, there wouldn't be any hot spots in the world."² People,

including those entrusted with making a nation's most crucial decisions, have a tendency to believe what they want to believe, or what is easiest to believe. It is becoming increasingly moot, then, to ask whether or not Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and the host of advisers surrounding them were misreading or misusing the past. The history of the domino theory shows us that they were. What we have to understand is *why* they persisted in using the past as they did.

The answer to this question rests first on the assumption, made by the players in the American foreign policy drama, that the United States had definite economic, military, and ideological vulnerabilities overseas. Should its suppliers or markets be threatened by an outside aggressor, should its dominant military position be compromised, or should its democratic ideology lose ground on the ideological battlefield of the world, then the future of the United States, as it had existed for nearly two hundred years, would be imperilled. The role of economics, strategy, and ideology in foreign policy cannot, therefore, be denied. But these national security considerations do not in and of themselves explain the persistence of the domino theory, and neither, as indicated above, does the idea that men sifted through the past searching for appropriate lessons. The domino theory persisted in American foreign policy thinking for twenty years (and more) not

because policymakers were incapable of original analysis, but because they were guided largely by anxieties which often caused them to overlook the total reality of any situation. The civil unrest in Greece followed on the heels of the Soviet Union's post-war expansion in Eastern Europe, and its certain role in fomenting the Azerbaijan crisis. As for Guatemala and the beginnings of the American involvement in Southeast Asia, they were prefaced by the Soviet Union's development of the atomic bomb, and the success of Mao Zedong in China.

State Department staffs were alarmed by these apparent trends, but they were also guarded when it came to public opinion. The United States was, after the Second World War and through the 1950s, strongly anti-Communist, but it was battle-weary; even more so after Korea. A verbal attack on Communism abroad would be well-received; it was less likely that a military attack would be. The domino theory, if repeated, kept public support for foreign policy at an acceptable level. It even, in the case of Vietnam, proved effective enough to allow LBJ to go to war, and for him and Richard Nixon to stay at war until the reality of Vietnam became too harsh. It was not only policymakers and the American public who were on guard; the press was as well, and its fear allowed it to assist the White House in creating an illusion. And although the press, free from the responsibility of running the nation, eventually recognized

Vietnam and the domino theory for the follies that they were, the policymakers with their demands of national security and their too human frailties, did not.

The domino theory did not cease to hold court in 1968 when Lyndon B. Johnson left the White House; nor did it die with the last American to die in Vietnam. Its recent application to Nicaragua and El Salvador may, however, have been its last hurrah. The Cold War, now widely proclaimed to be at an end, was an environment where one player's loss was inevitably the other's gain. Cold War thinking made it inevitable, too, that one loss would turn into a run of losses. The collapse of a bi-polar world and development of a multi-lateral system may very well witness the domino theory's pass from active use.

ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION

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³Demosthenes, First Phillipic, 6-9, trans. J.H. Vince (London: W.H. Heineman, 1930) 74.

⁴Public Papers of the President: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1954 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1960), 383. [Hereafter referred to as PPP: DDE,19--.]

⁵Ross Gregory defines the domino theory in its "broadest and most general meaning" as "nothing more than a chain reaction, a succession of events set in motion by a single, or common, force." Gregory, "The Domino Theory", in Alexander DeConde, ed., Encyclopedia of American Foreign Policy (New York: Scribner's, 1978), 275-280.

⁶This rather clumsy term is used by Dorothy Jeanne Carlson Donnelly to denote loss of land. Donnelly, American Policy in Vietnam, 1949 - 1965: A Perceptual Analysis of the Domino Theory and Enemy Based on the Pentagon Papers. (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1980), 37.

⁷Jonathan Schell thinks that the psychological domino theory was the Johnson Administration's primary justification for escalating the Vietnam War. Schell, The Time of Illusion (New York: Knopf, 1976), 9-10.

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⁹Bernard Brodie, "The Domino Theory" General Military Review 10 (1972): 469.

¹⁰Rocco M. Paone, "The Afro-Asian Ocean Heartland: A Study." Marine Corps Gazette 50:1 (1966): 20-26.

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¹²Thomas G. Paterson, "Historical Memory and Illusive Victory: Vietnam and Central America." Diplomatic History 9:1 (Winter 1988) 95-100; William Appleman Williams, America Confronts a Revolutionary World, 1776-1976 (New York: Morrow, 1976).

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¹⁴Paterson, "Historical Memory"; Stan Persky, America, the Last Domino (Vancouver: New Star, 1984).

¹⁵Les K. Adler and Thomas G. Paterson, "Red Fascism: The Merger of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in the American Image of Totalitarianism, 1930s - 1950s." American Historical Review 75 (1970): 1046 -1064.

¹⁶Gabriel Kolko, Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy, 1945 - 1980 (New York: Pantheon, 1988), 5.

¹⁷Jerome Slater, "Dominos in Central America: Will They Fall? Does It Matter?" International Security 12:2 (Fall, 1987): 107.

¹⁸Callum A. MacDonald's recent analysis of the Korean war argues that the war was part of the United States' global strategy based on NSC-68, the policy paper written in response to the USSR's acquisition of the atomic bomb in 1949. The United States feared that, with atomic capability, the Soviet Union would further aggrandize in a piecemeal fashion. It therefore decided to oppose Communism by military means whenever and wherever it intruded. Korea was the first demonstration of this policy. MacDonald, Korea: The War Before Vietnam (New York: Free Press, 1986): 18-27. While MacDonald's argument is relevant to the Korean war, it does not adequately explain the United States' reluctance to intervene militarily in Vietnam until 1964.

CHAPTER ONE

¹"Warning to Russia", New York Times [hereafter referred to as NYT], 13 March 1947, 26.

²Statement of 13 May 1947. Public Papers of the President: Harry S Truman, 1947 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963), 238. [Hereafter referred to as PPP: HST, 19--.]

³Adler and Paterson, "Red Fascism".

⁴George F. Gallup, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935 - 1971, Volume 1, 1935 - 1948. (New York: Random House, 1972), 639-640.

⁵For an analysis of how the Munich Syndrome impaired the thinking of American diplomats, see Göran Rystad's Prisoners of the Past?

⁶May, "Lessons" of the Past, 50.

⁷Walter Millis, ed., The Forrestal Diaries (New York: Viking, 1951), 127-128.

⁸May, "Lessons" of the Past, 50; Neustadt and May, Thinking in Time, 35 - 36; Harry S Truman, Memcirs: 1946-1952: Years of Trial and Hope (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1956), 333. Truman was applying the Munich Syndrome in this case to the American decision to send troops into Korea in 1950.

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¹²Joseph M. Jones, The Fifteen Weeks (New York: Viking, 1955), 3-13; Walter LaFeber, America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945 - 1980. Fourth edition. (New York: Wiley, 1980), 52.

¹³Text of Truman Doctrine Speech, 12 March 1947. PPP: HST, 1947, 176-180.

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¹⁸Ibid., 54.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 63.

²¹Edward M. Mark, "Allied Relations in Iran, 1941 - 1947: The Origins of a Cold War Crisis." Wisconsin Magazine of History 59:1 (1975): 51.

²²Gary R. Hess, "The Iranian Crisis of 1945 - 46 and the Cold War." Political Science Quarterly 89:1 (1974): 119.

²³Note of 16 August 1943. FRUS, 1943, IV, 377-79.

²⁴FRUS, 1946, VII, 1-5.

²⁵LaFeber, America, Russia, and the Cold War, 36.

²⁶FRUS, 1946, VII, 829.

²⁷Ibid., 840-842.

²⁸Ibid., 841.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰LaFeber, America, Russia, and the Cold War, 37.

³¹Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, 98.

³²Lawrence S. Wittner, American Intervention in Greece, 1943 - 1949 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 2-3; Idem., "The Truman Doctrine and the Defense of Freedom." Diplomatic History 4:2 (1980): 161-162.

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³⁴Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, 98.

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³⁶State Department Daily Staff Summary, 3 January, 15 January, 10 February, 24 February 1947. National Archives [hereafter referred to as NA], Record Group 59. As quoted in LaFeber, America, Russia, and the Cold War, 50. Wittner, American Intervention in Greece, 7.

³⁷Telegram, 15 October 1946. FRUS, 1946, VII, 235-237.

³⁸Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, 99; LaFeber, America, Russia, and the Cold War, 53.

³⁹Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, 99.

⁴⁰Ibid., 102.

⁴¹Ibid., 105.

⁴²Truman, Years of Trial and Hope, 101.

⁴³Gallup, Volume I, 534.

⁴⁴PPP, HST: 1947, 178.

⁴⁵Ibid., 179.

⁴⁶Telegram of 8 January 1947. FRUS, 1947, V, 2.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., 3.

⁴⁹Telegram of 20 January 1947. FRUS, 1947, V, 8-9.

⁵⁰Telegram of 21 January 1947. FRUS, 1947, V, 10.

⁵¹Ethridge to Byrnes, 17 February 1947. FRUS, 1947, V, 23.

⁵²Ibid., 24.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Gallman to Marshall, 19 February 1947. FRUS, 1947, V, 26.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ethridge to Marshall, 17 February 1947. FRUS, 1947, V, 24.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ethridge to Marshall, 21 February 1947. FRUS, 1947, V, 38.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Jones, Fifteen Weeks, 5-7.

⁶³Acheson to Marshall, 24 February 1947. FRUS, 1947, V, 44.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Minutes of meeting of Special Committee to study aid to Grece and Turkey, 24 February 1947. FRUS, 1947, V, 47.

⁶⁶See above, p.26, n.32, and the minutes of Marshall's, Patterson's, and Forrestal's meeting of 26 February 1947. FRUS, 1947, V, 56-7.

⁶⁷Marshall to Congressional Leaders, 27 February 1947. FRUS, 1947, V, 61.

⁶⁸Acheson, Present at the Creation, 219.

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⁷⁵Ernest K. Lindley, "Washington Tides: Significance: The Greatest Crisis Since the War." Newsweek, 10 March 1947, 24.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷"Greece: O Aghelastus." Time, 24 February 1947, 35-39.

⁷⁸"The Rustle of History." Time, 10 March 1947, 17.

⁷⁹"The Beach Heads." Time, 17 March 1947, 19.

⁸⁰"Policy: 'Containment' of Communism." Newsweek 17 March 1947, 27.

⁸¹"The Presidency." Time, 24 March 1947, 17-18; "New World." Ibid., 25; "The Union: America's Date With Destiny." Time, 24 March 1947, 23-24.

⁸²"Confusion Confounded." Newsweek, 31 March 1947, 21-22; "Washington Tides: What Will The Truman Doctrine Cost?" Newsweek, 31 March 1947, 31.

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⁸⁸Henry Wallace, "The Fight For Peace Begins." New Republic, CXVI, 24 March 1947, 12-13.

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⁹⁰"Bewidered Congress Faces World Leadership Decision." NYT 14 March 1947, 2.

⁹¹Policy Planning Staff Paper #8, 18 September 1947, 7. NA, Record Group 59.

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¹Quoted in Alexander DeConde, A History of American Foreign Policy. Volume I: Growth to World Power Third Edition. (New York: Scribner's, 1979), 130, 351-352.

²Reinhold Niebuhr, The Irony of American History (New York: Scribner's, 1952), 3.

³Policy Planning Staff Paper #26. "To Establish U.S. Policy Regarding Anti-Communist Measures Which Could Be Planned and Carried Out Within The Inter-American System." 22 March 1948, 9. NA, Record Group 59.

⁴The two standard accounts of Operation PBSUCCESS are Richard H. Immerman, The CIA in Guatemala: The Foreign Policy of Intervention (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982); and the more popular study by Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1982). Schlesinger and Kinzer examine the coup as an American attempt to protect United Fruit, while Immerman's analysis concentrates on the anti-Communism of PBSUCCESS.

⁵Schlesinger and Kinzer, Bitter Fruit, 65-77; Stephen E. Ambrose, Eisenhower: The President (New York: Touchstone, 1984), 192.

⁶Arévalo's political philosophy was abstract. He defined "spiritual socialism" in terms of what it was not, namely, materialistic. Although he wanted to feed his people and give them the right to vote, he also wanted to "liberat[el] men psychologically and spiritually." Distinguishing his socialism from the broader philosophy, Arévalo said: "'We call this post-war socialism 'spiritual' because in the world as now in Guatemala, there is a fundamental change in human values. The materialistic concept has become a tool in the hands of totalitarian

forces. Communism, fascism, and Nazism have also been socialistic. But that is a socialism which gives food with the left hand while with the right it mutilates the moral and civic values of man.'" Quoted in Schlesinger and Kinzer, Bitter Fruit, 39-40.

⁷Jim Handy, Gift of the Devil: A History of Guatemala (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1984), 95-106.

⁸Long to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, 14 July 1944. FRUS, 1944, VII, 1139.

⁹The most notorious example of this is the United States' 45 year relationship with the Somoza family of Nicaragua. Walter LaFeber examines the phenomenon in Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America. Expanded edition. (New York: Norton, 1984).

¹⁰Immerman, The CIA in Guatemala, 86.

¹¹NSC-68: "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security." 14 April, 1950. FRUS, 1950, I, 237-292.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶LaFeber, America, Russia, and the Cold War, 98.

¹⁷NSC-68, FRUS, 1950, I, 237-292.

¹⁸Handy, Gift of the Devil, 106-110.

¹⁹Cited in Ibid., 111.

²⁰Ibid., 127-131.

²¹Schlesinger and Kinzer, Bitter Fruit, 56-57; Handy, Gift of the Devil, 20.

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²⁷Ibid., 34.

²⁸Ibid., 39.

²⁹Ibid., 33.

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³⁶Ibid., 1075.

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³⁹Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Mann to Dulles, 3 October 1952. FRUS, 1952-1954, IV, 1042.

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⁴²Smith to Bruce, 12 December 1952. FRUS, 1952-1954, IV, 1056.

⁴³Department of State, Office of Intelligence Research. Intelligence Report #6185: "Guatemalan Support of Subversion and Communist Objectives (1950-1953)." 30 October 1953. NA, Record Group 59.

⁴⁴Ibid., ii.

⁴⁵Ibid.

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⁴⁷NSC-144/1 "United States Objectives and Courses of Action with Respect to Latin America." 18 March 1953. FRUS, 1952-1954, IV, 7-9.

⁴⁸Mann, Memo of conversation with Figueres, Hazera, and Dango, 21 May 1953. Central Decimal File of the Department of State, NA 714.001/5-2153 [Hereafter referred to as NA 714.001/...], 2.

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⁵³Stalker to Ferguson, 14 November 1953, NA 714.001/11-1453.

⁵⁴Assistant Secretary of State Thruston B. Morton to Ferguson, 25 November 1953. NA 714.001/11-1853.

⁵⁵A.L. Bump to K.H. Raymond, 21 January 1954. NA 714.001/1-2654.

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