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The Domino Logic of the darkest moment: The fall of Singapore, the Atlantic Echo Chamber, and 'Chinese Penetration' in US Cold War Policy toward Southeast Asia

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The Domino Logic of the Darkest Moment

The Fall of Singapore, the Atlantic Echo Chamber, and 'Chinese Penetration' in U.S. Cold War Policy toward Southeast Asia

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Abstract

This essay argues that Anglo-American memories of Japan's victory in Singapore in 1942, which British Prime Minister Winston Churchill labeled Britain's "darkest moment" in World War II, soon would underpin the domino logic within U.S. Cold War strategy. For both American and British policymakers, Japan's war machine had fused together in interconnected insecurity the bastions of Euro-American colonial power. In Southeast Asia, it had imposed the condition that one state's vulnerabilities impinged upon the stability of its neighbor. This vision of Southeast Asia's interconnected insecurity was central to the domino logic within U.S. Cold War policy. U.S. policymakers' preoccupation with containing communism in Vietnam arose significantly from how Japan had torn into Southeast Asia from Indochina. After World War II, U.S. and British policymakers perceived Southeast Asian insecurity through both the prism of Japanese imperialism and their fears of an older "Yellow Peril"—China and Southeast Asia's Chinese diaspora. Indeed, U.S. and British officials anticipated, as well as echoed and confirmed, each other's suspicions that China and its diaspora would collaborate to reprise Japan's campaign.

Keywords

domino theory – Chinese diaspora – Japanese imperialism – Anglo-American Cold War policy – race and empire – colonial order – Chinese Communists

At midnight on 8 December 1941, the 25th Imperial Japanese Army shelled the northern coast of British Malaya to commence its invasion of the colony. Two hours later, at dawn on the day of "infamy," Japan attacked U.S. military

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installations at Pearl Harbor and in the Philippines to immobilize the U.S. Fleet in the Eastern Pacific.[1] With that accomplished, Japan could push freely southward to Singapore.[2] That same day, Japanese bombers struck Singapore, the island that—for its $400 million naval and air bases—British strategists had called the Empire's "impregnable fortress" in East Asia.[3] Over the next three days, Japan's forces would hit U.S. military bases on Midway and in the Philippines, occupy Guam, and sink the 35,000-ton British battleship *Prince of Wales* and the battle cruiser *Repulse* just off the Malay peninsula.[4] Japanese tanks plowed through the Malayan jungles, joined by troops deploying from occupied bases and airfields in French Indochina and Thailand.[5] As British and Australian forces retreated, Japanese engineers and infantrymen raced on bicycles down Malaya's highways toward Singapore.[6] With alarm, the *New York*

For their invaluable help and encouragement with this article, the author thanks his colleagues and advisors in the Department of History at Northwestern University, as well as readers at the Cold War History Research Seminar that the International History Department of the London School of Economics and Political Science organized.

1 Frank L. Kluckhohn, "Guam Bombed; Army Ship is Sunk," *New York Times* [hereafter *NY Times*], 8 December 1941, p. 1; "U.S. and Japs at War," *Chicago Daily Tribune* [hereafter *Chicago Tribune*], 8 December 1941, 1; John Burton, *Fortnight of Infamy: The Collapse of Allied Airpower West of Pearl Harbor* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Publishing, 2006), 91, 324 n4. John Burton states that in 1941, Hawaiian time was thirty minutes behind its current setting. Thus, midnight on 8 December 1941 for Malaya and Singapore would have been 5:30 a.m. on 7 December in Hawaii. Japan attacked Pearl Harbor at 7:55 a.m., Hawaii time.

2 "Drive on Singapore," *NY Times*, 20 December 1941, p. C18.

3 Brian P. Farrell, "Bitter Harvest: The Defense and Fall of Singapore" in Malcolm H. Murfett, John N. Miksic, Brian P. Farrell, Chiang Ming Shun, eds., *Between Two Oceans: A Military History of Singapore from First Settlement to Final British Withdrawal* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1999), 198; See, for example, W. David McIntyre, "The Strategic Significance of Singapore, 1917–1942: The Naval Base and the Commonwealth," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 10, no. 1 (March 1969): 69–94; Ian Hamill, "Winston Churchill and the Singapore Naval Base, 1924–1929: A Gigantic Excuse for Building Up Armaments," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 11, no. 2 (September 1980): 277–86.

4 Hanson W. Baldwin, "Japan's War Pattern," *NY Times*, 9 December 1941, p. 20; "Japanese Gain Quick Successes in Far-Flung War of the Pacific," *NY Times*, 21 December 1941, p. E4; "Bomb Hits Claimed," *NY Times*, 10 December 1941, p. 1; James MacDonald, "Blow Staggers London," *NY Times* 11 December 1941, pp. 1, 10.

5 F. Tillman Durdin, "Tokyo Tanks Roll in Malay Jungle," *NY Times*, 13 December 1941, p. 1.

6 Memorandum, "Report on the Fall of Singapore," 25 April 1942, 3, CAB 66/24/7, United Kingdom National Archives [hereafter UKNA], Kew Gardens, London, England; Hanson W. Baldwin, "The Japanese in Malaya," *NY Times*, 14 January 1942, p. 4; "The International Situation," *NY Times*, 30 December 1941, p. 1; Christopher Bayly and Tim Harper, *Forgotten Armies: Britain's Asian Empire and the War with Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2005), 116.

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Times reported that Japanese forces had advanced over three hundred miles into Malaya in three weeks, a "penetration" both deep and "unbelievably rapid."[7]

By 15 February 1942, the *New York Times* recorded British Prime Minister Winston Churchill bemoaning the fall of Singapore "under the shadow of a heavy and far-reaching military defeat"—he and leading U.S. officials believed this to be "the darkest moment of the war."[8] As though in response, Japanese leaders renamed Singapore *Shonan*, the "Light of the South," and announced it was the "center [of] the southern part of [Japan's] East Asia sphere."[9] With control of mainland Southeast Asia, Japan turned its military offensive against the Dutch colonies of Sumatra and Java, enclosing both within its pincers.[10] By May, the Japanese had fully seized the Philippines from the United States and threatened Australia.[11]

From this "darkest moment" of the Pacific War, this article will explain, emerged the underpinnings of U.S. policy toward Southeast Asia through the 1970s. Japan's march through Southeast Asia established crucial antecedents of the domino logic, entwining race with both the U.S. struggle for ascendancy in the region and the threat communism posed to the colonial order. At base, Japanese imperialism had treated spectators and sufferers to a bloody preview of how Asian communism, pouring out of a new China, might bring Southeast Asia under its command. In the shared memory of U.S. and British policymakers, Japan's war machine had fused together in interconnected insecurity the bastions of white power; it had imposed upon Southeast Asia the condition that one state's vulnerabilities impinged upon the stability of its neighbor. But after Japan became an ally of the United States following World War II, China instead slipped into the skin of the Yellow Peril, ensuring that the new struggle in Southeast Asia reprised what historian John W. Dower has described as a Pacific conflict between Asiatic and white empires.[12]

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7 Hanson W. Baldwin, "Three Weeks in the Pacific," *NY Times*, 29 December 1941, p. 4.

8 Robert P. Post, "Premier is Somber: Calls Singapore Military Disaster" and James B. Reston, "Washington Sees Dire Blow in the East," *NY Times*, 16 Feb 1942, p. 1.

9 "Japanese Rename Singapore Shonan," *NY Times*, 18 February 1942, p. 4; "Japanese Troops Go on Parade in 'Shonan' Today," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 February 1942, p. 4. Historian John W. Dower translates "Shonan" as "Radiant South" in *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War*, (New York: Pantheon, 1986), p. 213.

10 "Japanese Pour Ashore" and "Singapore to Sumatra," *NY Times*, 16 February 1942, pp. 2, 16; "Japanese Closing Pincers on Java," *NY Times*, 18 February 1942, p. 4.

11 Larry Rue, "Shall We Save Burma or Java? British Problem. Danger to Australia and China Admitted," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 February 1942, p. 3; "Battles in Pacific Believed Nearing," *NY Times*, 2 May 1942, p. 4; Alexander D. Noyes, "Market Falls on Corregidor Surrender," *NY Times*, 11 May 1942, p. 23.

12 Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 308–11.

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As the Chinese Revolution began to crest in 1949, Secretary of State Dean G. Acheson submitted a report to the National Security Council (NSC) stating that the Chinese Communists would leverage the pervasive "anti-white Asiatic zenophobia [*sic*]" in Southeast Asia and marshal millions of agents in the region—the Chinese diaspora—to subvert Western colonialism from within.[13] In explaining to U.S. policymakers the challenges that the United States faced in Southeast Asia, Acheson set the terms for U.S. Cold War policy in that region, terms that alluded to Japan's sweeping but short-lived supremacy in the Western Pacific. Acheson's report, titled "NSC-51: U.S. policy toward Southeast Asia," presented what historian Fredrik Logevall considers an early version of the domino theory.[14] The rudimentary domino logic had long been in play within U.S. and British strategic visions of Southeast Asia when in April 1954 President Dwight D. Eisenhower would express in the domino imagery his own idiosyncratic vision of the region's interconnected insecurity.

Given the significance of the domino theory in history of U.S. foreign relations, it is surprising that historical studies of the theory's origins remain few and dated. Frank Ninkovich's *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* constitutes the one historical monograph dedicated to the subject.[15] At twenty-years old, Ninkovich's study is also the most recent work on the subject. He contends that since American leaders "psychologically defined" the Cold War as "an exercise in maintaining credibility and world opinion," senior U.S. policymakers thought it was imperative to resist any aggressor's expansionist tendencies or else risk their nation losing international legitimacy and global influence. The domino principle, Ninkovich argues, originated exclusively within the United States early in the 20th Century, when President Woodrow Wilson attempted to orient the nation toward an active, internationalist role in shaping global politics.[16]

Ninkovich is persuasive for the most part. But, like many historians, as well as political scientists, he has sought the sources of the domino logic far from the fraught history of Southeast Asia in the early 20th Century, distant from the

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13 Dean Acheson, "National Security Council [NSC] 51: U.S. Policy Toward Southeast Asia," 1 July 1949, *Digital National Security Archive* [hereafter DNSA], 2, 4–5; Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Color Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4–6; Dower, *War Without Mercy*, p. 7; NSC-51, pp. 2, 4–5.

14 Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012), 223.

15 Frank Ninkovich, *Modernity and Power: A History of the Domino Theory in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

16 Ibid., pp. 59–60, 65, 68, 192–3, 272, 276.

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very arena to which Eisenhower would apply for the first time publicly the image of falling dominoes. Indeed, scholars have suggested that U.S. officials imposed the domino principle upon Southeast Asia having derived it from the "principal lesson of Munich" before World War II. After all, they emphasize, Anglo-American fears that Communist aggression against Greece and Turkey in 1946 would "infect Iran and Africa" and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin's incorporation of Eastern Europe into the Soviet orbit from 1944 through 1948 all were developments in Europe that predated the Communist triumph in China and North Korea's army invading South Korea.[17] Such historical episodes implied that just one conquest never could sate the appetite of an aggressor, who, unless contained, inevitably would expand into contiguous areas.[18] These insights exude explanatory power because they seemed applicable to virtually all situations where the United States intervened during the Cold War.

Yet surely the last U.S. war in Southeast Asia shaped U.S. policymakers' Cold War visions of the region at least as much as the precedents of Nazi and Soviet aggrandizement, if not more. This article demonstrates, however, that U.S. policymakers instinctively mined their own vivid memories of Japan's recent conquest of Southeast Asia to divine the patterns of Chinese imperialism in the region. American memories of the Japanese Yellow Peril's string of victories over the colonial powers animated the domino logic in U.S. policy and, crucially, its undeniable racial character, which all major studies of the domino theory have left unexamined. The British played a significant role as well, for U.S. officials consistently discussed with their counterparts their ominous

17 Andrew J. Rotter, *The Path To Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1987), 119–20. Charles S. Taber, Jerome Slater, and the late Betty Glad studied the domino theory as political scientists, producing a number of important studies. Betty Glad and Charles S. Taber, "Images, Learning, and the Decision to Use Force: The Domino Theory of the United States," in Betty Glad, ed., *The Psychological Dimensions of War* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), 58–59; Jerome Slater, "The Domino Theory and International Politics: The Case of Vietnam," *Security Studies* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1993/94): 188–89. For suggestions that U.S. policymakers remained sanguine about China's fall to the Communists and instead preoccupied with Soviet advancements in Europe after World War II, see Douglas J. MacDonald, "The Truman Administration and Global Responsibilities: The Birth of the Falling Domino Principle," in Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder, eds., *Dominoes and Bandwagons: Strategic Beliefs and Great Power Competition in the Eurasian Rimland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 112–44. For another political scientist's analysis of the manner in which analogies such as preventing "another Munich" prefigured and shaped U.S. policy toward Vietnam, see Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

18 Rotter, *Path To Vietnam*, p. 120.

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predictions of Chinese expansionism, learning with more dread than satisfaction that their British allies harbored similar thoughts given their experiences with the mostly Chinese guerrilla fighters of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). The allies would reaffirm mutually each other's visions until they acquired the ring of truth. During 1950, in frequent meetings between U.S. officials visiting Southeast Asia and British colonial authorities in Malaya and Singapore, an embryonic domino logic specific to the states of Southeast Asia congealed rapidly. As a result, U.S. leaders formulated strategy for the region in the early Cold War in fear of the second coming of the "darkest moment" that the Allies had experienced during World War II.

In what the Allies assumed about Japanese designs on Singapore, in the stakes they had placed on defending the island, and among the ruins of the white empires in Southeast Asia were the building blocks of the domino logic. Throughout 1941, as Japanese troops entered Indochina (by agreement with Vichy France), the Allies persuaded themselves that Japan planned to capture Singapore. On 4 January 1941, U.S. officials in Bangkok informed Secretary of State Cordell Hull that Japan would use Thailand as a "base for operations against Singapore."[19] Days later, U.S. Ambassador to Japan Joseph C. Grew told Hull that Britain read Japanese operations in Indochina as a "serious threat to Malaya and Singapore." In February, Grew again sent word to Hull that an attack on Singapore was integral to Japan's southward advance, explaining how this "strategically essential base" was "fundamental" to the "immediate defense" of the British Empire.[20] Churchill himself wrote to U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt that Japan desired Singapore.[21] Over the following months, repetition hardened these predictions into truth. The Dutch government-in-exile warned its allies in August that Japan aimed at Singapore, the most "desirable springboard" for a "thrust" at the East Indies.[22] In November, Britain's ambassador to the United States wrote to the State Department that he expected Japan to invade Thailand soon, encroach on the Malay frontier, and level an "obvious threat" at Singapore.[23]

19 Minister in Thailand (Hugh Gladney Grant) to the Secretary of State, 4 January 1941, *Foreign Relations of the United States* [hereafter *FRUS* with appropriate year], *1941, The Far East* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1956), 5: 1.

20 Ambassador in Japan (Joseph C. Grew) to Secretary of State, 9 January 1941, ibid., pp. 8–9; Ambassador in Japan to the Secretary of State, 7 February 1941, ibid., p. 63.

21 British Prime Minister (Winston Churchill) Letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 16 February 1941, ibid., p. 79.

22 Memorandum of Conversation, Minister to the Netherlands Government in Exile to Department of State, 6 August 1941, ibid., p. 261.

23 British Embassy Note to the U.S. Department of State, 30 November 1941, ibid., p. 360.

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Singapore's bloated significance to Allied strategy produced such perceptions. As Lauchlin Currie, one of Roosevelt's closest advisors, insisted in April 1941, Singapore was "key to the Indian Ocean, Australasia and Oceania ... indispensable to the continuation of Britain's war effort [as well as] Japan's dominance of the East." He counseled the president that the "defense of Singapore should be a cardinal feature of our strategy." And with respect to the recommendations he heard from Currie for the "best defense of Singapore," Roosevelt learned the United States could "effectively tie up"—in a word, contain—Japan by "attacking Japanese shipping and airdromes in Indo-China."[24] Even before the Japanese invaded Malaya, the Western allies had come to treat Singapore as a symbol of the interconnected security of the colonial order, as the "keystone" of Anglo-American strategy in the "Eastern Theatre."[25] Within the U.S. fixations with Singapore during World War II lay the seeds of its future preoccupation with Vietnam and the containment of communism in Southeast Asia.

American journalists also inflated the stakes of defending Singapore. From December 1941 until Singapore fell in February, newsmen claimed repeatedly that British and U.S. military planners considered the island Japan's "key objective."[26] They too named Singapore the "gateway to the Far East," the Indian Ocean, India itself, the Dutch East Indies, and Australia.[27] Citing sources in the Anglo-American high command, U.S. journalists reported *ad nauseam* that Singapore was the "keystone of the strategic arch of the democracies of the Far

24 Lauchlin Currie Letter to Roosevelt, 25 April 1941, *FRUS, 1941, The British Commonwealth; the Near East and Africa* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1959), 4: 168–69.

25 Memorandum, 24 December 1941, Annex 1 to ABC-4 and JCCSs-1: Washington War Conference, American-British Strategy, 5, compiled volume, "Arcadia," box 1, Combined Chiefs of Staff Conference Proceedings, 1941–5, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library (hereafter DDEL), Abilene, KS.

26 F. Tillman Durdin, "Foe Seeks to Ring Singapore; Plan to Take it Intact Seen," *NY Times*, 28 December 1941, p. 1.

27 "British Fall Back in Malaya Despite Australians' Attacks" and "Malaya Line Sags," *NY Times*, 30 January 1942, "Drive on Singapore," *NY Times*, 20 December 1941, p. 1; "Australia Fears Jap Drive," *Chicago Tribune*, 16 February 1942, p. 1; "The Meaning of Disasters," *Time* 39, no. 8 (23 February 1942), 20. The Joint Chiefs of the British and American military planned to "prevent further Japanese penetration of the Southwestern Pacific Theater" by "establish[ing] security of essential land, air and sea communication" including "approaches to Singapore ... through the Dutch East Indies, to the Philippines." See Letter, 24 December 1941, Annex 1 to JCCSs-4: Proposed Draft of Instructions to the Supreme Commander, Southwestern Pacific Theater, 1–2, compiled volume, "Arcadia," box 1, Combined Chiefs of Staff Conference Proceedings, 1941–5, DDEL.

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East," the "keystone of the defense structure of the United Nations in the Southwestern Pacific," and the "keystone of all Allied plans for the Pacific War."[28] Few American newsmen ventured that losing Singapore fell "far short of determining ultimate control of the Orient."[29] On the front pages of papers such as the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *New York Times*, the story of Southeast Asia's capitulation—its interconnected security—warped around Singapore's fate. Well into January 1942, most U.S. newspapers continued to call the island the "Gibraltar of the Pacific" or "Bastion of Far East."[30]

These characterizations of Singapore were not new. A 1938 American-made film travelogue called Singapore the "most strategic point of the British Empire," for it lay at the "crossroads of India and Australia, South Africa and China." The film insisted that Singapore, as the "military base and home of the combined British Far Eastern Fleet," was "rightly ... the Gibraltar of the East." In a transparent retort to Japanese incursions into China at the time, as well the distant rumblings of coming war in Europe, the film acclaimed Britain's military might. It mentioned the "regular troops composed of European, Indian and Malay units" garrisoned in Singapore, and dwelled conspicuously long and without narration upon ranks and ranks of marching Indian soldiers before asserting that Britain owned the "finest and most efficient air force in the Far East" and airdromes "unrivalled in the Orient."[31] These taunts at Japan in fact betrayed American anxiety about the power of the Japanese forces, inscribing Singapore with vain hope that Britain could repel the Yellow Peril.

After Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, British officials also repeatedly assured other Western nations that the island was "virtually unassailable."[32] They bragged that Singapore's harbor was large enough to shelter the combined navies of the United States and Britain and that its 18-inch guns

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28 Hanson W. Baldwin, "Japan's War Pattern," *NY Times*, 9 December 1941, p. 20; Hanson W. Baldwin, "Defeat at Singapore," *NY Times*, 12 February 1942, p. 4; "Question Over Singapore," *LA Times*, 12 February 1942, p. A4.

29 "Editorial: The Battle of Singapore," *LA Times*, 11 February 1942, p. A4.

30 "Singapore Falls to Japs," *LA Times*, 16 February 1942, p. 1; "Question Over Singapore," *LA Times*, 12 February 1942, p. 4A; "Singapore: Key to the Pacific," *NY Times*, 4 January 1942, p. RP1; "Britain's Fleet Secretly Built Up in Far East, Many Powerful Ships Face the Japs," *Chicago Tribune*, 8 December 1941, p. 18.

31 Andre De La Varre, *Singapore—Crossroads of the East*, 1938, The Travel Film Archive, http://www.travelfilmarchive.com/item.php?id=10982&clip=n&num=10&startrow=0&keywords=Singapore (accessed 27 April 2013).

32 Hanson W. Baldwin, "Defeat at Singapore," *NY Times*, 12 February 1942, p. 4; "Japan's War Pattern," *NY Times*, 9 Dec 1941, p. 20; Paul Gordon Lauren, *Power and Prejudice: The Politics and Diplomacy of Racial Discrimination* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), 131–32.

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"outranged anything at sea."[33] Earlier that year, Britain's Ministry of Information even had sponsored a film British Movietone News produced titled *Alert in the East* that lavished cloying praise upon the "first class naval and air base[s]" of Singapore. With boasts soon soaked in irony, the film placed the island "stronghold" at the "strategic center" of the Empire, asserting that its military installations ensured the safety of all Britain's colonial possessions. The film's narrator proclaimed that Singapore's bases allowed India to remain "undistracted by self-defense," so safe that Britain could spirit India's "magnificent fighting men" to every other corner of the Empire. And this Empire operated on a gigantic scale. The film enumerated its far-flung possessions tied to Singapore's security guarantee, superimposing their names—Kenya, Egypt, Hong Kong, Fiji, Aden and Australia—upon footage of numerous deploying Indian and British troops. For Australian officers in Darwin, the sphere of security Singapore projected allowed their peaceful relaxation on a patio under a thatched roof, the leisurely reading of newspapers, and the drinking of tea without a care for the unnamed threat "which may arise in the Far East."[34] Intended as much for Britain's rivals and allies as its own imperial subjects, *Alert in the East* seemed contrived to assert that the British colossus astride the earth remained all-powerful. For the Allies it seemed ordained that in Singapore, white imperialism—with Britain its great champion—must make a fateful stand against Japan.

Not to be outdone, *Time* magazine sexualized Singapore's strategic importance. A week after Britain surrendered Singapore it designated the island the "key" that unlocked Britain's "seraglio" of colonies. *Time* framed Japan as a male sexual predator, whose "hot hand" pried the "key" from Britain's dead fingers, casting his lascivious "gleaming eye" upon Britain's defenseless feminized colonies. *Time*'s writers left no mystery as to the rapist's lustful intent, for he "ogled bejeweled India ... peeped up the rippling skirts of the Indian Ocean ... [and] winked at little Madagascar."[35] *Time* may have distinguished Japan from the rest of a feminized Orient, endowed it with masculinity enough to defeat the (presumably male) protector of India, but it still inscribed the Japanese man with animalistic urges to dehumanize him. In this *Time* was not unique. In his study *War without Mercy*, Dower has shown that jingoism was par for the course in numerous U.S. publications and government propaganda during

33 "Drive on Singapore," *NY Times*, 20 December 1941, p. C18.

34 Raymond Perrin (ed.), *Alert in the East*, 1941, British Movietone News, Ministry of Information, Great Britain, Colonial Film, http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/2467 (accessed 30 April 2013).

35 "Japs Eye Indies and India," *Time* 39, no. 8 (23 February 1942), p. 22.

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World War II. More to the point, *Time* too approached Singapore's fate alive to interconnectedness of Britain's empire.

By mid-1942, Japan's burgeoning East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere had strung Southeast Asia from Indochina to the Dutch East Indies in permanent interconnected insecurity. Violating sovereign boundaries once presumed secure, and routing from north to south the armies charged with fortifying these lines scrawled upon maps, Japan had demonstrated that the weakness of any state in the region undermined the security of its neighbor. Worse, strategic battlefronts drawn by the Western nations in the region proved all but flimsy. When Japanese forces occupied Java, what the *New York Times* called the "final citadel of Dutch resistance," they already had run roughshod over the "Malay barrier," which was that "line Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java and North Australia [*sic*]" which British and U.S. military chiefs had chosen as their "basic defensive position ... to oppose the Japanese southward advance."[36] From there, waters were forded easily. Once Japan conquered Indonesia and the Philippines, what Eisenhower later called the Allies' "island defensive chain" could be "turn[ed] ... southward ... to threaten Australia and New Zealand."[37] The Yellow Peril now was poised to strike Britain's white settler colonies.[38]

American newsmen during World War II also foreshadowed to a fault the subsequent Cold War anxieties of U.S. policymakers regarding Indochina and Thailand. They decried the susceptibility of both to Japanese aggression. They deplored how Indochina had become a "springboard for further adventure" against Thailand and the British Empire.[39] And they criticized "weak Thailand's" failure to resist the Japanese army, how it had collaborated with Japan, readying its southern airfields for Japanese troop insertions.[40] In effect, Southeast Asia already resembled a row of dominoes in December 1941. After Indochina

36 Hanson W. Baldwin, "Defeat at Singapore," *NY Times*, 12 February 1942, p. 4; "Java in Danger," *The Economist*, no. 5139, 21 February 1942, p. 248; United States—British Chiefs of Staff Report, 31 December 1941, Annex 2 to JCCSs-7: "Supporting Measures for the Southwest Pacific (the Far East Area and Adjacent Regions) until Establishment of Unified Command," compiled volume, "Arcadia," box 1, Combined Chiefs of Staff Conference Proceedings, 1941–5, DDEL.

37 Dwight D. Eisenhower, Presidential Press Conference, 7 April 1954, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10202 (accessed 16 April 2012).

38 Larry Rue, "Shall We Save Burma or Java? British Problem. Danger to Australia and China Admitted," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 February 1942, p. 3.

39 "Japan Challenged," 7 December 1941, *NY Times*, p. E1; "Editorial: Question Over Singapore," *LA Times*, 12 February 1942, p. A4.

40 F. Tillman Durdin, "Tokyo Tanks Roll in Malay Jungle," 13 December 1941, *NY Times*, p. 1.

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had toppled, the last went over quickly. And there was momentum to the process too. When Singapore fell, the *New York Times* reported how Washington had "conceded that Sumatra, too, must inevitably fall."[41] *Time*, in turn, predicted that once Japan took Sumatra, "very soon [it] would be at Java."[42]

Southeast Asian security had become indivisible. Each state by yielding, infiltration, or invasion had opened the way for its neighbor's ruin. The day Singapore surrendered, the *New York Times* carried a depiction of the "aerial pattern of Japan's conquest" that demonstrated what Japan wrought. The graphic featured a map with a chain of overlapping spheres enveloping the countries of Southeast Asia. The Japanese attacks at the epicenter of each sphere radiated crises outward; where these spheres overlapped there were no borders. Its meaning was plain—no states could stand or fall discrete from each other; the collapse of one was deadly for all.[43] This mindset helps explain why British planners remained engrossed throughout World War II with retaking Singapore by force. In 1943, British planners advocated to their American counterparts the "recapture of Singapore." They said it would shake Japan "psycholog[ically]" and "electrify the Eastern world." They conjured for the Americans grandiose visions of driving Japan from Southeast Asia. From Singapore, they argued, Anglo-American forces could threaten Japanese communications to Thailand and Burma, attack Dutch oilfields directly, "flank and undermine the whole Japanese defense structure in Southeast Asia," and then launch operations to retake Hong Kong or Formosa, control the South China Sea and establish a sea supply route to China.[44]

Whatever the direction the formative domino effect ran, it nestled deeper within Western strategic thought as the Pacific War progressed. Even disagreements between U.S. and British military planners illustrated the Allies' belief in the interconnectedness of Southeast Asia. U.S. military planners agreed with their counterparts in Britain that retaking Singapore affected all Japanese positions in Southeast Asia. From Singapore, they concurred, the Allies could unlock the South China Sea for U.S.-British forces to deploy against the Japanese navy. But Roosevelt and his military planners by 1943 had weaned themselves off obsessing with the island. Because Singapore did in fact possess

41 James B. Reston, "Washington Sees Dire Blow in East," *NY Times*, 16 February 1942, p. 1.

42 "Sumatra, Too," *Time*, 39, no. 8 (23 February 1942), 25.

43 "Singapore Stormed," *NY Times*, 15 February 1942, p. E1.

44 Memorandum, 18 August 1943, Appreciation and Plan for the Defeat of Japan, 155–61 and Minutes, 1st Meeting of the President and Prime Minister with the Combined chiefs of Staff, 19 August 1943, 402, compiled volume, "Quadrant Conference August 1943," box 2, Combined Chiefs of Staff Conference Proceedings, 1941–5, DDEL.

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strategic advantages, the Americans expected Japan to be deeply entrenched there—the island never could be a soft target and an Allied expedition there likely would become bogged down instead of rapidly embarking on other campaigns in the region. Until 1945, American planners rejected all British suggestions to recapture Singapore, preferring to attack perceptibly weaker Japanese forces in Burma so as to connect Allied supply lines to Chiang Kai-shek's armies in China. If the Allies through Burma could batter Japan in China, the ripple effect upon Japanese positions in Southeast Asia would surely favor their side.[45]

For a time, Churchill, unlike his military chiefs, shared the American focus on Burma. However in September 1944, he told Roosevelt that the Allies should recover Singapore "in battle" rather than at the "peace table." Churchill spoke passionately about the necessity to "avenge" the loss of Singapore. But Roosevelt disagreed, wishing to strike presumably weaker Japanese positions in Bangkok. He reminded the prime minister that Japanese forces on the island would be too strong. A frustrated Churchill responded that "undoubtedly [there would] be a large force of Japanese" in Malaya and Singapore, but he thought that it would boost American operations in the Pacific to "destroy" them there. The president sensed a protracted argument about Singapore looming and would not get embroiled. He said nothing, yielded the floor to the military advisors present, and the discussion of Allied military strategy soon whirled toward other topics.[46] Churchill would be disappointed for almost a year.

Yet Churchill and Roosevelt thought in similar ways about Southeast Asia's interconnectedness. Both believed that securing one corner of the region could shape the destinies of all its countries; they differed only over the location. The British identified the region's cohesion (and their wounded pride) with the fall of Singapore, so they fixed upon the island. Roosevelt viewed Southeast Asia with a capacious sense of U.S. national interests, treating American security as inseparable from the fate of other nations. According to historian Michael Sherry, once Nazi Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Roosevelt became sure that "when peace has been broken anywhere, the peace of all countries everywhere is in danger."[47] Indeed, the Pacific war powerfully

45 Summary Notes, 18 August 1943, Appendix: Appreciation and Outline Plan for the Defeat of Japan, 166, 169, compiled volume, "Quadrant Conference August 1943," box 2, Combined Chiefs of Staff Conference Proceedings, 1941–5, DDEL.

46 Minutes, First Plenary Meeting of Octagon Conference, 13 September 1944, 238–240, compiled volume, "Octagon Conference September 1944," box 3, Combined Chiefs of Staff Conference Proceedings, 1941–5, ibid.

47 Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 30, 32–3.

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confirmed what he had intuited. And with the fall of Singapore, the *New York Times* echoed Roosevelt in treating Pearl Harbor and Singapore as interrelated losses, stating the Allies' fought an "indivisible war" against Japan. As if paraphrasing the president, the article also stated "a loss on any front immediately affect[ed] adversely the situation on all other fronts."[48] These formulations of U.S. national security interests lived on in NSC-68, the landmark policy document of 1950 that for decades underpinned U.S. Cold War policy with dictums such as "a defeat of free institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere."[49] Perhaps this expansive logic of global interconnectedness afforded the United States the latitude not available to the European powers fixed on regaining their colonies to pick choice spots for attacking Japan, latitude the United States lost in stages as it assumed its allies' burdens during the Cold War.

Only in July 1945 did Churchill get his wish. With Burma more or less in Allied possession, the combined chiefs directed Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander of Southeast Asia, to "open the Straits of Malacca at the earliest possible moment ... complete the liberation of Malaya ... capture key areas of Siam [and] establish bridgeheads in Java and Sumatra." These directives mandated recapturing Singapore as a base for Allied operations.[50] By then, Japan was weak and Singapore had become that soft target that U.S. planners sought. But President Harry S. Truman's decision to use atomic bombs on Japan in August, and Britain's returning victorious to Singapore a month later without firing a shot, rendered these plans moot.

Moving ahead to the postwar period, after 1945, U.S. and British policymakers of the early Cold War consistently perceived Southeast Asian security through the prism of Japanese imperialism. Even the southward trail that Japan blazed through the region left an indelible mark upon U.S. and British decision-makers. When the Communists gained control in China in the fall of 1949, the two Western allies became convinced that the new China's path to power must retrace Japan's—Indochina first, then Thailand, Malaya, and Singapore, followed by Indonesia and the Philippines before threatening Australia and New Zealand. Already in 1948, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had warned that the weakened colonial order in Southeast Asia was

48 Lessons of the Pacific," *NY Times*, 17 February 1942, p. 20.

49 Paul Nitze, "NSC 68: United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," 14 April 1950, https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/nsc-68/nsc68-1.htm (accessed 28 April 2013).

50 Directive, 20 July 1945, Combined Chiefs of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander (Southeast Asia), 176–8, compiled volume, "Terminal Conference July 1945," box 3, Combined Chiefs of Staff Conference Proceedings, 1941–5, DDEL.

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vulnerable to Communist attack.[51] Such an attack seemed imminent, as John Dower notes, when China replaced Japan as the main U.S. enemy in Asia.[52] With ease the Americans imagined that the Chinese menace, comprised of armies invading from the north and fifth columns embedded within each state, marched to the martial drumbeat of the Japanese so recently silenced.

In August 1950, State Department officials returned from fact-finding missions to Southeast Asia convinced that the "Japanese had demonstrated the way" the Communist Chinese would invade the region. The military men on these missions concluded alike that if they "take Indochina ... Thailand would soon fall," making it easy for Chinese forces to "come down the [Malay] peninsula as the Japs did in the last war."[53] American officials at the U.S. embassy in Indonesia concurred. They too invoked the Japanese invasion as a way to comprehend and express their fears of Chinese communism. In September 1950, the U.S. ambassador in Jakarta reported to the State Department that a Communist-controlled Indonesia would ease "communist penetration" of the Philippines and the vital bases of Australia, "as was demonstrated when the Japanese mounted their greatest threat" to Western interests in the Pacific during World War II from the Indonesian islands.[54]

British strategists held the same thoughts. To be sure, Britain's Office of Foreign Affairs predicted that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) would seek chiefly to stimulate "conspiracy against and subversion" of the governments in Southeast Asia. Since it lacked military prowess comparable to the Japanese in World War II, they reasoned, the CCP was "unlikely" at that time to pursue military aggression beyond its southern frontier. Yet when these same British officials pondered the details of Chinese foreign policy, they insisted China would retrace the Japanese campaign. They made this disconnected conclusion when nothing in China's use of conspiracy and subversion demanded it must follow a systematically southward course through mainland Southeast Asia. Britain's

51 Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], "The Break-Up of the Colonial Empires its implications for U.S. Security," 3 September 1948, 6, Central Intelligence Agency Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room [hereafter CIA FOIA].

52 Dower, *War Without Mercy*, p. 310.

53 Report, "Malaya," n.d., State Department—Joint MDAP Survey Mission to Southeast Asia, 9; Report, "Malaya," 17 August 1950, U.S. Navy—Joint MDAP Survey Mission in Southeast Asia, 16, folder "Melby—Chronological File 1950 (Aug 1–15)," (Chronological File), May–December 1950, box 12, Papers of John Melby (hereafter Melby Papers), Harry S. Truman Presidential Library (hereafter HSTL), Independence, MO.

54 H. Merle Cochran Report to John F. Melby, "Indonesia: Information Desired by Survey Mission," 22 September 1950, 3, folder "Melby—Chronological File 1950 (Sept 16–30)," (Chronological File), May–December 1950, box 12, ibid.

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secretary of state for foreign affairs even informed the Cabinet that everyone on his team "agreed that Indo-China ... would probably be the immediate objective of Communist action." The British thus looked first to Japan's original launching pad, despite acknowledging Thailand's outstanding "strategic importance" with respect to the region, for it bordered Burma, French Indochina, and British Malaya. They locked onto Indochina even after noting that independent Burma suffered from "chaotic" civil strife that "rendered [it] ... acutely vulnerable to infiltration and exploitation by the Chinese communists."[55]

For British officials, the persistence of memory went even further. After Indochina, they fully "expected" China to do as the Japanese had done and "overthrow the existing regimes in Siam and Burma" before turning its attention toward Malaya, Singapore and eventually, India.[56] Because the British leaders believed Malaya and Singapore to be the prizes Communist China sought (since this had been true of Japan before), they cast their strategy from the past, drawing the Cold War battlefront at the French colonies from which Japan had entered Thailand. Even a decade after losing Singapore to Japan, Britain's Chiefs of Staff still formulated the Empire's "Defense Policy and Global Strategy" with that "darkest moment" in mind. Recalling a pattern of expansion all too familiar, the chiefs calculated that China would aim first for the "fall of Indo-China to Communism," and then "inevitably" (and in sequence) target Thailand, then Burma, before preying on Malaya and Singapore.[57]

Australia also figured in this British picture of insecurity. During World War II, the danger to Australia had seemed so immediate after the fall of Singapore that British officials consequently situated Southeast Asia and Australia within the same strategic space. Sir William Strang, under secretary for foreign affairs, in his March 1949 report on Southeast Asia, reminded his colleagues that Singapore was an "indispensable link in communications with Australia," a link so intimate that when Strang visited Singapore earlier that year, he could

55 British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Memorandum to the Cabinet, 26 November 1949, CAB 129/37, 2–3, UKNA.

56 Ibid.

57 "Defense Policy and Global Strategy—Report by The United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff," 9 July 1952, 13, PREM 11/49, UKNA. By 1949, the British government had decided that Hong Kong could not remain its choice outpost against Communist China. Its proximity to the mainland and the ease with which Communist agents could infiltrate it, meant Malaya (for its rubber production representing Britain's largest dollar earner) and Singapore (for its naval and air bases) were the more logical focus for Britain in preserving its imperial interests in East Asia. See Conclusions of Meeting, "China and Southeast Asia," 8 March 1949, CAB 128/15, UKNA.

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not help but "feel [himself] there within the sphere of Australian interest."[58] Across the Atlantic, Dean Acheson held the same view. In NSC-51 (penned as Strang produced his report), Acheson argued that if Southeast Asia were ever "swept by communism," this "major political rout" meant a "critically exposed Australia."[59]

So when President Truman dispatched three fact-finding missions to Southeast Asia between December 1949 and August 1950, U.S. and British officials encountered each other as though trapped in an echo chamber. They confirmed each other's strategic visions of Southeast Asia in the Cold War. As historians Mark Atwood Lawrence and Andrew J. Rotter have shown, both French and British officials labored through the late 1940s to talk their American counterparts into giving economic and military aid to the French in Indochina, though equally U.S. policymakers heeded their allies' arguments since they melded with American strategic assessments of Southeast Asia after the Chinese revolution.[60] In all three U.S. missions to Indochina—under Philip C. Jessup, R. Allen Griffin, and John F. Melby—that Truman sent to the region, U.S. officials analyzed Southeast Asia through their memories and impressions of Japanese expansionism, re-inscribing the embryonic domino logic of the "darkest moment" onto the reports that they later filed. At the same time, U.S. officials above all sought British analysis of regional developments, discovering that British thoughts mirrored their own. In any case, the British considered these U.S. missions rare opportunities to have their allies see—through British eyes—"the South East Asian picture correctly."[61] In the echo chamber the two allies' shared memories of Japan's victories caused their Cold War assessments of Southeast Asia to converge.

Thus, the British role in reifying the domino logic demands close scrutiny. Moreover, the records of the Jessup, Griffin and Melby missions—named after their leaders—suggest that U.S. officials paid more attention to British

58 Sir William Strang, "Tour in South-East Asia and the Far East," 17 March 1949, CAB 129/33, 11, UKNA.

59 NSC-51, pp. 5–6.

60 For a study of the British role in convincing the United States to support the French, see Andrew J. Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987). For the French role (as well as a discussion of Britain's) that few American historians have studied, see Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

61 Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Memorandum to the Cabinet, 26 November 1949, CAB 129/37, 4 and Foreign Office Telegram to Washington, 13 July 1952, 1–2, PREM 11/49, UKNA.

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colonial administrators in Malaya and Singapore than to Asian leaders or the French in Indochina. Malcolm MacDonald, the loquacious British Commissioner-General for Southeast Asia, had much to do with this. He shared his views so copiously that the records of the visits of U.S. officials to Malaya and Singapore are somewhat thicker than records of their visits elsewhere in the region. Then again, the Americans did prefer to legitimate their views with British opinions. For one, Colonel R. Allen Griffin, leader of the second mission, sought from the British—especially MacDonald, for whom he had "great respect"—clarity about how the United States could meet Southeast Asia's security needs. Griffin believed that "you had to talk with the British if you were to understand" the region since "you never found an American who knew anything, in that part of the world."[62] He also personally assured Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Dean Rusk that "the British analyses of the situation in Indochina and in Southeast Asia as a whole were similar to those which he and his mission developed."[63]

In fact Griffin's recommendations to the State Department, laced with MacDonald's perspectives, proved critical to the first steps that the United States took toward involvement in Vietnam. Citing the importance of Griffin's reports to the president's decision, Rusk in April 1950 informed Under Secretary of State James E. Webb that Truman had reserved $36.5 million for military assistance projects in Indonesia, Indochina, Thailand, and Japan. The president also sought another $5 million for Indochina and other increases in military aid to Indochina from the Mutual Defense Assistance Program.[64] Because of views they shared in common with the British, American suspicions coalesced into conviction, and conviction into imperatives.

Therefore, on 23 March 1950, when Ambassador Jessup reported on the first mission's findings to the two Deans—Acheson and Rusk—he stressed his conclusions were "in accord" with those of British officials in Malaya and Singapore. Many of Jessup's insights drew from the views of MacDonald, who Jessup referred to as "McD." Jessup echoed McD's opinion that Indochina was "key to the situation" in Southeast Asia, specifically the region's "military weakness in meeting Communist guerrillas" in "hot wars" like those raging in Indochina,

62 Colonel R. Allen Griffin Oral History, 15 February 1974, 59, Oral History Program, HSTL.

63 Record, "Interdepartmental Meeting on the Far East at the Department of State," 11 May 1950, *FRUS, 1950, East Asia and the Pacific* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 6: p. 89.

64 Dean Rusk Memorandum to James E. Webb, Budgetary Plans for Fiscal Year 1951 for Assistance ot Countries Eligible Under Section 303 of the Mutual Defense Assistance Act, 25 April 1950, *FRUS, 1950*, 6, pp. 83–84.

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Malaya, and Burma.[65] According to Jessup, McD contended that "if Indochina or Burma fell to the communists, it would be very easy for them [the Communists] to sweep over the Thais who were most unlikely to resist."[66] Whether paraphrasing or elaborating McD, Jessup's own expressions recalled how American newspapers during World War II characterized Thailand's collaboration with Japan, claiming that "weak" Thailand, which he qualified was the "British view also," would "not attempt to stand up" against communist aggression.[67] In a section of his report entitled "The Weaknesses of Our 'Friends'," Jessup stated that McD had identified a troubling "Asian psychology" that left them susceptible to Communist aggression if the Western powers did nothing. With the authoritative perspectives of the colonial powers (the British above all), Jessup proposed that the United States should take "all measures ... to prevent Communist expansion in Southeast Asia."[68]

By July 1950, when the third mission with John Melby as its leader arrived at its first stop, Saigon, the belief that Indochina was a gateway for communism's sweep into Southeast Asia had reverberated through the Atlantic echo chamber enough to sound like fact.[69] At any rate, Truman had decided in May, a month before the outbreak of the Korean War, that the containment of Asian communism required the United States aid the French in Indochina.[70] In August, Melby and Major General Graves B. Erskine, chief of the military

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65 Among others, Ambassador-at-Large Philip C. Jessup also visited Afghanistan, Burma, Formosa, India, Japan and Pakistan. Memorandum of Conversation, "Oral Report by Ambassador-at-Large Philip C. Jessup upon his return from the East," 3 April 1950, ibid., p. 68.

66 Memorandum of Conversation, "Conference at Commissioner General's at Bukit Serene," 6 February 1950, ibid., p. 11.

67 Memorandum of Conversation, "Oral Report by Ambassador-at-Large Philip C. Jessup upon his return from the East," pp. 69–71; Ambassador in Thailand (Stanton) Telegram to the Secretary of State, 27 February 1950, *FRUS, 1950*, 6, p. 29. For the same expression "weak Thailand" see for example, F. Tillman Durdin, "Tokyo Tanks Roll in Malay Jungle," 13 December 1941, *NY Times*, p. 1.

68 Jessup also noted that Leon Pignon, the French High Commissioner for Indochina, offered more or less the same insight. Memorandum of Conversation, "Oral Report by Ambassador-at-Large Philip C. Jessup upon his return from the East," 3 April 1950, *FRUS, 1950*, 6, p. 68.

69 Melby Mission in Indochina Schedule, 17 July 1950, folder "Melby Mission File, File #1, 1950 (May–July)," Chronological File (1950 May–December), box 12, Melby Papers, HSTL.

70 U.S. Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945–67* (*Pentagon Papers*), Book I, Part IV, Section A, ii, quoted in Andrew J. Rotter, "The Triangular Route to Vietnam: The United States, Great Britain and Southeast Asia, 1945–1950," *The International History Review* 5, no. 3 (August 1984): 404.

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group on the mission, submitted to the U.S. government that it was "almost a commonplace, now, to state that failure in Indochina" to contain communism would "make well nigh inevitable the over-all and eventual victory of Communism throughout the area."[71] U.S. actions and beliefs now reflected complete acceptance of the domino logic derived from "the darkest moment" during World War II.

Anglo-American memories of the Japanese Yellow Peril also infused the formative domino logic with a racial character that carried into the Cold War. As Dower has documented, in the mutual "race hate [that] fed atrocities" on the battlefield and the "impression of a truly Manichean struggle between completely incompatible antagonists," race was intertwined with the contest for power in the region.[72] This white-Asiatic antipathy segued easily into the gathering Euro-American hostility toward Communist-controlled China and extant distrust of the Chinese diaspora. Indeed, Britain for decades had believed that the large Chinese populations in its colonies of Malaya and Singapore were "racially, culturally and politically ... bound to the mother country China" and these Chinese constituted an impenetrable "'Imperium in Imperio,' a 'State within a State'."[73] For their part U.S. policymakers had considered the Chinese diaspora of Southeast Asia a major source of regional instability even before the Communists established control of China. Policymakers of both the United States and Britain thus presumed the overseas Chinese could serve as China's fifth column, just as the U.S. government once had thought all Japanese-Americans potential agents for Tokyo.[74] In line with this reasoning, the fact-finding missions to Southeast Asia Jessup and Griffin led took the revealing step of producing for the Truman administration a chart detailing the distribution of ethnic Chinese across the region, state by state. The explanations accompanying the chart described the Chinese as an "alien and unassimilated group" in Southeast Asia, an "entering vehicle for infiltration of Communism"

71 Melby and General Graves B. Erskine Report to FMACC [Foreign Military Assistance Correlation Committee], Joint State-Defense MDAP [Mutual Defense Appropriations Program] Survey Mission to Southeast Asia, 6 August 1950, 4–5, folder "Melby Chronological File File #1, 1950 (May–July)," Chronological File (1950 May–December), box 12, Melby Papers, HSTL.

72 Dower, *War Without Mercy*, pp. 9, 10–11, 29, 72–3.

73 J.E.M Mitchell (for Chief of the Intelligence Staff, British Pacific Fleet) to Staff Officer (Intelligence) Singapore Area, "The Post War Emigration Policy of China," 27 August 1947, 1, FCO 141/16975, UKNA.

74 Dower, *War Without Mercy*, p. 5; Memorandum of Conversation, "Oral Report by Ambassador-at-Large Philip C. Jessup upon his return from the East," 3 April 1950, pp. 70–71.

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into the region.[75] It was critical to know the enemy's numbers and where they resided.

How Americans viewed the Chinese in the late 1940s was not surprising. Historians Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds have uncovered a history of white hatred of the Chinese in the United States, Britain, and Australia with descriptions of violent local and transnational racist reactions to the Chinese immigrant workers entering these countries in 1800s. White Americans, British, and Australians for years before World War II already had designated "Chinamen" as the original Yellow Peril.[76] For them, rediscovering their first race hate, an older flame, proved easy. Acheson's NSC-51, for example, considered the Chinese of Southeast Asia a contagion that "afflict[ed] the entire region," a problem made "doubly ominous" by the CCP's role in supporting and guiding the Communist movements in Southeast Asia. He worried especially that Southeast Asia's Chinese became more enamored by the day of how the CCP "waxed enormously in strength," fearing that with such advantages "Chinese penetration" of the region would be "a simple matter." Acheson even thought Chinese hegemony over Southeast Asian communism the greater threat to U.S. interests in the region than Soviet influence.[77]

Likewise, British officials like Under Secretary of Foreign Affairs Strang maintained that the "darker side" of the "Far Eastern picture" was how the Communist revolution in China and anti-colonial impulses might inspire the "great Chinese communities" across Southeast Asia to oppose Western interests.[78] Britain worried intensely that a mass movement of the Chinese in Malaya and Singapore might overrun their authority. And Jessup, based on his meetings with McDonald, reiterated to the State Department what the Atlantic allies believed in common—that Southeast Asia's "overseas Chinese communities form[ed] one of the most important elements in

75 Mutual Defense Assistance Program Chart, "South and Southeast Asia: Chart 11–Distribution of Chinese," n.d., folder "State Department, Correspondence, 1949 [3 of 3], box 40, White House Confidential File (WHCF), State Department Correspondence, Papers of Harry S. Truman (hereafter Truman Papers), HSTL.

76 Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Color Line*, pp. 9–10. Chapter 1 provides excellent coverage of Chinese immigration to the United States and the interconnected construction and inspiration for white solidarity between the United States, Australia, and other white settler nations. See also, Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor Immigration and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

77 NSC-51, pp. 1–4, 5–6.

78 CAB 129/33, p. 2.

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the strength of the Communists in Asia" and could power Chinese expansionism.[79]

In what appeared a logical leap, Jessup stated that countries with strong local Chinese communities were as much in danger as those sharing "common borders" with China. But Jessup's assessment illustrates how profoundly race influenced American and British approaches to the Cold War in Asia. The abiding suspicions that U.S. and British policymakers directed against the overseas Chinese reinforced the idea of interconnectedness that was at the core of the domino logic; they explain why the United States often treated the Southeast Asian countries as strategically indistinguishable from each other. For U.S. leaders at least, what real differences existed between Southeast Asian countries ultimately paled in significance, and offered little obstruction, should China turn the ten million overseas Chinese into its weapon against the Western powers. No wonder Jessup believed a country's large Chinese community, like those of Malaya and Singapore, even when physically disconnected from the mainland, was tantamount to sharing a common (and porous) border with China. These suspicions survived well into the 1950s, shaping U.S. strategy in the region. Eisenhower administration policymakers consistently spilled ink over plans for the Taiwanese leadership to wrest the loyalties of Malayan and Singaporean Chinese away from China's mainland regime.[80]

Fredrik Logevall has argued in *Embers of War* that the domino theory "egregiously" approached the countries of Southeast Asia as if they "had no individuality, no history of their own, no unique circumstances in social, political, and economic life that differentiated from their neighbors." But these were not merely simplifications arising from what Logevall labels the "apocalyptic anti-Communism" infecting the Truman administration thanks to Senator Joseph McCarthy.[81] These Cold War fears did not work alone. Rather, they united powerfully with American and British anxieties over race—their lasting dread of the original Yellow Peril—often overwhelming their recognition of each country's differences. As such, U.S. and British policymakers did not ignore these distinctions as much as hold that race trumped sovereignty, a lesson they had

79 Memorandum of Conversation, "Oral Report by Ambassador-at-Large Philip C. Jessup upon his return from the East," pp. 70–71.

80 Ibid.; John E. MacDonald (Operations Coordinating Board [OCB] Staff Representative on Taiwan and Government of the Republic of China [GRC] Working Group) Memorandum to Ad Hoc Working Group on Overseas Chinese, "Summary of Operations Plans Affecting Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia," 6 September 1957, 1–6, folder "Overseas Chinese [1]", White House Office, NSC Staff Papers, 1948–61, OCB Secretariat Series, box 5, DDEL.

81 Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 223.

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learned from the "darkest moment." Indeed, the specter of colonial collapse in the face of an Asiatic power would haunt and skew Anglo-American strategic thinking for years. If the much smaller outfits that had served as Japan's fifth column during World War II had combined to wreak such havoc, U.S. and British leaders could visualize easily large masses of Chinese intimately interconnected across (and despite) the borders of distinct Southeast Asian states. If the overseas Chinese linked arms with each other and the mainland, they could by sheer numbers pull the Western powers asunder. These were big ifs, but in the Atlantic echo chamber doubts shrank while the Yellow Peril loomed larger.

On the day that Jessup delivered his recommendations to the State Department, Griffin had just completed his weeklong discussions with MacDonald in Malaya and Singapore.[82] His mission had been to ascertain what "emergency economic and technical assistance" the U.S. could provide its allies in Southeast Asia, but his analyses often centered on the latent danger that Southeast Asia's Chinese posed to the colonial order. This concern MacDonald found easy to amplify, and Griffin to heed, given that Malaya's and Singapore's large Chinese populations troubled British colonial authorities. While the absolute numbers of ethnic Chinese residing in Thailand and Indonesia were higher than that of Malaya and Singapore combined, it was the proportion of Chinese in the populations of these British territories that unnerved Griffin. From its first sentence, Griffin's report about Malaya and Singapore counted both as a single unit and focused on how "almost half" of its population was Chinese. For Griffin, the Chinese problem in Malaya and Singapore was of special significance. Like the British, he believed that the Chinese diaspora pledged "deep underlying" and "primary loyalty ... to China."[83] He echoed the ideas already circulating in the U.S. security establishment.

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82 Jessup delivered his oral report to members of the State Department and other U.S. officials (including George F. Kennan) on 23 March 1950. The Griffin Mission visited Malaya and Singapore between 16 and 23 March 1950. R. Allen Griffin's itinerary included Indochina (6 to 16 March), Burma (23 March to 4 April), Thailand (4 to 12 April), and Indonesia (12 to 22 April). Samuel P. Hayes, Griffin's chosen deputy for the mission, has written an account of what they experienced. Samuel P. Hayes, *The Beginning of American Aid to Southeast Asia: The Griffin Mission of 1950* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Heath Books, 1971).

83 R. Allen Griffin to State Department, Report No. 2 of the United States Economic Survey Mission to Southeast Asia: Needs for United States Economic and Technical Aid in the Colony of Singapore and the Federation of Malaya, May 1950, iii–iv, 1–7, folder "Southeast Asia File, General—1950–1952," Southeast Asia File, Miscellaneous File, box 9, Melby Papers, HSTL.

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The Central Intelligence Group (precursor to the CIA) in 1946 had deemed the "4,500, 000 alien Chinese and millions more persons of part-Chinese blood" as a "potential tool for the extension of China's influence in Southeast Asia," whether it was that of the CCP or the Guomindang (GMD).[84] By 1950, when the CCP ruled China and the Chinese of Southeast Asia had swelled to twice that number, the prospects facing the United States and its allies became that much darker.

For Griffin, the Chinese problem in Malaya and Singapore was of special significance. Britain had been fighting the guerrillas of the MCP since 1948, a battle-hardened group that had mounted anti-Japanese resistance throughout World War II, sought to unify Malaya and Singapore under a Communist government, and was comprised ninety-five percent of ethnic Chinese. Griffin reported that the MCP's "campaign of violence" aimed to "drive Europeans away and disrupt the government and economic activities" in both Malaya and Singapore. He emphasized the international implications of the MCP's attacks on both European civilians and British rubber and tin plantations in Malaya. He reminded the State Department that Malaya was Britain's largest net dollar earner, generating forty-five percent of the world's natural rubber and thirty-four percent of the world's tin. Should the "sinister and effective" MCP derail Malayan production of rubber and tin, two items high on the U.S. strategic commodity list, Britain would struggle to contribute to the Cold War effort in Europe as well as Asia.[85]

Moreover, Griffin believed the MCP's violent acts remained on the uptick despite the increased suppression operations that British forces had mounted. This was to be expected, he surmised, because Malaya and Singapore with their large Chinese populations presented "peculiarly inviting target[s]" for Communist aggression "either from within or without." As Griffin repeated several times, Chinese residents "already outnumber[ed] the Malays" and Indians in Malaya and Singapore. So if the Chinese Communists assaulted Malaya directly, or if Malaya's Chinese joined with Beijing, this outpost of the British Empire must "fall to the Communists." In Griffin's opinion, Chinese Communists abroad and locally then would control the major British military bases in Singapore, which meant thereafter "Burma, Thailand and Indonesia would face greatly increased Communist pressure."[86]

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84 Central Intelligence Group, "Chinese Minorities in Southeast Asia," 2 December 1946, 1–2, 7, CIA FOIA.

85 Griffin to State Department, Report No. 2 of the United States Economic Survey Mission to Southeast Asia, May 1950, pp. iv, 2–4.

86 Ibid.

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After listening to MacDonald worry aloud about the Chinese populations of Malaya and Singapore, Griffin bound his remarks about Burma, Thailand, and Indonesia to the perceived Chinese threat, focusing on an invasion from the "mother country," Chinese subversion from within, or both in combination.[87] Griffin's reports demonstrate the imaginative work U.S. policymakers performed in acknowledging the unique conditions of each country in Southeast Asia, while diminishing those distinctive features. For example, Griffin readily acknowledged that Burma faced a spectrum of problems unrelated to the Chinese threat: its largest minority group—the Karens—struggled against the government for an autonomous state. Moreover, the size of Burma's Chinese population was small compared to that of Malaya and Singapore. Thus, Griffin's report on Burma focused on a Chinese invasion. He argued that Burma's "proximity with Communist China" constituted the "principal factor" in the country's foreign relations, in particular its "undefined and frequently disputed border" with China. Griffin considered Burma an "attractive goal for Chinese expansion," a "pathway ... from Southern Yunnan province to Thailand and Indo-china."[88] From Thailand and Indochina, the Chinese could follow the path that the Japanese had plotted before them during World War II.

Griffin certainly had Japanese imperialism on his mind. When it came to Thailand, Griffin deplored the Thai "record of World War II," specifically its accommodation with the rising power in the region based on its "estimate of who is likely to win." This "precedent" meant that the Thais would collaborate with China and, like they once did for Japan, facilitate Chinese incursions into Southeast Asia.[89] A week after visiting with MacDonald, Griffin cabled Acheson from Bangkok, stating that Thailand like the rest of Southeast Asia was "threatened by Communist imperialism controlled from China, which makes no secret [of its] designs" on the region. He eyed warily Thailand's "large Chinese minority [of] about 3 million ... susceptible [to] use" by a China "already exerting pressure."[90] With mounting anxiety Griffin described Thailand's "well-organized Chinese Communist Party" and the successful collaboration in

87 Ibid., p. 1.

88 R. Allen Griffin to State Department, Report No. 3 of the United States Economic Survey Mission to Southeast Asia: Needs for United States Economic and Technical Aid in Burma, May 1950, 1, 3, folder "Southeast Asia File, General—1950–1952," Southeast Asia File, Miscellaneous File, box 9, Melby Papers, HSTL.

89 R. Allen Griffin to State Department, Report No. 4 of the United States Economic Survey Mission to Southeast Asia: Needs for United States Economic and Technical Aid in Thailand, May 1950, ii, 3, folder "Southeast Asia File, General—1950–1952," Southeast Asia File, Miscellaneous File, box 9, Melby Papers, HSTL.

90 Stanton to Secretary of State, 12 April 1950, *FRUS, 1950*, 6, p. 79.

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propaganda and subversion between the Chinese and Thai converts to communism.[91]

In Griffin's mind, Indonesia was not safe from the Chinese either. Indonesia's coastal areas remained, for him, "susceptible to easy Communist penetration from the mainland." Griffin again drew parallels between the current situation and World War II. He used familiar terms from U.S. war planning during World War II, reminding the State Department that the Indonesian archipelago and the Malayan Peninsula formed the "Malay Barrier between the Indian and Pacific Oceans"—the barrier that Japan once breached and China now endangered. His analyses distorted by his racial lens, Griffin acknowledged, but skated past, the unique characteristics of Indonesia. Though Indonesia had a population of some 75 million in 1950, Griffin zeroed in on the country's Chinese "minority of nearly two million," which he thought an internal Communist threat if China utilized it.[92] Griffin's treatment of Indonesia best illustrates the overpowering assumptions that the Americans harbored with regard to the Chinese menace. It mattered less that Indonesian-Chinese did not control the national government or that native Javanese and Sumatrans outnumbered them by some twenty to one. What had warped Griffin's assessment of the newly independent country was not just the presence of two million Chinese in Indonesia, but how the Chinese of Malaya and Singapore were destabilizing British rule.

The reports that the Melby team submitted did not simply reiterate the conclusions of its Jessup and Griffin counterparts. What its members learned in Indochina, Malaya, and Singapore definitively anchored the ideas about Southeast Asian insecurity that had been coalescing since 1942. Moreover, the Melby team's encounter with British colonial officials offered U.S. policymakers the most developed enunciation of the early domino logic, nodding at its origins in World War II and the importance of race in its vision of the Communist threat to Southeast Asia. Also, this final mission to the region boasted personnel with substantial expertise in war making and diplomacy in Asia. General Erskine had led the military campaigns against Japan at Saipan and Iwo Jima, to name only two, and these experiences augmented his recommendations for U.S. policy in East Asia. Diplomat Melby had served as a U.S.

91 Griffin to State Department, Report No. 4 of the United States Economic Survey Mission to Southeast Asia, May 1950, pp. ii, 3.

92 R. Allen Griffin to State Department, Report No. 5 of the United States Economic Survey Mission to Southeast Asia: Needs for United States Economic and Technical Aid in Indonesia, May 1950, ii, 2–3, 9, folder "Southeast Asia File, General—1950–1952," Southeast Asia File, Miscellaneous File, box 9, Melby Papers, HSTL.

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diplomat in China from 1944 to 1948, and was the principal author of the *China White Paper* in 1949 that (in more than a thousand pages) detailed the past century of U.S. policy toward China. His insights into Chinese relations with Southeast Asia carried weight in the State Department and with Rusk especially, under whom he served as special assistant.

Erskine's report on Indochina contained only bleak forecasts. After three weeks in the colonies, he judged that the French had made "little progress" ineffectively fighting the Viet Minh. The people of Indochina, from his view, harbored "deep-seated hatred and distrust" for the French, feelings Communist propaganda fanned that goaded "the Oriental to 'push the white man out of Asia'"—echoes of the "anti-white Asiatic zenophobia" that NSC-51 maintained was the legacy of Japan's East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.[93] The French command admitted to Erskine that it "was unable to fight on two fronts, the Viet Minh and the Chinese frontier." Erskine agreed, reporting that the "Chinese thrust" into Indochina could occur through any of "three historic invasion routes from the north and northwest." Only U.S. military assistance to the French "on a considerable scale," he advised, would help them in countering the appeal of communism in Southeast Asia.[94] With his unimpeachable military credentials, Erskine's views validated both the Truman administration's commitment to French Indochina and fears that China would invade Southeast Asia. His endorsement sufficed until 19 October 1950 when China's entry into the Korean War confirmed, or so U.S. leaders thought, that China planned to expand militarily into Indochina and the rest of Asia.[95]

Melby's records suggest that he and Erskine came away from discussions with MacDonald and other British officials in August 1950 with possibly the earliest coherent and comprehensive articulation of the domino logic.[96] Aside

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93 Graves B. Erskine Summary Report, Military Group Joint MDAP Survey Mission to Southeast Asia, 5 August 1950, 3–4, 13–15, folder "Melby Mission File, File #1, 1950 (May–July)," Chronological File (1950 May–December), box 12, Melby Papers, HSTL.

94 Ibid., 3–4.

95 CIA, "Critical Situations in the Far East," 12 October 1950 and "National Intelligence Estimate-2: Chinese Communist Intervention in Korea," 6 November 1950, ii, CIA FOIA. The Central Intelligence Agency's October 1950 estimate of critical situations in the Far East discussed the possibility of "full Chinese Communist intervention in Korea," the "threat of Chinese Communist Invasion of Formosa," and the "Threat of Chinese Communist Invasion of Indochina." See also, Rotter, *Path to Vietnam*, especially chapter 9, "The Korean Intervention and After."

96 Malcolm MacDonald's version certainly did not offer original ideas, but the manner in which he synthesized them on 8 August 1950 in Johor, Malaya, represents the first time (in U.S. government records) that the domino logic received so cogent a presentation.

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from the piecemeal gestures that U.S. and British officials had made to its component parts in previous years, the vision had not been synthesized or expressed with as much cogency until the Melby team's conference with MacDonald. On 8 August, when Melby invited him to offer his "views on [the] situation" in the region, MacDonald launched into his most developed portrayal of the Communist threat to Southeast Asia. To begin, he referred to the ongoing Korean War, suggesting over two months before the fact that China would intervene there. When neither Melby nor Erskine challenged this prediction, MacDonald talked about China threatening Southeast Asia in turn. He stated that if in Korea China's expansionist "design is successful ... Indo-China is next." Even if China ultimately chose not to use force, MacDonald reasoned that it could destroy Western power "by proxy, linking up with the local fifth column" that operated "in every one of these countries—Burma, Indo-China, Siam and Malaya," fifth columns driven by "first, all the communists, and secondly, all the Chinese community." He quickly explained that China would strike Indochina first because "as a result of the colonial rule continuing there, there is a very powerful nationalist movement, a large part of which is under the control of the communists."[97] MacDonald in just minutes had linked possible Chinese invasion to the importance of Indochina, and awkwardly conflated Communists with overseas Chinese in his description of China's fifth column.

But MacDonald was not done. He next focused on China's potential aggression toward Malaya, the country he called the "great prize" of the region because of its tin and rubber. He expected the Americans to recall Japan's pursuit of Malaya's natural resources and how Malaya fell to Japan during World War II. For China to conquer Malaya, he argued, Indochina would be the "place of attack ... the highway to the rest of South East Asia," for "if Indo-China falls Siam would be easier to 'pick up." Siam, he contended, "wouldn't resist at all." The shared memories of World War II finished the job for him: after Siam, Malaya, and then Singapore—the pregnable fortress. If the Americans had not yet tapped their memories of World War II, MacDonald explicitly harked back to how the Thais had once yielded to the Japanese and would do so again when

Fredrik Logevall's detailed account of American, British, and French articulations of the domino principle suggests that after the somewhat vague expressions of it contained in NSC-51 in July 1949, the next obvious enunciation came from General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny in August 1951 (*NY Times*, 26 August 1951). Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 263.

97 Transcript, Bukit Serene Conference, 8 August 1950, 1, 3, folder "Melby Chronological File 1950 (August 1–15)," Chronological File (1950 May–December), box 12, Melby Papers, HST.

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the Chinese were at their gates.[98] This statement had the desired effect. State Department officials agreed with MacDonald that "Thai officials and the Thai public would be apt to seek some accommodation with communism" if the West appeared "unable to counter-act" China's advance. They concurred that Thailand's "record *vis-à-vis* the Japanese in World War II [was] a precedent" of great relevance to the Cold War.[99]

According to transcripts of the Malaya conference, Melby and Erskine let MacDonald have free run of the floor. And MacDonald seized the opportunity to hammer home his view:

> Indo-China is the place where Communists ... would want to conquer in their plans for South East Asia. If Indo-China holds, all holds. Indo-China is top priority ... and we should give it first place in all our considerations.

He then made quick work of explaining the difficulties France faced with the Viet Minh before he got back on track, declaring that "the Communists are working very hard to make war this autumn ... training large numbers of Vietminh troops in China." Once again, "route through Indo-China and Siam is the route," he stated. "We expect trouble in October or November." At this point, Melby and Erskine signaled their assent with more than silence. They pitched in to confirm their collective suspicions. Melby shared that intelligence gathered in Hong Kong indicated 1 October was "the invasion date" and that the United States knew that 30,000 Viet Minh already had been trained and organized in China. Then Erskine chipped in. He explained the weaknesses of the French defenses and forces, admitting the French "are not in a good position [and] if the Chinese make any movement southward ... the northern [French] force (in Tonkin) would be practically annihilated."[100] Neither Melby nor Erskine needed to verbalize the horror they expected to follow the obliteration of their French ally. The Americans had found in MacDonald the great communicator of what they had wanted to hear.

In the days that followed the conference in Malaya, Melby increasingly would frame Indochina's problems and their impact on Malaya in the terms that MacDonald had presented. On 10 August, he told the *Malay Mail* that

98 Ibid.

99 U.S. State Department, "Report of the Joint MDAP Survey Mission to Southeast Asia – Thailand," 30 September 1950, 5, folder "Melby – Chronological File 1950 (Sept 16–30)," Chronological File (1950 May–December), box 12, Melby Papers, HSTL.

100 Transcript, Bukit Serene Conference, pp. 3–5.

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"should Indochina fall to the communists, followed by Burma and Siam, Malaya's position would be critical indeed." The *Singapore Standard* reported the same day that Melby had no doubt that "the Chinese Communists will march over the borders" into Indochina. Even Singapore's leftist Chinese newspaper the *Nan Chiao Jit Pao* recorded Melby saying that "Indo-China was under the threat of New China's troops," but commented that it was "laughable" how the American was "unable to quote any evidence" in support of his statement.[101] On hindsight, it would seem that MacDonald's vivid portrayals of Southeast Asia's insecurity provided all the evidence that Melby needed. Indeed, before the *Nan Chiao Jit Pao* confronted him, he had asked MacDonald and General Sir John Harding, British commander-in-chief of Far East Land Forces, for "any evidence" that the Malayan Communists were benefiting from "political guidance" outside of Malaya. Harding had confirmed the MCP received "guidance from Peking." But MacDonald, with his proclivity for graphic detail, gave Harding's statement motion and substance. He described how Chinese messengers traveled throughout Southeast Asia, communicating with the MCP not by radio (for that image would seem too remote), but in person in "Bangkok, Hong Kong, much through the [Soviet] Embassy in Bangkok." One sentence in a letter that Melby sent weeks later to his personal friend in the State Department expresses MacDonald's influence best: "Malaya has been the most stimulating experience and Malcolm MacDonald the most constructive man I have talked with."[102]

No wonder that the reports members of the Melby team submitted bore the distinctly recognizable marks of MacDonald's influence. State Department officers that had accompanied Melby pondered the possibility of China mounting an "overland invasion of Malaya" explicitly using the example of Japan, and even amplified MacDonald's hints and suggestions. They concluded that such an invasion could come only along Malaya's "northern frontier" as with the "last war," and that defending Malaya would be impossible if a Chinese southward drive, like the Japanese, already had forced "one or more other Southeast

101 "American Mission," *Malay Mail*, 11 August 1950; "Appropriate Aid for Malaya to be Recommended—Melby," *Singapore Standard*, 10 August 1950; "Leader of U.S. Far East Military Aid Mission Makes Groundless Statement that Chinese Troops Threaten Indo-China. But Unable to Name Evidence to Support Statement," *Nan Chiao Jit Pao*, 10 August 1950. The colonial authorities of Singapore shut down the paper just over a month later on 20 September. "Singapore Paper Banned," *Cairns Post* [Queensland, Australia], 22 September 1950.

102 Melby Letter to John Paton Davies (Policy Planning Staff, Department of State), 31 August 1950, 2, folder "Melby—Chronological File, 1950 (Aug 16–31)," Chronological File (1950 May–December), box 12, Melby Papers, HSTL.

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Asian countries ... [to] succumb."[103] The U.S. Navy echoed this prediction. They used the "Japs" campaign as a means of visualizing the path of China, and cited MacDonald to ground their contention that the Chinese "enemy land forces" would first conquer Indochina, causing Thailand to fall, bringing the danger "right across the border" to Malaya.[104] If the idea of interconnected insecurity among Southeast Asian states previously had been a free-floating concept for U.S. officials, it rapidly gained mass as British officers reiterated it with choice words. Like MacDonald, Harding had stated emphatically that Malayan security "lies in the defense of the frontier of Indo-China," and the fate of the two countries in the Cold War was "closely interlocked ... and cannot be separated."[105]

And so with the Melby team the domino logic returned to the United States fully formed, awaiting only the specific metaphor that Eisenhower later provided. Subsequent enunciations of the domino logic from American, British or French leaders after the Melby-Erskine-MacDonald encounter, while important, often merely retreaded the principles and imagery that already had congealed for U.S. policymakers. Logevall suggests that after Acheson's submission of NSC-51 in July 1949, it was French High Commissioner and Commander-in-Chief of Indochina General de Lattre who in late August 1951 publicly declared that "Tonkin is the keystone of the defense of Southeast Asia," and that "if Tonkin falls, Siam falls with Burma and Malaya is dangerously compromised."[106] In fact, De Lattre likely adopted this formulation from discussions with British officials like MacDonald and Harding in Singapore in June 1951, for attendees at that conference later confided in Assistant Secretary of State Rusk that the Frenchman took at "full value" the following recommendations of the Singapore Conference: "Tonkin is the key to all of Southeast Asia and were it to fall to the communists the area as a whole would be lost."[107]

In any case, in October 1950, months before de Lattre convened with MacDonald and Harding in Singapore—the Allies' once upon a time "keystone

103 U.S. State Department, "Report of the Joint MDAP Survey Mission to Southeast Asia—Malaya," n.d., 1, 9, folder "Melby—Chronological File, 1950 (Aug 1–15)," ibid.

104 Report, U.S. Navy-Joint MDAP Survey Mission in Southeast Asia, "Malaya," 17 August 1950, 16, ibid.

105 Transcript, "Phoenix Park Conference, Singapore," 9 August 1950, 8, ibid.

106 Logevall, *Embers of War*, p. 263; Michael James, "De Lattre of Rhine, Danube and Tonkin," 26 August 1951, *NY Times*, pp. SM11–12.

107 "Vital Singapore Conference on Red Threat," *Examiner* [Tasmania], 14 May 1951; Memorandum of Conversation, G. McMurtrie II Godley (Office of Western European Affairs) for Rusk, 29 August 1951, *FRUS 1951, Asia and the Pacific* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), 6, Part 1: 489.

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in the arch"—the CIA had already built upon the findings of the Melby mission and installed the domino principle in its strategic vision of Southeast Asia in the Cold War:

> The fall of Indochina would provide the Communists with a staging area in addition to China for military operations against the rest of mainland Southeast Asia, and this threat might well inspire accommodation in both Thailand and Burma. Assuming Thailand's loss, the already considerable difficulty faced by the British in maintaining security in Malaya would be greatly aggravated.[108]

To all intents and purposes, U.S. policy toward Southeast Asia was cast.

In January 1953, the imagery Eisenhower employed in his inaugural address seemed just a step away from the domino metaphor he would coin in April the following year. Not halfway into his speech, the new president would proclaim common cause with the nation's French and British allies. He spoke of the "common dignity" of European and American soldiers that fought the Cold War in Asia, who fell (in a single sentence) one by one to unseen Asian enemies. In this vein, "the French soldier who dies in Indo-China, the British soldier killed in Malaya, the American life given in Korea" that he described were all linked, and in more ways than one.[109] The order in which Eisenhower chose to refer to these fighting men, their deaths occurring from north to south in mainland Southeast Asia before encroaching upon U.S. interests in the broader region, reveals how intensely the new president believed in the interconnected vulnerability of Western interests. That these soldiers were obviously white fighting men dying in foreign fields expressed his conviction that U.S. Cold War objectives mandated protecting the colonial order and from non-whites at that. Eisenhower's row of white protectors vividly depicted the dynamic of falling dominoes, the first knocked over in Indochina making it certain the last would go over very quickly. By the time he was asked to explain the "strategic importance of Indochina to the free world" in April 1954, the "falling domino" principle he offered constituted only the latest incarnation of ideas that had been circulating since the "darkest moment" of World War II.

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108 CIA, "Consequences to the U.S. of Communist Domination of Mainland Southeast Asia," 13 October 1950, 1–2, CIA FOIA.

109 Dwight D. Eisenhower, First Inaugural Address, 20 January 1953, Bartleby, http://www.bartleby.com/124/pres54.html (accessed 10 June 2013).

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