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FROM TRUSTEESHIP TO CONTAINMENT:

AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT

IN VIETNAM 1945 - 1950

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Oberlin College History Honors

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PREFACE

When I first began to study American involvement in Vietnam, I became especially interested in the Kennedy years. I considered the escalation decision of 1961 pivotal in that it seemed to explain a number of factors in the nature and course of the continuation and intensification of American involvement. I felt a deeper investigation of the forces which defined the need and manner of intervention in this period would help me come to grips with a war I could neither accept nor understand. Also, growing up with the war on television and the war at home, my earliest impressions about politics, about the world around me, were deeply entwined with the Vietnam war and my incoherent perceptions about it and about the way the American government seemed to handle it. Thus when I thought of Vietnam, I thought of the 1960s.

However, as I read more, I saw that the United States had been involved in Vietnam much earlier than the Kennedy Administration, and I began to think that this involvement in the 1940s and 1950s was perhaps far more significant in terms of grasping the reasons behind American intervention and the attitudes which accompanied them. It seems very clear to me now that the years 1945-1950 were pivotal in that this period saw the first direct American assistance to Vietnam. This period is important because the Truman Administration did not inherit an already inexorable involvement. There were possibilities for some flexibility in policy, which would not

be the case later on, and American credibility at least did not appear to be completely identified with success in Vietnam.

I think the postwar years are crucial to the development of later policies and attitudes toward Southeast Asia, and saw the origins of a number of strategies, policies, perspectives, and perceptions which would be either intensified or perpetuated over the course of American involvement in Vietnam. Thus I wanted to study this period in the development of American policy toward Vietnam, so as to better understand the nature and course of later involvement, to gain an understanding of the reasons for the initial commitment, and to fit American policy toward Vietnam into the larger context of American foreign policy after World War II altogether.

I would like to thank Gary Kornblith for his help, guidance, and, above all, patience, throughout this project. And many, many thanks to Ellen, and to Josh and Natalie, for everything.

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CHAPTER I

INTERPRETATIONS OF AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM

The American involvement in Vietnam has motivated extensive scholarship and reflection from diverse segments of American society. The Vietnamese war for independence and the dynamics and nature of American intervention have been approached from the perspectives of many different disciplines and from all points on the political continuum. The majority of these works address, either directly or implicitly, the fundamental issue of how American involvement can be explained and understood.

The historiography of American involvement in Vietnam covers a wide range of interpretations of the impetus behind the initial commitment, the reasons for progressive escalation, and the rationales for why the United States didn't "win." Though categorizing these analyses runs the risk of oversimplification, in the interest of clarity they are classifiable in terms of the central imperatives behind intervention which they address. The salient issues these scholars bring to light can be further subdivided in that some are concerned with the motivations of intervention and others with the decision making process. The interpretations to be discussed herein base the fact or character of United States involvement on the imperatives of the balance of power, the capitalist system, American ideology, the bureaucratic establishment, domestic electoral politics, and

the concept of credibility.

The balance of power approach bases American decision making toward Vietnam in pragmatism and traditional power politics. The proponents of this approach interpret American actions as the result of realistic consideration of the international situation and of the necessities of national security. This interpretation takes two main directions: one finds the motivation behind involvement in the need to maintain the balance of world power with the Soviet Union, and the other sees the maintenance of Western power on Asia as the determining factor.

The former perspective views the aims of American policy toward Vietnam as grounded in the perception of a global Soviet threat and the resultant need to counter this throughout the world. The rise of communism in Asia was seen as an extension of Soviet power and influence, and therefore seemed to necessitate action on the part of the United States. George Herring advances this argument, stating that "the United States intervened in Vietnam to block the apparent march of a Soviet-directed Communism across Asia." According to Herring, American involvement was then escalated "to halt a presumably expansionist Communist China." With the growth of a globalist outlook in American policy making, it was increasingly considered in the interest of national security to stop the spread of communist influence in East Asia as elsewhere so as to maintain the balance of power between the Soviet Union and the United States. Thus the

original American commitment in Vietnam and subsequent escalations were motivated by the Cold War view of the world, and any perceived shift, or potential shift, in the balance of power in the favor of the Soviet Union and its allies was considered a threat to national security.

In contrast, the other main interpretation of the balance of power as the motivation behind American involvement locates the roots of American support for the French in Indochina in the need to strengthen and stabilize the Western powers. Gareth Porter makes this argument, and asserts that the origins of the commitment to France

lay not in the Cold War with the Soviet Union but in a set of attitudes and perceived interests regarding Asia and Africa that American officials held in common with the French colonialists. While President Franklin D. Roosevelt's wartime policy was strongly opposed to the restoration of French colonialism in Indochina, the State Department took a distinctly realpolitik approach in April 1945. It accepted as fact that colonialism would continue in Southeast Asia and that the United States could not afford to deny France its colonial role in Indochina, since France would be "weakened as a world power."²

Porter states that these State Department attitudes became policy after FDR's death. Porter interprets this policy as geared toward preserving Western European colonialism, and based in ethnocentricity. It can be argued, however, that American support of France as a Western European power relates to the previous analysis. That is, the United States sought to strengthen France vis a vis the Soviet Union in order to restore the European balance of power.

The interpretation which views the reasons for American involvement in Vietnam as primarily economic sees policy

making as equally rational and deliberate, but sees the goal of intervention as the stabilization of the capitalist system. This view is advanced by Richard Du Boff, who states that American foreign policy in general serves the goals of the economic ruling class. Du Boff argues that high and influential positions in the policy-making machine are largely dominated by members of the capitalist class, and foreign policy is not only molded to the objective of defending world capitalism, but derives its attitudes largely from the business outlook.

A central element of this outlook is the value and need that is felt for expansion. Thus capitalism is stabilized through the means of dominating foreign markets and controlling the resources of overseas economies. According to this perspective, then, the United States became involved in Vietnam because of the economic imperative of gaining access to Southeast Asian markets and strategic raw materials; equally important is the denial of these resources to the Soviet bloc.

Paul Joseph advocates the economic interpretation, but he states that this approach has been relatively weakened because of the tendency to reduce internal state policy to external social forces: "'Capitalism' explains U.S. intervention in Vietnam. But 'capitalism' did not determine the specific form of that intervention." Thus he expands his perspective by recognizing the validity of some elements of other interpretations in terms of the processes of policy making, notably the organization and objectives of the

national security bureaucracy, and the constraints on
5
American intervention.

The ideological perspective bases American intervention in Vietnam on less tangible motivations. At the heart of the ideological explanation is the anticommunist consensus of the Cold War. Advocates of this approach see stabilization of the basic American system as the goal of United States foreign policy, and define the system as encompassing political, economic, and social institutions. American policy is highly influenced by the imperative of preserving the power of the United States and American-oriented nations in order to maintain and in a sense validate the basic premises upon which American society and principles have traditionally been based. This perceived need is explained in relation to Vietnam as the result of the increasing tendency to view the world as involved in a kind of Manichean struggle between the forces of American-oriented capitalist democracy and those of Soviet-oriented communism in the Cold War years. In light of this, it was considered increasingly important to defend the American system against the Soviet threat.

By the late 1940s, Soviet communism was seen not merely as a threat to the stability and "free world" orientation of Western Europe, but as a force to be combatted in the world at large. Since communism was perceived as an expansionist global threat, American policy makers embraced globalism in the formulation of policies and strategies. The

anticommunist consensus was to prevail as an underlying assumption in United States decision making throughout the period of American involvement in Vietnam and was therefore a key element of the American ideological standpoint in these years.

The ideological imperative has been analyzed as a product of the "arrogance of power." Sen. J. William Fulbright argues that as a result of the position of the United States in the postwar world, the American approach to foreign policy became arrogant, though from a largely ingenuous outlook. Power corrupts, and from world power stems a feeling of omnipotence. Fulbright does not see American policy makers as "extreme practitioners" of the arrogance of power on a level with for instance Mao or Stalin, but does point out that "the problem of excessive ideological zeal is our problem as well as the communists'." While he argues that this is based in genuine good intentions and idealism, its effect is essentially the same as that of expansionist imperialism, and Fulbright sees no place for this type of crusading mentality in contemporary foreign policy.

While this interpretation of American involvement in Vietnam deals primarily with ideological concepts and ideological ardor, these naturally translate into policies. Principles such as containment and the domino theory, while formulated in consideration of realpolitik, took on special significance when approached from the black vs. white Cold War world-view: "Going well beyond balance-of-power

considerations, every piece of territory became critical and every besieged nation a potential domino. Communism came to be seen as an infection to be quarantined rather than a force to be judiciously and appropriately balanced." Thus policy and self-perpetuating ideological momentum -- in other words, means and ends -- merged in the Cold War, according to this perspective, and Vietnam became the locus of this ideological power struggle.

These analyses all address the forces motivating American intervention in Vietnam but do not attempt to explain the policy making process itself or the effects it had on the nature of United States involvement. The "quagmire" theory examines the role of the Washington decision making bureaucracy without questioning the basic assumptions behind American foreign policy. This approach focuses on inherent inadequacies and irrationality within the national security bureaucracy, and is therefore a critique of policy making means independent of ends.

The leading proponent of the quagmire interpretation is Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Schlesinger portrayed American policy toward Vietnam as a series of small steps, each accompanied by an optimistic certainty that it would be the last escalation necessary:

And so the policy of 'one more step' lured the United States deeper and deeper into the morass. In retrospect, Vietnam is a triumph of the politics of inadvertence. We have achieved our present entanglement, not after due and deliberate consideration, but through a series of small decisions. It is not only idle but unfair to seek out guilty men....Each step in the deepening of the American

commitment was reasonably regarded at the time as the last that would be necessary. Yet, in retrospect, each step led only to the next, until we find ourselves entrapped today in that nightmare of American strategists, a land war in Asia -- a war which no President, including President Johnson, desired or intended. The Vietnam story is a tragedy without villains.6

Schlesinger located the "villain" in the "Vietnam story" within the organization of the decision-making bureaucracy. Because of the sheer size and internal dynamics of the policy-making apparatus, presidents were not given adequate information upon which to base decisions. Thus in a prevailing atmosphere of optimism, United States involvement was escalated again and again, because of miscalculations and misrepresentation, resulting from bureaucratic ineptitude.

The reasons for optimism among policy-making bureaucrats have been described as relating primarily to the maintenance of personal prestige within the organization, involving such issues as the tendency to report what one's superior wanted to hear, the feeling that reporting bad news was a personal failure, the tendency for optimism to breed continued optimism in subsequent reports, and the value placed in this country on getting the job done.⁹

The "military-industrial complex" analysis also examines the role of the national security bureaucracy in American intervention in Vietnam, but stands in contrast to the quagmire theory's emphasis on inadvertance and irrationality within the policy making apparatus. Rather, this approach stresses rational and deliberate control. Advocates of the military-industrial complex interpretation see United

States involvement in Vietnam as the result of foreign policy designed to serve the interests of the Pentagon and certain national industries, notably defense contractors. According to this point of view, the military has gained and exercised substantial power in the making of foreign policy, and the industries which supply the Pentagon have therefore become more powerful as well. This in a sense approaches the economic imperative interpretation, except that instead of seeing intervention as serving the interests of the whole capitalist class, this analysis differentiates the industries which have as their main customer the United States government with its high defense budget. Thus defense industries are able to spend vast amounts on research and development. One cost of this constant technological innovation is its self-generated momentum in terms of creating the pressures to use new defense technology as soon as it is developed.

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Richard J. Barnet, one of the proponents of this thesis, sees the potential for slightly conflicting interests between state and industrial management, in that corporate goals are generally short-range economic profits and expansion, and state goals are usually less tangible long range gains. Yet he argues that corporate management has a substantial role "in shaping long-term policies, such as those affecting investment, availability, and use of resources, which are ultimately more important." Barnet goes on to state that "The corporations continue to exercise the dominant influence in the society, but the power keeps passing to the state."

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Thus, this perspective contends, the United States intervened in Vietnam because of the power and influence of the military with its brand of foreign policy, and because of the pressure to demonstrate new defense technology and strategies.

The "system worked" argument also analyzes the means to American involvement in Vietnam, concentrating more on the forces that motivated the domestic decision making process than on those which motivated its objectives. This interpretation stands largely in agreement with quagmire school regarding its depiction of the policy making bureaucracy and the prevalence of deception and self-deception in government. Yet this perspective, as presented by both Leslie Gelb and Daniel Ellsberg, refutes of the quagmire theory. They contend that presidents were given adequate information, despite the inherent problems within the decision making apparatus, and made conscious choices to perpetuate the stalemate in Vietnam.

Gelb and Ellsberg concentrate in their analyses on the policy-making process, but they agree that a general anticommunist consensus was the foundation of American foreign policy in the Vietnam years. It became imperative that the United States not lose Vietnam to communism because of possible international and domestic repercussions. American global concerns were mainly containment and the maintenance of credibility. Domestically, Gelb and Ellsberg assert that the potential results of "losing" Vietnam involved such issues as loss of the president's personal

prestige and his prospects for reelection, loss of public and Congressional support for the president's programs, both domestic and international, and increased prospects for a right-wing backlash.

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Vietnam was established as a vital security interest, and, according to Ellsberg and Gelo, this assumption was never questioned as involvement was escalated. Yet the presidents and their advisors did not, could not, enact policies which would enable the United States to "win" in Vietnam; rather, because of domestic constraints, they chose policies geared toward "not losing" in the short run. Ellsberg states this in the form of two overall rules perceived by United States presidents: 1) "Do not lose the rest of Vietnam to Communist control before the next election" and 2), "Do not commit U.S. ground troops to a land war in Asia."

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Gelo concurs that presidents took steps which were minimally necessary and maximally feasible in view of the consensus that Vietnam must not be "lost" and the concomitant domestic constraints upon policy. The potential domestic repercussions suggested above kept presidents from acting too aggressively, yet the consensus necessitated some form of action; hence the policy of continued stalemate and postponement of attempts to resolve the conflict. Gelo states that presidents acted as "brakemen" in order to ameliorate pressures from hawks and doves, both within and

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outside the government. In this respect, this perspective tends toward a pluralist interpretation of the constraints

upon presidential decision-making:

The tactic of the minimally necessary decision makes optimum sense for the politics of the Presidency. Even our strongest Presidents have tended to shy away from decisive action....Too seldom has there been forceful moral leadership; it may even be undemocratic. The small step that maintains the momentum gives the President the chance to gather more political support. It gives the appearance of minimizing possible mistakes. It allows time to gauge reactions.¹⁵

Thus Gelb contends that the political-bureaucratic system worked through the course of United States involvement in terms of the ultimate goal of preventing the "loss" of Vietnam to Communism within each president's tenure in office. Ellsberg basically concurs with this interpretation of American involvement and escalation in Vietnam. He presents his refutation of the quagmire interpretation via a decision model, the "Stalemate Machine," through which he argues that escalations were enacted not under the optimistic assumption that each would be the last necessary step, but in periods of pessimism when the policies chosen were all that could be done, given the rules constraining policy. Escalation decisions were oriented toward "the defensive aim of averting an immediate Communist takeover" and succeeded "not in terms of publicly avowed long-range aims, but in terms of the successive short-range aims and expectations that were actually...salient in the White House."¹⁶

The issue of credibility figures into most of the above analyses and serves in this sense to link these diverse arguments. While credibility has differing interpretations and different roles in both the means to and ends of American policy toward Vietnam, it refers in the context of American

intervention to symbolic politics, and the perceived need to demonstrate the prudence, power, trustworthiness, or practicability of American institutions, policies, and intentions.

The imperative of demonstrating United States credibility ties in with the balance of power objective in relation to military strength. Jonathan Schell presents the thesis that in the nuclear age, power politics became dependent upon the illusion of power: "The substance of the nation's strength was useful only insofar as it enhanced the image of strength." ¹⁷ In other words, the inability to physically demonstrate military capability necessitated the development of other forms to prove its existence. Thus credibility became a policy directed toward the goal of achieving a stable balance of power, and is seen in this light by advocates of the interpretation of United States intervention in Vietnam as motivated by realpolitik considerations.

Symbolic politics has a place in the economic argument as well. Gabriel Kolko, one of the foremost proponents of this line of reasoning, sees American involvement in Vietnam as motivated in part by the desire to set Vietnam up as a test case for other Third World nations:

That Vietnam itself has relatively little of value to the United States is all the more significant as an example of America's determination to hold the line as a matter of principle against revolutionary movements. What is at stake, according to the "domino" theory with which Washington accurately perceives the world, is the control of Vietnam's neighbors, Southeast Asia and, ultimately, Latin America.¹⁸

Kolko argues that Vietnam was vital not so much because of its economic resources as in terms of its utility to the United States as a demonstration of the credibility and gravity of the American commitment to the maintenance of its own dominant power in the world. The ultimate imperative of American intervention is, according to Kolko, the preservation of American capitalism as the leading political and economic system; in reference to this goal, Vietnam served as a warning of the extent to which the United States would go to secure the position of this system.

The role of credibility in the interpretation which sees ideology as the force behind American involvement is similar to this in that it encompasses both the ends and the means to the objectives of intervention. If Vietnam is viewed as an East Asian locus of the Cold War ideological conflict, then it follows that the role of Vietnam would be to demonstrate the preeminence of the American nation and system. Proving the credibility of the American perspective is then a central policy goal, and is also a strategy for the achievement of the aim of stabilizing the power and influence of the American ideological outlook.

The quagmire theory and the system worked analysis involve a different type of credibility: personal prestige within the government of the United States. Both interpretations point up the importance to government bureaucrats of maintaining and enhancing personal credibility and the effects this concern has toward increasing the volume of deception and irrationality within the policy making

apparatus. The system worked thesis furthers this theme in its discussion of the impact of domestic political imperatives on American intervention in Vietnam. This interpretation places high priority on the significance to the president of maintaining personal prestige toward the goal of reelection. In general, presidents and their advisors were concerned with building up the credibility of the Administration, in the eyes of the world, Congress, and the voters, in order to enhance its position toward handling the exigencies of partisan and legislative politics.

Hannah Arendt analyzes American involvement in Vietnam largely in terms of the issues of credibility and deception. She discusses two types of deception that are prevalent within the policy making bureaucracy: "image-making" along public relations lines, and decision making methods that tended toward the development of laws and theories as a means to policy making. Arendt argues that these factors enabled decision makers to design policies and strategies without regard to the ultimate and human reality of intervention in Vietnam. Arendt sees American goals in Vietnam as equally bound to issues of credibility and image, and therefore equally divorced from factual reality. She argues that there was no need, from the policy maker's perspective, to confront the facts in Vietnam, because Vietnam was only seen as a domino, a test case, or a means to demonstrating American credibility regarding containment and the position of the United States in the world.

There are thus certain continuities among these different analyses which point up the difficulty of completely adhering to or discarding any one of them. While not all of these interpretations have applications to the period 1945 to 1950, they provide a framework for analyzing the original commitment in the context of the course of American intervention on the whole.

NOTES

1. George C. Herring, America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1979), p. 270.
2. Gareth Porter, ed., Vietnam: A History in Documents, abridged ed., (New York: NewAmerican Library, Inc., 1981), "Editor's Preface," p. xxviii.
3. Richard B. Du Boff, "Business Ideology and Foreign Policy: The National Security Council and Vietnam," Sen. Mike Gravel, ed., The Pentagon Papers, 5 vols., (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971-72), 5:16-31, see pp. 16-18.
4. Paul Joseph, Cracks in the Empire: State Politics in the Vietnam War, (Boston: South End Press, 1981), p. 41.
5. Ibid., see pp. 14-15.
6. Sen. J. William Fulbright, The Arrogance of Power, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1966), p. 254.
7. Leslie H. Gelb with Richard K. Betts, The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1979), p. 22.
8. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy 1941-1966, (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1966), pp. 47-48.
9. Leslie H. Gelb, "Vietnam: The System Worked," Foreign Policy #3, summer 1971, pp. 140-167, pp. 152-153.
10. Richard J. Barnet, Roots of War, (New York: Atheneum, 1972), see p. 16.
11. Ibid., p. 184, p. 185.
12. Gelb, p. 143, cf. Daniel Ellsberg, "The Quagmire Myth and the Stalemate Machine," Papers on the War, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), p. 94. See also Gelb and Betts for an expanded, but less clear, statement of Gelb's interpretation.
13. Ellsberg, p. 102.
14. Gelb, p. 141.

15. Ibid., p. 149.
16. Ellsberg, p. 122.
17. Jonathan Scnell, The Time of Illusion, (New York: Random House, Inc., 1975), pp. 366-367.
18. Gabriel Kolko, The Roots of American Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Power and Purpose, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 85.
19. Hannan Arendt, "Lying in Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers," Crises in the Republic, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1969).

CHAPTER II

AMERICAN "NEUTRALITY," 1945 - 1947

In August of 1941, Franklin Delano Roosevelt met with Winston Churchill off the coast of Newfoundland. On August 12 they signed a broad declaration of common aims and principles, the Atlantic Charter. Central among these principles were a commitment to oppose any type of territorial expansionism, the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live, and the commitment to see that self-government is restored to all peoples denied this by force.

The Charter had concrete applications in the context of German expansionism at the time; as it was a general statement, it would stand as American policy in the postwar world. The signing of the Charter complicated the American approach to Western colonialism. Specifically, the commitment to national self-determination raised the problem of what position the United States should take in the event that the Western European powers attempted to reestablish or maintain control of their colonial possessions in Asia.

This issue was first brought to the fore in 1943, in discussions involving the war effort in French Indochina, which Japan had invaded in 1940. France was against the use of Chinese troops in Indochina, warning that French troops might react against the Chinese, because they might see a Chinese attack as directed toward motives of self-interest as opposed to the Allied effort. The United States government,

nowever, viewed this as a problem to be handled by the military in Indochina, but it was becoming apparent that more was involved. Assistant Secretary of State Berle noted this on October 21, 1943, and pointed out that the issue had to be considered:

This brings us squarely up to the problem of whether, in the Far East, we are reestablishing the western colonial empires or whether we are letting the East liberate itself if it can do so. I feel that this matter should be discussed on a high level with the President for his decision.¹

President Roosevelt had strong feelings about European colonialism. He saw colonialism as a central cause of Japanese aggression in East Asia, and looked toward trusteeship for these colonies under the auspices of the United Nations Organization to be formed after the war.² During the war, Roosevelt brought up the possibility of an international trusteeship for Indochina at the Tehran Conference. The goal of such an arrangement would be to prepare the people for self-government within a twenty to thirty year period. At Tehran FDR received complete agreement from Stalin and Chiang Kai-shek on the issue.³ This did not represent a final decision. Rather, American wartime policy regarding Indochina was characterized by indecision.

This is seen in the conflicting messages which the United States conveyed. On the one hand FDR began to commit the United States to trusteeship for Indochina; on the other, the United States was deeply committed to France and Britain, each of which held colonial possessions in East Asia. The

United States had made a number of statements dating back to 1941 reassuring France of American support for the reestablishment of French sovereignty over its colonies after the war.⁴ Therefore, when FDR began to advocate international trusteeship for Indochina, the British became concerned because of the implications this would have on their own colonial possessions in Asia. In January 1944, FDR informed Lord Halifax, the British ambassador to the United States, that it was his opinion that Indochina should be administered by an international trusteeship. In reporting this to Secretary of State Hull, Roosevelt stated that

As a matter of interest, I am wholeheartedly supported in this view by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and by Marshal Stalin. I see no reason to play in with the British Foreign Office in this matter. The only reason they seem to oppose it is that they fear the effect it would have on their own possessions and those of the Dutch. They have never liked the idea of trusteeship because it is, in some instances, aimed at future independence. This is true in the case of Indo-China.

Each case must, of course, stand on its own feet, but the case of Indo-China is perfectly clear. France has milked it for one hundred years. The people of Indo-China are entitled to something better than that.⁵

Roosevelt also strongly opposed the idea of using any French troops in the liberation of Indochina. But he hesitated to present this as an official policy conclusion because of British sensitivity to anticolonialism. American policy throughout 1944 continued to be ambivalent and the U.S. declined from stating any definitive policy toward Indochina. Roosevelt continued to reaffirm his sentiments as expressed in the Atlantic Charter, but also naturally continued to support the Allies. In the face of growing British and

French concern over the contradictions in American policy for postwar Indochina, the United States chose to postpone the problem. As FDR told Secretary of State Stettinius on January 1, 1945: "I still do not want to get mixed up in any Indo-China decision. It is a matter for postwar....From both the military and civil point of view, action at this time is premature."

President Roosevelt again raised the issue of trusteeship for Indochina at the Yalta Conference in February; once again Stalin agreed and Churchill opposed the idea. After Yalta pressures from France increased. In March De Gaulle told Jefferson Caffery, the United States ambassador in Paris, that the French did not understand American policy:

'What are you driving at? Do you want us to become...one of the federated states under the Russian aegis?...If the public here comes to realize that you are against us in Indo China there will be terrific disappointment and nobody knows to what that will lead. We do not want to become Communist; we do not want to fall into the Russian orbit, but I hope that you do not push us into it.'

Very shortly after Caffery reported this conversation, President Roosevelt seems to have modified his opinion concerning Indochina. On March 15, FDR said he would agree to France's retention of Indochina with the stipulation that independence was the ultimate goal. His policy still of course excluded unconditional reestablishment of French control, but Roosevelt was moving away from his adherence to the idea of U.N. trusteeship due to British and French opposition.

FDR's changing policy devolved to an abandonment of the trusteeship proposal in favor of allowing France to determine the future of Indochina. In a statement on April 3, approved by the President, Secretary of State Stettinius announced that as a result of the discussions at Yalta, the United States looked to trusteeship as applicable to "territories taken from the enemy" and "such other territories as might voluntarily be placed under trusteeship." With Indochina fitting into the latter category, it was really up to France to decide upon the status of Indochina.

American policy was still somewhat ambiguous at the time of Roosevelt's death on April 12. Upon Harry S. Truman's accession to the presidency, foreign policy perspectives changed rapidly. Certain themes of the considerations of Indochina policy during the Roosevelt Administration would, however, prevail under Truman. These include mainly the conflict between the need to support France as a Western power and the American commitment to anticolonialism, and the furtherance of the attempt to let France determine the future status of Indochina in order that the United States could stay out of the conflict.

Truman had very little previous knowledge of the workings of foreign policy upon Roosevelt's death. He had never been briefed on contemporary issues, nor had FDR informed Truman about his personal approach. This was especially significant in terms of relations with the Soviet Union. FDR had used a somewhat bilateral approach in that

while his public statements were of a universalist nature, he approached his personal contacts with Stalin from a more ¹⁰ realpolitik perspective. Unaware of the intricacies of Roosevelt's diplomacy, Truman would approach foreign policy from a universalist, black vs. white standpoint. He also in general assumed a stance of toughness, in part due to his sense of need to assert his authority as the non-elected heir to the presidency. Because of his relative naivete, Truman relied heavily on his advisors in matters of foreign policy, in contrast to FDR's highly personal approach. These aspects of the early period of Truman's presidency would have serious effects on the direction of diplomacy in the imminent Cold War with the Soviet Union.

On the day after FDR's death, Truman requested an outline of the principal issues in foreign policy from Secretary Stettinius. Regarding France, Stettinius reported that "the best interests of the United States require that every effort be made by this Government to assist France, morally as well as physically, to regain her strength and her influence." He continued to state that the French were then highly preoccupied with national prestige, and

They have consequently from time to time put forward requests which are out of all proportion to their present strength and have in certain cases, notably in connection with Indochina, showed [sic] unreasonable suspicions of American aims and motives. It is believed that it is in the interest of the United States to take full account of this psychological factor in the French mind and to treat France in all respects on the basis of her potential power and influence rather than on the basis of her present strength.¹¹

This overriding concern with strengthening France was a prime

motive behind United States policy toward Indochina, the result of which was a shift in focus from FDR's anticolonialism and the trusteeship concept to policies which would help to strengthen Western Europe psychologically, economically, and militarily vis a vis the Soviet Union.

Shortly after Truman was sworn in, the State Department conducted a review of policy toward Indochina. While the resultant document was never given to President Truman, the drafts drawn up by the Far Eastern Affairs (FE) and European Affairs (EUR) desks of the State Department are significant for their revelation of attitudes and opinions about the direction of Indochina policy.

The EUR draft noted Stettinius' statement of April 3 and asserted that there was "not the slightest possibility" that France would volunteer to give control of Indochina over to an international trusteeship. It went on to say that if pressure were applied to France in this context, it would have to be through unilateral action by the United States, since the other colonial powers would support France. It also pointed out that such a policy would contradict the "established American policy of aiding France to regain her strength in order that she may be better fitted to share responsibility in maintaining the peace of Europe and the world." The draft concluded that the U.S. should not oppose the restoration of French sovereignty over Indochina unless it was prepared to take similar action toward the other colonial powers; rather, the U.S. should try to influence France toward liberalizing its policies in Indochina.

In response to this, the FE division redrafted the EUR memorandum with some modifications. FE was in agreement with EUR that the U.S. should not oppose the reestablishment of French control in Indochina, but recommended a conditional offer of compliance that would guarantee some degree of self-

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government. These drafts illustrate the predominant view within the State Department. Roosevelt's concept of international trusteeship was discarded and policy choices tended away from the consideration of ultimate independence for Indochina. Rather, the proposed recommendations were for some measure of self-government under French auspices or trying to influence France toward this. Potential American policy choices were constrained by the fear of alienating France and the other Western Allies.

Very soon after Truman came into office, then, there was a definite shift in Indochina policy toward recognition and support of French control over the area upon the conclusion of the war. At the United Nations Conference in San Francisco in late April 1945, Secretary of State Byrnes reassured the French that the U.S. did not in any way question French sovereignty over Indochina.

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But this policy shift did not affect American military actions in Indochina. In the summer of 1945, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), precursor to the CIA, sent teams of North Vietnam to work ostensibly with French and Vietnamese troops in guerrilla operations against Japan. But the Vietnamese had refused to collaborate with French troops, so

the Americans worked exclusively with the Viet Minh, as they constituted the only effective guerrilla group in the area. Relations became quite warm and the OSS teams developed substantial respect and esteem for Ho and the Viet Minh. They also saw the Viet Minh as a widely supported popular movement. After the DRV had proclaimed independence, Major Allison K. Thomas, a leader of the OSS "Deer" mission, reported that "the new government seems to be enthusiastically supported by the majority of the population in every province of Indochina." Overall, Thomas' report illustrates the positive response of the OSS teams to their close workings with the Viet Minh.

Consideration of the status of Indochina has been dramatically accelerated by the Japanese surrender on August 15, 1945, after the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9, respectively. The decision to use the bomb, aside from increasing the mounting strains between the United States and the Soviet Union, found France somewhat unprepared to recover control in Indochina. The French were also upset by their relative impotence in that British and Chinese troops would be used to liberate Indochina from Japan.

the Viet Minh, however, had been prepared for mobilization almost immediately upon the end of the war in the Pacific. They had succeeded in gaining effective control by the end of August. Bao Dai abdicated on August 30, and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was established on

September 2. Throughout this period and subsequent months, Ho Chi Minh looked to the United States for support and aid.

Ho's desire for American recognition and assistance was doubtless part of the reason for his warm reception of the OSS teams. According to Major Archimedes Patti, Director of the OSS in Hanoi at the time, Ho was able to use the "Deer" mission as a "fantastic psychological factor" to convince rival parties that his party had American backing and should therefore be the one to formulate the provisional government. These rumors of American support were widely circulated, and affected Bao Dai's decision to abdicate to the "American-backed" Viet Minh.

Ho hoped to be able to utilize such pronouncements of the American commitment to anticolonialism as the Atlantic Charter to enhance his position. In a conversation with Major Patti, Ho expressed his hope that the United States would continue to condemn colonialism in Indochina. He was concerned that the U.S. would continue to condemn colonialism in Indochina. He also told Patti that he wanted to dispel the notion that he was an agent of the Comintern, calling himself a "progressive-socialist-nationalist," and emphasized above all his nationalism.

Ho Chi Minh also aimed at receiving some U.S. support through the DRV Declaration of Independence, drafted by Ho in the five days prior to Independence Day, September 2. The Declaration began with the words: "We hold truths that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, among these are Life,

Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The Declaration also included an appeal to the Allies in general: "We are convinced that the Allies who have recognized the principles of equality of peoples at the Conferences of Teheran and San Francisco cannot but recognize the Independence of Viet Nam." ¹⁸

Also, in a speech made directly after Ho read the Declaration of Independence on September 2, Vo Nguyen Giap ¹⁹ appealed directly to the Allies not to abandon Vietnam.

The United States became aware of the DRV's independence soon after September 2. American policymakers were also made aware of the seriousness of the situation in Indochina. The United States did not officially respond to the existence of the Vietnamese government until October 5, at which point Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson made the following statement to American officials in East Asia concerning American policy toward Indochina:

US has no thought of opposing the reestablishment of French control in Indochina and no official statement by US Govt has questioned even by implication French sovereignty over Indochina. However, it is not the policy of this Govt to assist the French to reestablish their control over Indochina by force and the willingness of the US to see French control reestablished assumes that French claim to have the support of the population of Indochina is borne out by future events.²⁰

This statement would, in various forms, constitute the basis of American official policy toward Indochina until 1949. This was a policy of non involvement -- "neutrality" in that the U.S. did not want to become directly involved -- French claims to sovereignty over Indochina. The United States would urge France to liberalize its policies toward the

native population, but essentially abandoned its earlier insistence on guarantees of eventual independence for Indochina.

Because of the desire to stay out of the conflict, the U.S. did not recognize the DRV or its appeals for American support. Between October 17, 1945, and February 16, 1946, Ho Chi Minh sent a series of communications to President Truman and Secretary of State Byrnes, and also to the heads of state of the other great powers.

The first of these was a telegram to Truman on October 17, at which point hostilities had been taking place for some weeks between French and Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam. Ho brought to Truman's attention both the de jure and de facto legitimacy of the DRV Provisional Government. He invoked the Atlantic Charter and this national legitimacy as qualifications for Vietnamese representation on the United Nations Far East Advisory Commission in place of the French, who were in the commission as the representatives of
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Indochina.

The next of Ho's communications was a letter to Byrnes of October 22, 1945, with which he enclosed the DRV Declaration of Independence, the rescript of Bao Dai's abdication, a declaration of DRV foreign policy, and an explanation of the DRV position on the war in South Vietnam. Ho again the French betrayal of the Allies in World War II, and the conclusion of the Atlantic Charter, which Ho said was viewed by the Viet Minh as "the foundation of future Vietnam." He also cited the U.N. charter, and asked for

recognition and intervention by the United Nations.

Ho continued to send communications to the U.S., requesting American and U.N. aid to fight starvation, and the establishment of cultural relations between the U.S. and Vietnam. He also continued to invoke the Atlantic and San Francisco Charters and appeal for recognition by the U.S. and other great powers, and reiterated the nefarious deeds and intents of the French in collaborating with Germany and Japan and the the Vietnamese effort with the Allies against Japan. Ho cited in addition President Truman's Navy Day speech of October 27, 1945 as indicative of the American position toward to national self-determination.

This speech, while never referring specifically to Indochina, included a number of broad statements of American foreign policy goals, directed mainly toward the Soviet Union.²³ Among the principles set down by Truman were the American belief in "the eventual return of sovereign rights and self-government to all peoples who have been deprived of them by force" and a pledge that the United States would "refuse to recognize any government imposed upon any nation by the force of any foreign power."²⁴ Clearly, Truman's reaffirmation of the principles of the Atlantic and U.N. Charters could be used by Ho to gain leverage over the American position.

The United States never in any way responded to Ho's appeals. When Major Patti inquired at the State Department as to whether the U.S. had acknowledged or was planning to

acknowledge receipt of the communications, he was informed that because the U.S. did not recognize the DRV government, it would be "improper" for anyone in authority to respond to Ho. He was also told that the U.S. was "committed" to look to France, and not the Vietnamese nationalists, for actions toward Vietnamese independence.²⁵ The American refusal to acknowledge Ho's letters and telegrams explains the tone of Ho's last letter to President Truman of February 16, 1946, in which he said that French aggression in Vietnam "implies the complicity, or at least, the connivance of the Great Democracies." Ho continued to push for aid, stating that "the United Nations ought to keep their words" in peace-time as well as in wartime, and cited the example of the independence granted the Philippines by the U.S. as the course the Vietnamese wished to follow.²⁶

But by this time it was even less likely that the U.S. would extend aid or recognition to Ho. The DRV was already negotiating with France, encouraged by the potential for support from the growing strength of the French Communist Party; this, conversely, motivated the U.S. to increase its support of France to avert the threat of the government falling into the hands of the communists.²⁷

Still, through this period, American support of France was restrained by the overriding American concern with remaining "neutral." The United States was reluctant to support French colonialism but also did not want to alienate the French. This policy not only disappointed Vietnamese hopes for American support but disappointed French

expectations as well, in that France had hoped for more direct support from the U.S. The imperative to shore up France as a major power in Western Europe became more vital to United States interests as Cold War tensions began to mount. The U.S. would continue to be critical of French policy in Indochina, but the priority to create a strong bulwark against the perceived Soviet threat to the European balance of power would far outweigh the American anti-imperialist commitment.

This priority was intensified upon the receipt in the State Department of George F. Kennan's long telegram from Moscow on February 22, 1946. Kennan was one of the foremost American experts on the Soviet Union, and had by this time built a strong career as diplomat and advisor. He also had a particularly vehement anti-Soviet viewpoint. The telegram included an analysis of Soviet behavior and recommendations for American policy in light of this analysis. The fundamental point of Kennan's analysis of the Soviet perspective was that Soviet hostility in foreign affairs was the result of the need perceived among Soviet leaders to justify their approach toward domestic affairs. Kennan saw communism as a means for advancing this perspective more than creating it.

In his recommendations for American policy, Kennan suggested that the best way to approach Soviet paranoia and hostility was through realpolitik. His emphasis was on building up security rather than attempting to eradicate the

Soviet threat through confrontation. This implied a globalist outlook, in that Kennan anticipated covert Soviet policy on a global scale. He predicted that the Soviet Union would make "particularly violent efforts" of a subterranean nature "to weaken power and influence of Western Powers on colonial backward, or dependent peoples." He foresaw that the Soviet Union would agitate resentments among dependent peoples, and that while these peoples were "being encouraged to seek independence of Western Powers, Soviet dominated puppet political machines will be undergoing preparation to take over domestic power in respective colonial areas when independence is achieved." Hence the task for the U.S., as Kennan envisioned it, was to provide guidance and a positive example for other nations, and above all to promote their security.

Kennan's message had an immediate impact on the American foreign policy outlook. It emphasized the importance of the American role throughout the world in acting to control Soviet expansionism. The U.S. began to formulate policies which were global in scope, and would therefore impact local policies as well. Policy planning toward Indochina, in part as a result of Kennan's projections concerning Soviet policy toward Western colonial areas, began to reflect this apprehension of Soviet global policy and the growing American tendency toward a global outlook.

As globalism grew, so grew the perception of bipolarity in the world. American ties to the Western Allies were fortified in the face of greater strains between the United

States and the Soviet Union. The East-West split was accelerated by Churchill's famous "Iron Curtain" speech of March 5, 1946 in Fulton, Missouri. Despite President Truman's claim that he had not been aware of what the message of the former Prime Minister's speech would be beforehand, his presence on the dais gave the appearance of American concurrence with Churchill's position. The effect was that the speech was interpreted by many as a statement of the Anglo-American outlook. The speech would have significant international and domestic repercussions. Churchill essentially equated Soviet domestic policy and foreign policy objectives with those of another totalitarian state, Nazi Germany, and this had an obvious impact less than a year after the conclusion of World War II. He also warned of the presence in France and most other nations of Moscow-oriented communist "fifth columns" which constituted, he asserted, "a growing challenge and peril to Christian civilization."²⁹

The day after Churchill's speech, France and Vietnam agreed to a preliminary accord. Difficult negotiations had been initiated as a result of Vietnamese apprehension due to the agreement between China and France in February 1946 allowing French troops to replace Chinese occupation troops in North Vietnam. Apparently, the DRV felt that they might effectively buy some time through negotiating to prepare for the struggle with France.³⁰ Because of the French refusal to use the word "independence" in the document, the Republic of Vietnam was recognized by France in the agreement as an

ambiguous "free state" within the French Union. Practically speaking, this accord did not produce any change in the status of the DRV, but Ho felt pressured in that he had quite narrow options stemming from his failure to secure any assistance whatsoever from the United States and the U.N. Thus Ho continued to negotiate with France through September 1946 in order to gain the necessary peace-time to build up the political, military, and economic strength of the DRV.

In the meantime, the United States perpetuated the policy of non involvement beyond vocal support of France. On April 12, Secretary of State Byrnes informed the French ambassador to the U.S., Henri Bonnet, that the United States approved the replacement of Chinese forces with French troops in northern Indochina; in accord with the policy of "neutrality," this was viewed as "a matter for determination by the Governments of France and China." And, in accord with the desire to strengthen American relations with France, Byrnes' note mentioned that the Sino-French agreement "completes the reversion of all Indo-China to French control." Thus the U.S. implicitly supported this reversion, despite the fact that it contradicted of the Franco-Vietnamese agreement of March 6, which was not mentioned.

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Yet throughout 1946, American officials continued to voice concern over French motives and policies in internal communications. As Franco-Vietnamese negotiations at the Dalat Conference in April and May progressed with difficulty, the U.S. Consul at Saigon, Charles Reed, reported that:

French insistence withdrawal Chinese from north and

all-over procrastination to Dalat may have ulterior motives as it is not impossible French military coup may be brought off as soon as Chinese gone. Some French civilians have spoken of this "as putting Vietnamese in their place." In any event over-all picture is not happy one and much compromise, good faith and tolerance needed to effect peaceful settlement.³³

Similarly, during the next Franco-Vietnamese negotiations at Fontainebleau between July and September, Abbot L. Moffat, the Chief of the State Department's Southeast Asian Affairs desk (SEA), reported his suspicions about French motives and (supported) the Vietnamese claim that France was not living up to the agreement of March 6. Moffat asserted that the French were moving to regain control of Indochina "in violation of the spirit of the March 6 convention," and felt that since Vietnamese resistance was likely, the ultimate result could very well be widespread hostilities. He also reported that the French might be preparing to secure control through a resort to force.³⁴ The result of the Fontainebleau Conference was the modus vivendi of September 14, which, while it didn't settle the most crucial issue of the status of Cochinchina, reiterated the importance of perpetuating the spirit of the March 6 preliminary agreement and anticipated continuation of negotiations in January 1947.

While American officials were quite critical of French policy and actions in Indochina, the Cold War foreign policy perspective was heading increasingly in directions which would soon lead to stronger efforts to shore up France in both Europe and Southeast Asia. On September 24, 1946 Clark Clifford, Special Counsel to the President, reported to

Truman on United States relations with the Soviet Union. While never circulated outside the White House, Clifford's report is important in that, building on the foundation of Kennan's "Long Telegram," it recommended policies which would gain more currency as the Cold War accelerated. Among the more significant suggestions Clifford made was that the U.S. should "support and assist all democratic countries which are in any way menaced or endangered by the U.S.S.R." He recommended economic rather than military support in that this would strengthen ties with friendly nations and would also effectively demonstrate "that capitalism is at least the equal of communism." Clifford also stated that U.S. policies must be global in scope.³⁵ The report illustrates the growth even at this early date of the tendency to view the world in bipolar terms.

This viewpoint increased American concern with Ho Chi Minh's communist affiliations. In the fall of 1946, the French claimed to have proof that Ho was receiving direct instructions from Moscow. There were also alleged connections between the DRV and Chinese communists, but none of this was verified. At this point serious clashes had broken out between France and Vietnam, and Americans again questioned France's intentions, in this case in reference to Ho's Moscow connections. James O'Sullivan, the American Vice Consul at Hanoi, reported that "French concern over Communism may well be devised to divert Dept's attention from French policy in Indochina."³⁶

But regardless of their doubts about France, American policy makers became concerned with their allegations. In instructions to SEA Chief Moffat, who was going to Hanoi, Acting Secretary of State Acheson cautioned him to

Keep in mind Ho's clear record as agent international communism, absence evidence recantation Moscow affiliations, confused political situation France and support Ho receiving French Communist Party. Least desirable eventuality would be establishment Communist-dominated, Moscow-oriented state Indochina in view DEPT, which most interested INFO strength non-communist elements Vietnam.³⁷

After visiting Ho, Moffat reported that Ho indicated his government was first and foremost a nationalist group. Moffat said this went along with the well-informed French view Ho's group was interested in building up an effective nationalist state first as a prerequisite to the secondary aim of building a communist state.³⁸ In reporting Moffat's view to the London, Moscow, and Nanking Missions, Secretary Byrnes stated that, apart from the strength of Vietnamese nationalism and anti-French sentiment, "French influence is important not only as an antidote to Soviet influence but to protect Vietnam and SEA from future Chinese imperialism."³⁹ This indicates the relatively high priority given to France in American national security concerns.

American policy toward Indochina after the outbreak of the Franco-Vietnamese War on December 19, 1946 increasingly reflected this ranking of priorities. On December 30, Consul Reed reported to the Secretary of State that the French might be willing to negotiate with Vietnam, but needed to find someone with whom to treat without "losing face." Reed

suggested "creation new Vietnam Government," perhaps under former emperor Bao Dai, with which France could deal without embarrassment and which could exert influence over the native population. This is a relatively early suggestion of the idea of supplanting the existing "extremist" Vietnamese government with one more compatible to French and American interests.

The year 1947 saw crucial shifts in the American foreign policy outlook, but as of February 3, Indochina policy was essentially the same. In the first policy statement made by the new Secretary of State George C. Marshall on this day, the main themes found in Indochina policy since the war years were basically reiterated. Marshall reaffirmed the American concern with strengthening France: "we are anxious in every way we can to support France in her fight to regain her economic, political and military strength and to restore herself as in fact one of major powers of world." He also reaffirmed United States recognition of France sovereignty. Marshall also brought up the American policy of anticolonialism, pointing out that France persisted in the use of a "dangerously outmoded colonial outlook and methods," and that nineteenth century style colonial empires were a thing of the past. Tying in another strand of previous U.S. policy toward Indochina, Marshall noted Ho's communist affiliations and emphasized that "we are not interested in seeing colonial empire administrations supplanted by philosophy and political organizations emanating from and controlled by Kremlin." Marshall also made note of the

rising globalism in American foreign policy by stating that the situation in Indochina could no longer be viewed as of a local character. Secretary of State Marshall concluded by reaffirming the policy of non-involvement: "Frankly we have no solution of problem to suggest. It is basically matter ⁴¹ for two parties to work out themselves."

Marshall's appointment as Secretary of State brings up his earlier role as mediator between the nationalists and communists in China. American policy toward China would have a very strong impact on Indochina policy in 1949. While the effects were not yet felt in 1947, the course of American involvement in China up to this point is relevant in terms of the similarities between the two conflicts.

The stated American goal in China after World War II was the creation of a unified, stable, and friendly state. Toward this end, the United States sponsored negotiations between Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government and the Chinese Communists in 1945 and 1946. But the American effort at mediation, first under Ambassador Patrick J. Hurley, and later under General Marshall, was curtailed in October 1946 from frustration and with the pessimistic prediction that Mao's group would inevitably gain control in the foreseeable future. ⁴²

Marshall's February statement that the Indochina conflict was no longer to be considered a local concern became especially apt in February and March of 1947. Britain had been providing substantial military and economic aid to

both Greece and Turkey in hopes of halting communist attempts to gain control in both nations. In February Britain informed the United States that it could no longer afford to support Turkey and Greece and would have to withdraw its troops and terminate all aid to these countries in order to fortify its own unstable economy. The U.S. felt it crucial that the American government extend military and economic assistance to Greece and Turkey, but this entailed receiving Congressional approval. Thus on March 12 President Truman addressed a joint session of Congress to request \$400 million in aid for the countries. This came to be known as the Truman Doctrine.

The message of Truman's speech constituted a turning point in American foreign policy. The speech established globalism as policy and defined American national security to be involved in any struggle where aggression of any type threatened the peace. After presenting the critically unstable nature of the situation in each country in rather dramatic terms and stating that the U.S. was the only nation to which Greece and Turkey could turn for much needed support, Truman discussed American foreign policy in general. He stated the creation of conditions under which the U.S. and other countries could live "free from coercion" as one of the primary aims of American foreign policy. However, Truman asserted, we would not be able to realize this goal "unless we are willing to help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian

regimes." He continued that the direct or indirect imposition of totalitarianism would "undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States."

Truman stated that U.S. policy must be to support nations in resisting this kind of pressure, and that this should be achieved primarily through economic aid. He also warned of the potential danger to neighboring countries should either Greece or Turkey "fall under the control of an armed minority." Truman stated that "Should we fail to aid Greece and Turkey in this fateful hour, the effect will be far reaching to the West as well as to the East." He concluded by asserting that the free nations of the globe looked to the U.S. for leadership, and that if the United States failed to take that responsibility, repercussions would be felt not only in America but throughout the world.⁴³

The Truman Doctrine speech was a turning point because it was a definite statement of American foreign policy goals and strategy. It essentially codified American anticommunist globalism, supplementing the outlook suggested by Kennan in the "long telegram" with universalist rhetoric. One can speculate as to what extent the speech was mere rhetoric and to what extent it was actually believed by the Administration. There is little doubt that the main immediate objective of the address was to push Truman's foreign aid programs through Congress.⁴⁴ Thus the lofty rhetoric was employed as a means to gain Congressional and

public support for these costly programs.

It is also clear that Truman himself had a fairly hard-line vision of foreign policy, and wanted to take a "tough" stance toward the Soviet Union. Before delivering the speech, the President requested that it be rewritten to include a statement of general policy, then revised it again himself in order to make the language stronger: "I wanted no hedging in this speech. This was America's answer to the surge of expansion of Communist tyranny." ⁴⁵ Thus rhetoric of the sort used in the Atlantic Charter was employed, this time directed toward the threat of Soviet aggression in peace-time as opposed to the aggression of the Axis powers during the war. The declaration of policy in the Truman Doctrine speech suggested that it was America's role to protect the right to national self-determination in the face of communist expansionism, as distinct from the right to national self-determination in general. Whatever the main purpose of the speech, and regardless of how much American policy makers actually believed in its message, the Truman Doctrine had the immediate effects of heralding the Cold War in the United States and disseminating anticommunist ideology throughout the American public. And, the effects of this policy attitude would soon be felt in American local policy toward Indochina.

NOTES

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CHAPTER III

FROM PERIPHERAL TO VITAL INTEREST, 1947 - 1950

The universalism broadly pronounced in the Truman Doctrine speech was not immediately echoed in internal foreign policy discussions. This indicates that the Truman Doctrine was in fact designed mainly as a means to Congressional support for the aid proposal for Greece and Turkey, and not as an official statement of policy. Rather, policy makers concentrated at this point on setting priorities in terms of potential recipients of United States aid because it was plainly impossible to provide aid to the entire globe.

An example of this is the report to the Joint Chiefs of April 29, 1947, by a Pentagon policy planning group, the Joint Strategic Survey Committee. Written relatively soon after President Truman's speech, the report emphasized that "the mere giving of assistance to other countries will not necessarily enhance the national security of the United States." The report pointed up the limits of American capabilities, and ranked possible recipients of aid in terms of areas of vital and peripheral interest to the national security of the United States.

The report indicates the growth of bipolarity in the policy making outlook. It made recommendations in reference to the potentiality of "ideological warfare," and viewed the "primary rule" governing American aid as the exclusion of aid to all countries under Soviet control. The

recommendation was to extend aid on the basis of importance to national security before urgency of need -- "excepting in those rare instances which present an opportunity for the United States to gain worldwide approbation by an act strikingly humanitarian." The report is thus much more pragmatic than the policy announced in the Truman Doctrine speech of assisting free peoples the world over, but it also indicates the prominence within the Pentagon at this early date of the viewpoint of a world divided into two camps. The Committee stressed the need to strengthen friendly nations in strategically vital areas in order to be prepared "in the event of war with our ideological enemies."¹

France was high on the list of areas of vital national interest. But French policy in Indochina was still viewed quite critically by State Department officials in Southeast Asia. The United States retained its neutrality in the Franco-Vietnamese War through 1947 but searched at the same time for possible alternatives and compromises to what appeared increasingly to be a policy planned toward the goal of returning Indochina to its prewar status on the part of France. In May, the Southeast Asia desk (SEA) tried to influence a more progressive policy outlook of urging France to negotiate with the DRV, the result of which was success in getting Secretary of State Marshall to send a telegram to Ambassador Caffery warning of the possible effects of a French attempt to maintain control of Indochina.²

In these instructions to Caffery, Secretary Marshall

pointed out a fact which would be central to American policy making in the period: while policy makers were concerned with the direction of French strategy, they were very aware that any setbacks to French interests in Southeast Asia would be setbacks to American interests as well. Thus the United States would try to influence French policy but would not, all in all, be able to exert much pressure because of its dependence on the French to facilitate the aims of American policy without necessitating direct United States involvement in Indochina. Marshall warned in this connection of the possible repercussions of protracted war in Indochina:

Plain fact is that Western democratic system is on defensive in almost all emergent nations southern Asia and, because identified by peoples these nations with what they have considered former denial their rights, is particularly vulnerable to attacks by demagogic leaders political movements of either ultra-nationalist or Communist nature....Signs development anti-Western Asiatic consciousness already multiplying...We fear continuation conflict may jeopardize position all Western democratic powers in southern Asia....

Marshall suggested that Caffery express the American hope for a concerted effort by France towards ending the war soon. Marshall's concern that the French desire to find more conciliatory Vietnamese leaders with whom to negotiate would lead to the creation of a puppet government or the restoration of Bao Dai is quite significant; Secretary Marshall rejected the latter because it would imply "democracies reduced resort monarchy as weapon against Communism." ³ Thus the United States was concerned with building up strong democratic Western-oriented nations in Southeast Asia, but France was more interested in regaining

colonial control of Indochina.

American policy makers felt that the installation of a French puppet government and/or the restoration of the former emperor would definitely not be acceptable to the native population.⁴ It was becoming increasingly clear that Ho Chi Minh was the only Vietnamese leader with extensive popular support in 1947, and the State Department therefore began considering the viability of unification under Ho from the standpoint of American national interests. On July 17, Marshall requested that Consuls Reed in Saigon and O'Sullivan in Hanoi appraise the likely repercussions upon American interests should France be forced to treat with the DRV,⁵ leading eventually to DRV control in all of Indochina. Thus Marshall was considering the viability of national communism as a solution in Indochina. The concept that a communist state could be free of Soviet domination challenges the bipolar view of the world advanced by the Pentagon.

In their responses a few days later, both Reed and O'Sullivan expressed the belief that under these prospective circumstances, it was quite possible that Vietnam could exist independent of Soviet control. Both stressed the commitment among Vietnamese first and foremost to independence, and felt that the United States could exert influence if it were to extend aid to Vietnam. Reed and O'Sullivan contended that the primary sentiment among Vietnamese nationalists was anti-French, and that the possibility of strong Soviet influence was unlikely, at least for quite some time. They asserted that Ho was a nationalist first, and would align his

government with whatever nation offered aid toward the goal of independence. Reed did point out, however, that there was no way of knowing exactly how influential Ho's communist affiliations would be once independence was achieved, whether facilitated by the United States or not: "A wily opportunist, Ho will take any aid coming his way to gain his ends without disclosing ultimate intentions."⁶

The view that France would most likely have to deal with Ho eventually was reiterated by Chinese foreign ministry officials a few months later. Significantly, the Koumintang officials who spoke with American Ambassador Stuart voiced no serious concern with the possibility of a communist state on China's border, and rather strongly disagreed with the idea of restoring Bao Dai.⁷

While the State Department was considering the possibility of a communist-directed government over Indochina, American foreign policy on the larger scale was meanwhile taking crucial steps toward the expressed goal of fortifying Western Europe against the spread of Soviet communism. It became increasingly apparent early in 1947 that the economy of Western Europe was in critical shape, and the United States began to draw up plans for large scale economic aid for the Western Allies. The resultant program for assistance, the Marshall Plan, was propopsed for the first time by Secretary Marshall in a speech at the Harvard commencement on June 5. Marshall presented the grave condition of the European economy and the necessity for

extensive aid in order to prevent total economic, social, and political collapse. He then stated the clear humanitarian responsibility of the United States to support reconstruction in Europe in terms similar to those employed by President Truman in the Truman Doctrine speech:

Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos. Its purpose should be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist...governments, political parties, or groups which seek to perpetuate human misery in order to profit therefrom politically or otherwise will encounter the opposition of the United States.⁸

With this speech the United States began to work comprehensively toward European recovery.

One of the most important foreign policy making bodies in this period was the Policy Planning Staff (PPS), formed by Secretary Marshall early in 1947. It was designed to create and develop long-range policy programs, and Marshall appointed George F. Kennan as its first director in May. Kennan's "long telegram" had created for him a reputation within the government as its foremost Soviet expert and a very able and incisive strategist. Because of his position in the foreign policy establishment, Kennan published his article for Foreign Affairs, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," under the pseudonym "Mr. X" in July, 1947. However, when the author's true identity was leaked, the article began to be taken by some as a statement of United States policy. This was unfortunate, as Kennan's analysis in the "X" article did not reflect the entirety of his thinking on the subject, nor did he intend it as a statement of official strategy. The

ultimate result would be confusion over Kennan's true perceptions due to contradictions and inconsistencies between the "X" article and the policies and strategies formulated by the Policy Planning Staff.

Kennan used the term "containment" for the first time in the Foreign Affairs article, which was intended mainly as a public restatement of the analysis in his "long telegram." Kennan argued that

the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies. It is important to note, however, that such a policy has nothing to do with outward histrionics: with threats or blustering or superfluous gestures of outward "toughness."

Kennan believed that Soviet pressure upon the West could be contained "by the adroit and vigilant application of counterforce at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points." ¹⁰ It can be seen, then, how this could produce confusion if taken as an official policy statement, in that the Administration's policy did not conform with the "X" article, nor did it employ "containment" as described in the article.

The "X" article was quite significant because it brought the concept of containment into foreign policy considerations and into the public eye. Kennan's true perceptions about the implementation of containment can be clarified through examining some of the internal PPS studies he directed. For example, in a paper for Secretary Marshall on November 6, 1947, Kennan emphasized that "our policy must be directed

toward restoring a balance of power in Europe and Asia." He stressed the use of economic assistance for the objective of containment, and pointed out that psychological and political factors were also important as means to restoring the balance of world power.¹¹ This is a different approach from that of the "X" article, which advocated a somewhat militant stance. Kennan did not suggest the use of military force in Foreign Affairs -- he believed the Soviet Union did not intend to start a war -- but did favor a militant approach to the Cold War. Altogether, Kennan's concept of containment was approached from a realpolitik standpoint, and he recognized the limits of American power, something which was not so apparent in the "X" article.

The policy of containment, although it would, over time, tend in different directions from Kennan's original idea, was a very central aspect of American Cold War policy making. In terms of the policy planning apparatus itself, the State Department's Policy Planning Staff was supplemented with the creation of the National Security Council (NSC) in the National Security Act passed in July 1947. The NSC would become very influential in the forming of foreign policy in relation to national security interests. There was now a body involved in policy formulation which was dominated by¹² the Pentagon.

By mid-1947, the United States had begun to take significant action toward the aim of restoring stability to the world through fortification of the Western powers and Western-oriented nations. Through the European Recovery

Program (the Marshall Plan) and other general policies being formulated in 1947, the United States sought to encourage the stability that would enable the West to take a less defensive posture toward Soviet policies.

This was also true of American policy toward Indochina. American officials were still hesitant about the idea of the Bao Dai solution, but an article published in Life magazine in December of 1947 was widely interpreted in France as an American endorsement of the proposed solution. The article, written by the former American ambassador to France, William C. Bullitt, advocated the policy of creating a movement around Bao Dai which Bullitt felt would attract substantial numbers of Vietnamese nationalists away from Ho and his government. In France, Bullitt's article was taken as a statement of American policy and a pledge of American moral and economic support for Bao Dai.

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The prospect of American support was apparently encouraging to Bao Dai, who sensed that American involvement by way of pressuring France for Vietnamese independence was inevitable. On December 7, Bao Dai and Emile Bollaert, the High Commissioner of France for Indochina at that time, signed the first Ha Long Bay Agreement. This rather ambiguous accord associated Bao Dai with a Vietnamese nationalist movement sponsored by France, and included a vague promise for eventual independence within the French Union. The document was essentially meaningless, however, because it extended only a negligible amount of autonomy to

Vietnam. Bao Dai soon became skeptical of French sincerity and dissociated himself from the agreement.

While the United States did not yet agree to endorse the Bao Dai solution early in 1948, American attention was increasingly directed toward the strategy of installing "truly nationalist" (meaning noncommunist nationalist) leadership in Vietnam in order to win support away from Ho and his government. This indicates a heightened concern with avoiding the prospect of communist control over Vietnam. It also reflects the view of Ho as primarily an agent of world communism; his commitment to nationalism was seen as subordinate in the long run. This trend can be better understood in the light of global policy planning in early 1948.

Kennan's perceptions of the application of his containment concept in East Asia were put forth on February 24, 1948, in PPS 23. In accordance with the basic ideas of PPS 13, Kennan emphasized the limits of American power and the need to differentiate between areas of vital and peripheral interest to the national security. In relation to the East Asia in particular, Kennan also stressed the limits of American strength as a moral or ideological force. He stated that the American political philosophy and general outlook were not viable for the Asian peoples, and pointed up the enviable position of the United States vis a vis East Asia in terms of the ratio of wealth to population. Kennan believed the task confronting the United States was to maintain this position without causing detriment to the

national security, and that this entailed leaving behind the "sentimentality" and "the luxury of altruism" which the United States realistically could no longer afford.

Therefore, Kennan asserted the need above all for restraint in approaching East Asia. He noted frankly that in the course of adapting to modern technology, it was probable in Asia that "many peoples will fall, for varying periods, under the influence of Moscow, whose ideology has a greater lure for such peoples, and probably greater reality, than anything we could oppose to it." Continuing in this pragmatic vein, Kennan argued for a policy of economic and military aid, extended primarily to Japan and the Philippines.
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The National Security Council's perception of the application of containment was quite different, reflecting more the tone of the "X" article. NSC 7, completed on March 30, 1948, discussed American policy toward the world communist movement. This document viewed the interests of all the nations within the international movement, including the Soviet Union, as basically equivalent. It stated that "The ultimate objective of Soviet-directed world communism is the domination of the world." Another point emphasized by the NSC was the presence of communist fifth columns throughout the world, and that this implied a threat almost as grave to the United States as the external threat. All in all, the study advocated a "counter-offensive" rather than defensive stance. This concept of containment expanded on the

interpretation in the "X" article, and also involved increasing the military capabilities of the non-communist nations.¹⁶

These two perspectives on American foreign policy help to explain Indochina policy in early 1948. The United States observed a policy of restraint toward involvement in East Asia, recognizing Western Europe as a higher priority to American national security. But American policy also exhibited a heightened awareness of the perceived need to prevent the area's coming under communist control. This led to the search for "truly nationalist" leaders within Vietnam with the intention of directing Vietnamese nationalism away from Ho Chi Minh and the DRV.

Meanwhile, the somewhat reluctant Bao Dai met again with Bollaert on June 5, and witnessed the signing of the second Ha Long Bay Agreement by Bollaert and General Nguyen Van Xuan, head of the Republic of Cochinchina. In this accord France recognized Vietnamese independence and established the State of Vietnam with Bao Dai as Chief of State. But this did not signal a real change from the first Ha Long Bay Agreement, because France specifically retained control over foreign relations and the Vietnamese army, and put off any further transfers of power to future negotiations.¹⁷

June 1948 was a turning point in the Cold War. It saw not only the Berlin blockade late in the month but, more relevant to Indochina policy, the Tito-Stalin break in mid-June. Tito's successful resistance to Stalin's attempt at subjugating Yugoslavia to Soviet control led to Yugoslavia's

expulsion from the Soviet bloc for "taking the route of
nationalism."¹⁸ Thus it could no longer be said that the
world was divided in two camps. Tito's break necessarily led
to a reevaluation of American policy.

PPS 35, submitted to Secretary Marshall on June 30,
evaluated the Tito-Stalin split and recommended the approach
the United States should take in view of this. The Policy
Planning Staff asserted that it would probably be possible
for the United States to take advantage of this rift and of
potential rifts between the Soviet Union and its other
satellites as well. The document stressed continued caution,
in that Yugoslavia was still a communist state, "dedicated to
an ideology of hostility and contempt toward the bourgeois
capitalist world." The paper stated that the American
attitude toward Yugoslavia would depend upon the approach
Tito would take toward the United States and its allies, and
that if this turned out to be cooperative, the United States
would have no problem in developing economic relations with
Yugoslavia. The nature of Yugoslavian domestic government,
whether or not it was acceptable to American tastes, need not
have any bearing on the development of international
relations.¹⁹ The Policy Planning Staff viewed Tito's
defection with a degree of optimism, implying that it was
conceivable for the United States to coexist with communist
states which were not controlled by the Soviet Union.

Tito's break with the Soviet Union would lead to
consideration of the viability of a Titoist solution for

Vietnam, but the United States largely continued to see more value in attempting to locate a noncommunist indigenous solution. In trying to ascertain the extent of communist bloc influence in Ho's government, the State Department in July 1948 was able to find evidence that Ho was definitely a communist, but found nothing to indicate that he had direct ties with Moscow. The Department saw also that "Ho seems quite capable of retaining and even strengthening his grip on Indochina with no outside assistance other than continuing procession of French puppet govts."²⁰ In light of this, the United States urged France to give the government formed on June 5 "every chance to succeed by the granting to it of such concessions as will attract greatest possible number of non-²¹ communist elements." It was really too soon to tell whether Titoism would work in Yugoslavia, much less in Vietnam, so the United States directed its efforts toward a "truly nationalist" solution.

In this connection, Secretary of State Marshall advised the U.S. Embassy in Paris on July 14 that, provided the French government approved the June 5 agreement and the change in the status of Cochinchina from a colony to a part of the new government, the United States would consider public approval of the French action as a forward looking step. Marshall felt this policy would be helpful in strengthening non-communist elements in Indochina.²² This shift in thinking in terms of American willingness to support French policy indicates the growing importance to the State

Department of finding an alternative to Ho's form of government. Marshall apparently believed that this "truly nationalist" group would be able to induce Viet Minh supporters over to its position given greater French concessions.

On September 27, the State Department produced its first extensive policy statement on Indochina. The document stated the short-term goal of American policy as assisting in a solution which would result in ending the war. Foremost among the long-term objectives advanced by the Department were to eliminate Communist influence in Indochina and see installed an independent nationalist state friendly to and compatible with Western conceptions of democracy. The document stated that Ho was probably supported by a "considerable majority," but that the United States had not urged the French to negotiate with him because of his record as a communist. This along with the frequent allusions in State Department documents to true nationalists suggests that the Department assumed that the majority would prefer a non-communist government but supported Ho for lack of a better option. The policy statement also indicated a desire to arrange for trade relations with Indochina, once the political situation was stabilized.

But all in all, the State Department paper had no solution to suggest. It stated that the Department was hesitant to pressure France too much because the United States was unable to present a solution and unwilling to intervene. The Department also pointed up the fact that

France and Europe were higher priorities to United States security than was Indochina. The Department saw French military reconquest as highly undesirable but also saw French withdrawal as unworkable; thus the United States was left with a policy of essentially acquiescing to French strategies with which it did not agree.

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Within the next year American policy toward East Asia in general and Indochina in particular changed radically. This was due in large part to the American reaction to the course of events in China. Through 1948, however, policy toward China was somewhat indecisive. A number of parallels exist between American policy toward China in 1948 and current and especially future policy toward Indochina. In this context, a brief examination of China policy in 1948 shows the irony of decisions made toward Indochina shortly thereafter.

Although the United States considered Chiang Kai-shek's prospects for success highly unlikely, aid was extended to the Nationalist regime in 1948 because of the strong pro-Chiang faction in Congress and constant pressures from outside the government in the form of a very powerful China lobby. The China Aid Act was passed in April 1948, even though most policy makers did not think it could appreciably alter the course of events in Chiang's favor. Truman had to extend the aid in order to receive the support he needed from the Congressional China bloc for Marshall Plan aid to Europe. China did not become a high national security priority until control passed completely to the Communists in October 1949; this was largely because of the attitude that it would be

impossible for the United States to influence the course of the civil war without enormous assistance to China. Mao had become too powerful, and Chiang's government was essentially bankrupt; therefore, the aid the U.S. would have to extend under these circumstances was beyond its means in view of the higher importance of European recovery at this point.²⁴

The Administration was unable to come up with a coherent China policy in 1948. There was no organized bloc in Congress which could effectively counter the pressures of the China bloc and the China lobby.²⁵ The Joint Chiefs also advocated continued support to Chiang in order to postpone a communist takeover in China, though they admitted that this would not in all likelihood change the ultimate result.²⁶ This pessimistic reasoning would be reasserted in relation to Indochina very shortly.

The State Department, on the other hand, favored working to facilitate a Titoist solution to the conflict in 1948. The Department saw the possibility of a Sino-Soviet split along the lines of the recent Tito-Stalin split as the most realistic U.S. objective.²⁷ In NSC 34, submitted on October 13, 1948, and based on a previous study, PPS 39, the Department advanced this argument. The paper pointed out the vastness of the task of asserting control over all of China for the Kremlin, noting Mao's love of power and his firmly entrenched position in the Chinese Communist movement. The Department advocated a policy of trying to prevent China from falling under Soviet control, but did not consider it

practicable to expect or work toward the unification of China
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under Chiang Kai-shek. But the State Department was somewhat reticent in asserting its views, because the Titoist hypothesis was met by skepticism from President Truman, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Congress.

Until 1949, then, the United States had no single defined policy toward China, but rather continued to provide aid to the Nationalists, knowing full well that this was not sufficient to turn the tide against the Communists. There were essentially very few options for China policy, considering the strength of the China lobby and the Congressional China bloc, the skepticism outside the State Department toward the viability of encouraging a Titoist solution, the limits of American military and economic resources, and the overriding importance of strengthening Western Europe in the light of the perceived Soviet threat.

As with China policy, Indochina policy still suffered in late 1948 and early 1949 from lack of clarity due to conflicting interests within the policy-making apparatus and to the dearth of options which were perceived as workable. The State Department, while interested in finding a noncommunist solution to end the war in Indochina, continued to hesitate in its support of Bao Dai. In January of 1949, Truman began his second term in office and brought with him a new Secretary of State to replace Marshall, who had resigned due to ill health. The new Secretary was ex-Under Secretary Dean Acheson, a strident anticommunist with an approach at least as tough as the President's.

A few days before the inauguration, Acting Secretary of State Robert Lovett voiced his concern about the progressing French negotiations with Bao Dai in a telegram to the Embassy in Paris. As noted above, his feeling was that while State supported a "truly nationalist" solution in Indochina,

we cannot at this time irretrevably [sic] commit US to support of native govt which by failing develop appeal among Vietnamese might become virtually puppet govt, separated from people and existing only by presence French military forces.²⁹

Similarly, Acheson told the Ambassador in Paris a month later of his doubts regarding the extent of French concessions. He remarked that the State Department was aware that "over past three years Fr have shown no impressively sincere intention or desire make concessions which seem necessary solve Indochina question." The United States would need stronger evidence of progress before it would agree to support the Bao Dai regime publicly. Acheson frankly admitted his awareness of the emptiness of French policy, but given the alternatives of allowing Ho to win control or direct U.S. involvement, he persisted in trying to pressure France to concede more ground to Vietnamese nationalism.

This points up a problem with American policy through the late 1940s in general. Through its policies of "neutrality" in Indochina and financial support of France in Western Europe, the United States hoped to achieve its main goal: the building of strong and friendly noncommunist states to work toward the containment of communism. But France, it can be argued, was more concerned with retaining

its colonial possessions than with containment. The United States hoped to persuade France to act toward the fulfillment of American aims in Southeast Asia yet was not willing either to intervene directly, or to threaten France with sanctions, because of the more serious repercussions these actions would have on national security.

On March 8, lengthy negotiations between the French and Bao Dai were concluded with the Elysee Agreements, which reaffirmed Vietnam's status as an independent state within the French Union, but again gave control of foreign relations and military affairs entirely to France. Apparently, Bao Dai felt he had few options if he was to have any role in the government, and was counting on support and assistance from the United States.³¹

March 1949 also saw the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This was an important step toward increasing the American global role. As Acheson stated it on March 18:

...the security of the United States cannot be defined in terms of boundaries and frontiers. A serious threat to international peace and security anywhere in the world is of direct concern to this country. Therefore it is our policy to help free peoples to maintain their integrity and independence, not only in Western Europe or in the Americas, but wherever the aid we are able to provide can be effective.³²

Using these terms reminiscent of the Truman Doctrine, Acheson suggested that the collective security pact was geared toward "waging peace." This is interesting in view of the fact that militarily, the pact did not enhance American security too significantly. Rather, because European recovery had

progressed quite well through the Marshall Plan, the United States could now, through the means of the NATO military alliance, work toward strengthening its political bonds with and influence upon Western Europe.

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Meanwhile, on the question of extending support to Bao Dai, the WE (Western European Affairs) and EUR desks of the State Department recommended that, in light of repeated French requests for American economic aid for Indochina, the United States should provide assistance to Bao Dai. WE and EUR advised this even though they still had serious reservations concerning the chances for the new regime's success:

While we obviously do not wish to get ourselves involved in a repetition of the painful Chiang Kai-shek situation, we must realize that the only alternative to a Bao Dai regime is one led by the Communist Ho Chi Minh. It is therefore believed that Bao Dai, although a very weak reed, represents the only solution to France's problem in Indochina and we should give him such support as we can without getting ourselves involved with him in case he turns out to be a failure.³⁴

This clearly pessimistic appraisal recommended American support for Bao Dai while giving all the reasons that it would most likely not succeed. The fact that the Chiang situation is mentioned is quite significant, for the recommendation is essentially for a repeat of American policy toward Chiang: extend nominal support, but not enough to implicate American prestige in the likely event that it will be a losing proposition. This is especially significant in view of the imminence of the fall of the Kuomintang at this point. It indicates a heightened perception of the communist threat in East Asia, and a resultant intensification of the

perceived urgency of American action toward a temporary solution. American officials began to push for the Bao Dai solution with no illusions about its prospects for long term success.

The State Department did not, however, immediately follow the recommendation of the WE and EUR desks. Rather, Acheson instructed the Saigon desk to be very careful not to endorse Bao Dai prematurely in order to retain freedom of action.³⁵ But a few days later, George Abbot, the American Consul General in Saigon, sent Acheson an extensive review of the Indochina situation, prepared for the New Delhi Foreign Service conference the previous February. In this study, Abbot restated the belief that the only alternatives to the Bao Dai solution were "either continued costly colonial warfare or French withdrawal leaving a Communist-controlled government in a strategic area of Southeast Asia."³⁶

As a result, on May 10 Acheson stated that the State Department did in fact desire the success of the Bao Dai experiment, since it seemed to be the only resolution apart from communist control. Acheson also stated that the U.S. would recognize the Bao Dai Government and consider extending economic and military aid to Indochina, provided that France offered concessions "to make Baodai solution attractive to nationalists." Acheson also emphasized the importance of making concessions in view of the "possibly short time remaining before Commie successes Chi are felt Indochina." Acheson introduced the possibility of getting support for Bao

Dai from noncommunist Asian nations so as to avoid the appearance of the Bao Dai solution as a "gambit engineered by FR, US and UK as part strategy of West-East conflict." 37

This gives the impression of a kind of public relations approach in order to win the support of noncommunist nationalists to the Bao Dai government.

Acheson reiterated his conviction that a non-communist solution was the only solution a few days later in a telegram to the Consulate in Hanoi. On the subject of communist nationalists in Vietnam, Acheson stated that

Question whether Ho as much nationalist as Commie is irrelevant. All Stalinists in colonial areas are nationalists. With achievement natl aims (i.e., independence) their objective necessarily becomes subordination state to Commie purposes and ruthless extermination not only opposition groups but all elements suspected even slightest deviation....It must be conceded theoretical possibility exists estab Natl Communist state on pattern Yugoslavia in any area beyond reach Soviet army....while Vietnam out of reach Soviet army it will doubtless be by no means out of reach Chi Commie hatchet men and armed forces.38

This certainly clarifies the vehemence of Acheson's anticommunist attitude. He saw the possibility of a Titoist solution as only "theoretical." Also significant is the growing threat felt by the proximity of Chinese Communism.

While specific policy toward Bao Dai was being formulated, the Policy Planning Staff had begun work on a paper designed to develop United States policy toward Southeast Asia in general. The drafting of PPS 51 began in February, 1949. The study considered Southeast Asia the target of a Soviet-directed offensive and viewed the region as vital because it was located at a crossroads in global

communication and was a source of important raw materials. PPS 51 viewed the possibility of communist control in the area especially in terms of the domino effect this would have upon the Middle East and Australia. The paper also viewed Southeast Asia as "a vital segment on the line of containment, stretching from Japan southward around the Indian Peninsula." ³⁹ This was a crucial shift in thinking in regard to the application of containment in East Asia; previously, policy had adhered to Kennan's notion of a line of containment composed of island strongpoints, especially Japan and the Philippines. Now the Planning Staff drew the line of containment on the Asian mainland itself.

While the paper suggested the importance of noncommunist victory in Southeast Asia and called for a more activist American policy in the area, it did not recommend extensive stepping up of the involvement of American economic and military assistance, though it called for these in small amounts. But in the end, PPS 51 was only sent to the field as an information source, and its recommendations were not used. The difficulty the United States continued to have in finding a viable solution or course of action which would not imperil American prestige resulted in a policy somewhere between supporting France and doing nothing. Thus by July 1949, PPS 51 "had become, in effect, a non-policy paper." ⁴⁰ The paper's failure reflected, for one thing, the ascendancy of the FE and EUR desks over the PPS. These offices and their subordinates generally worked out policy among themselves, following PPS strategies only when this was

expedient in terms of their own attitudes and strategies.

Later in July, Congress ratified the NATO treaty, and President Truman sent Congress the Mutual Defense Assistance Bill, the main purpose of which was to appropriate military aid to the Pact nations. The bill was also to authorize Military Assistance Program (MAP) funds for East Asia. The bill was debated in Congress through September, and controversy erupted because of demands by the China bloc that the bill include funds for aid to Nationalist China. Some MAP funding would have to go to Asia in order to get the desired amount for Europe through Congress, and finally in September it was agreed that \$75 million would be authorized for the "general area of China." This wording left the President options in terms of deciding how to use the money.

The Mutual Defense Assistance Act was passed at long last through Congress immediately following Truman's announcement on September 22 that the Soviet Union had exploded its first atomic bomb in August. The abrupt end of the American atomic monopoly was a great shock to many, and would have far-reaching repercussions on American policy making in the next months. It had the immediate effect of allowing the MDA Act to pass through Congress. In the eyes of the Congressional China bloc, the \$75 million contingency fund was to be used to assist Chinese Nationalists. But the actual result of the vague wording of the Act was that most of the funding would be used in Southeast Asia. The authorization of this funding would soon stimulate planning

for its use, which ultimately led to an activist American containment policy in Southeast Asia.

The formation of NATO and the authorization of MDA appropriations illustrate a major shift in 1949 toward militarism in the application of containment. The concept of military preparedness became increasingly important in the planning of American strategy; at this point the United States began to consider rearming West Germany against the growing Soviet threat. The Marshall Plan had been fairly successful in shoring up Western Europe economically, but by the middle of 1949, this was not enough.

American insecurity was heightened by the Soviet bomb test in August because of the clear implications this had on the balance of world power and on the perception of American invulnerability to a military threat. Insecurity was compounded by the success of the Chinese Communists through 1949, culminating in the formal establishment of the People's Republic of China on October 1. This was a much changed world, a different Cold War, and one in which the old containment policy did not appear to be an adequate defense of the West and its economic and political systems. As tensions mounted late in 1949, policy was reevaluated, and the American approach toward Southeast Asia and toward the Franco-Vietnamese conflict in particular changed substantially.

The result of the reassessment of American policy toward Asia was the NSC 48 series written late in December 1949. Through NSC 48, policy makers aimed at formulating a coherent

general statement of American policy goals and strategies in East Asia. NSC 48/1, presented by the National Security Council on December 23, stated that the ultimate American objective in Asia was the development of independent and self-sufficient nations friendly to the U.S. It viewed the Soviet Union as the foremost threat to Asian independence, and concluded therefore that the short-term objective of the United States "must be to contain and where feasible to reduce the power and influence of the USSR in Asia to such a degree that the Soviet Union is not capable of threatening the security of the United States from that area."

In reference to China, NSC 48/1 advanced the view that in the near term, Soviet influence would grow stronger, but allowed for the possibility of a Sino-Soviet split later in time, depending on the success of the Chinese communist regime. It also noted that the U.S. could not expect to lessen communist control of China, but U.S. policy could have an effect on the development of Sino-Soviet relations. Another strand of policy regarding China in the study was that the U.S. should not restrict trade between friendly nations and China, provided this excluded items of possible military use against the Western powers in Asia. The paper's discussion of Southeast Asia basically served to restate earlier general policy goals, but did point out the importance of Asia as a source of raw materials of strategic value, especially tin and rubber, and as a market for the United States and Western powers.

On December 30, President Truman approved the document with certain changes. Among the significant additions in the resultant paper, NSC 48/2, was the objective of developing "sufficient military power in selected non-Communist nations of Asia to maintain internal security and to prevent further encroachment by communism." This indicates once again the attention being given by this time to military preparedness in the face of the communist threat. Regarding Vietnam, the modified paper stated that "particular attention should be given to the problem of French Indo-China and action should be taken to bring home to the French the urgency of removing the barriers to the obtaining by Bao Dai or other non-Communist nationalist leaders of the support of a substantial proportion of the Vietnamese." Finally, NSC 48/2 stated that the "sum of \$75,000,000 for assistance to the general area of China, which was made available under Section 303 of the Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949, should be programmed as a matter of urgency." Thus while the policy reevaluation of December essentially involved a consolidation of earlier statements on separate regions, it pointed up the priority being given to devising plans for using the newly authorized MAP funds.

While American policy goals regarding Indochina were not altered early in 1950, the immediate importance of their achievement and the zeal with which this was approached were substantially intensified. The greatly increased activism was largely the product of the communist victory in China and its domestic as well as international repercussions, and the

creation of funds with which to finance an activist policy.

The "fall" of China had a serious impact on domestic politics. A heated debate arose over "who lost China," and the China bloc and China lobby began to criticize the Administration, especially the State Department. Secretary Acheson addressed the National Press Club on January 12 and attempted to focus attention away from China and toward the issues of general importance to American interests in Asia. Acheson stressed the development of the two lines of containment in East Asia: the Pacific perimeter off the Asian coast, and the line through the Southern and Southeast

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Asian mainland. The emphasis on broader policy issues did not, however, succeed in diverting the attention of the China bloc. This led to a perceived need on the part of the Administration to demonstrate American willingness and ability to act decisively in Asia. It also led to the shuffling of personnel within the State Department in order to attract less attention to certain officials who were suspected of not having done everything in their power to avert the Communist victory in China.

Another factor which intensified the felt need to act in Southeast Asia was the recognition of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam by the People's Republic on January 18. The two nations also concluded a trade agreement for military aid. It should also be noted that Chinese Communist troops had been stationed since late in 1949 at the Sino-Vietnamese

border. The Soviet Union also extended recognition to the DRV on January 30. This accelerated the push within the United States toward recognition of Bao Dai's government. Acheson stated on February 1 that the Soviet recognition of the DRV "should remove any illusions as to the 'nationalist' nature of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveal Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina."⁴⁷

The next day, Secretary Acheson recommended to the President that the United States extend diplomatic recognition to the Three Associated States of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Truman complied with this, and United States recognition was announced on February 7, at which time Britain also extended recognition to Bao Dai.

This clarifies the position of Vietnam as a Far Eastern locus of the worldwide East-West struggle. This approach toward Vietnam was intensified by the advent of fervent domestic anticommunism early in 1950. On February 9, Senator Joseph R. McCarthy made his first charges of communist infiltration of the State Department in his famous speech in Wheeling, West Virginia. These and later accusations toward State Department officials were in large part an outgrowth of the search for an explanation to the question of who "lost" China. The mass hysteria provoked by McCarthy and his Congressional allies would have serious effects on public opinion. Mounting anticommunist fervor on the domestic front would naturally only further advance the anticommunist tendency in American foreign policy making.

In connection with the growing interpretation of events in Vietnam as part of a global struggle, Acheson reported on February 16 that the French, on the basis of this view, were requesting American military aid to France in Indochina through Section 303 funding.⁴⁸ The United States was already planning to send a mission to Southeast Asia to study the appropriations of these funds. But even with American recognition of Bao Dai and plans to extend economic and military aid to Vietnam, the United States could not secure the alliance of the noncommunist neighboring states. Ambassador Stanton in Bangkok reported to Secretary Acheson that

It is transparently clear that Asiatic neighbors of Indochina consider Bao Dai a French creation and a French puppet; despite current and anticipated actions of support by US and western powers they prepared sell his regime short, if status Bao Dai remains undrasticlaly modified; even if such changes made promptly, he must exert effective leadership comparable to Ho's.

Stanton continued, saying that the "missing component" was not American assistance, but was, as earlier, further French concessions.⁴⁹ But this would not prove to be a deterrent; the course of events continued to intensify the American perception of the urgency of combatting communism in the area.

At the end of February, the State Department submitted NSC 64, a draft on Indochina policy. The paper presented the

threat of communist aggression in Indochina as part of a larger communist plan to eventually "seize all of Southeast Asia." Pointing up the importance of proximity to Communist China, it asserted that a "decision to contain communist expansion at the border of Indochina must be considered as a part of a wider study to prevent communist aggression into other parts of Southeast Asia." Altogether, the salient point of the position paper was its interpretation of Indochina as a vital area in terms of its place on the line of containment on the Asian mainland; it also asserted the likelihood of a domino effect in Southeast Asia if Indochina were controlled by a communist government. By this time, then, Southeast Asia was decisively viewed as a vital area in the interests of United States national security. This change was a result of the need to contain China; the threat to Europe was no longer the utmost American concern in making policy toward East Asia.

The United States began constructively in March to plan the implementation of containment in Southeast Asia. This involved both economic and military assistance, and a little public relations work as well. Secretary Acheson suggested to the Embassy in France that the U.S. extend aid to France in Indochina, but stressed that it was important to "make Bao Dai appear to be the overt recipient" so as to help in solidifying his political position.

On March 6, the first official American economic mission to Southeast Asia, headed by R. Allen Griffin, was dispatched

with the main objective of deciding upon appropriate projects to be financed by Section 303 funds. Between March 6 and April 22, the Griffin mission visited Indochina, Singapore, Burma, Thailand, and Indonesia. Its findings helped in directing American economic aid in Southeast Asia, but the mission seems to have had the additional objective of demonstrating the American interest in and commitment to constructively countering communism in the region. The conclusions Griffin formed regarding the political situation and the role of the United States in Southeast Asia essentially conformed to the Department's established policy line. Thus the well-publicized mission served as a public relations venture to enhance public reception of the Administration's decision to send aid to Southeast Asia.⁵²

The growing trends in the late 1940s toward globalism and military preparedness in the face of the threat of communist aggression, and the changing interpretation of the strategy of containment came together in April 1950 with the completion of NSC 68. The study was written by an ad hoc group from both the State and Defense Departments, under the supervision of Paul Nitze, George Kennan's recent successor as director of the Policy Planning Staff. NSC 68 was a broad reevaluation of national security goals and strategies, stimulated partly by the unexpected Soviet atomic bomb test and the resultant greater possibility that the Soviet Union would choose to start a war with the United States. Another major stimulus was the communist victory in China. Because of these events, the study indicated that the global balance

of power had shifted in the favor of the Soviet Union, and that action must be taken to reverse this.

Setting up the basic conflict between the "free" society of the United States and the "slave" society of the Soviet Union, NSC 68 viewed the world situation in terms of this polarization imposed upon the United States by Soviet communism: "The assault on free institutions is world-wide now, and in the context of the present polarization of power a defeat of free institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere." Implicit here, and throughout the study, is the definition of American interests based on the world communist threat. This constitutes a shift from Kennan's original concept of containment, whereby the United States would defend selected areas deemed vital rather than accord equal importance to all nations threatened by communism.⁵³ Kennan's strategy was no longer considered adequate in view of the events of 1949.

There are a number of other points where NSC 68 shows the evolution of the containment concept from Kennan's original idea. For example, in defining the policy itself, the document greatly stressed the importance of military strength, almost to the exclusion of the role of political, economic, and psychological strength, which Kennan had seen as central to the building of self-confidence in the Western-oriented world. NSC 68 stated that "without superior aggregate military strength, in being and readily mobilizable, a policy of 'containment' -- which is in effect

a policy of calculated and gradual coercion -- is no more than a policy of bluff."

The paper continued to build the case for military preparedness: "the Soviet Union is widening the gap between its preparedness for war and the unpreparedness of the free world for war." It also cited the communist victory in China and the "politico-economic situation in the rest of South and South-East Asia" as an asset to the Soviet Union regarding communist expansion. No mention of a possible Sino-Soviet split was made. Because of the emphasis on military strength, NSC 68 did not suggest any strategy for taking advantage of possible rifts within the communist movement, in contrast to Kennan's thought. This omission can perhaps be explained in part by the overall concern in the paper with the short term importance of appearances; any communist victory, whether or not it eventually worked to the advantage of the Soviet Union, would appear to be a short term loss for the United States.

In conclusion, NSC 68 advocated the rapid build-up of political, economic, and military strength in the "free world" in order to regain the initiative in the Cold War.

The document was to become the blueprint for American policy making in the Cold War. It illustrates the evolution of the concept of containment since the term was coined by Kennan in 1947 toward a more militaristic interpretation, incorporating a "zero-sum" approach, whereby every Soviet gain implied an American loss, and vice versa. This in turn implied that virtually every area outside the Soviet bloc was vital to

American national security. NSC 68 effectively legitimated the broad public rhetoric of the Truman Doctrine by writing it into policy; this universalist rhetoric was employed largely in order to mobilize Congressional and public support for the proposed military build-up.⁵⁶ But NSC 68 was not a speech, it was a policy plan; this indicates the extent to which American globalist anticommunism was accepted by policy makers.

The general tone of NSC 68 and its policy recommendations was reflected in American policy toward Vietnam and the heightened need which policy makers felt for an active policy there. On April 10 the Joint Chiefs of Staff reaffirmed the "critical strategic importance" of Southeast Asia to the United States in terms of its location as a crossroad of communications, the presence of important raw materials there, and its position as "a vital segment in the line of containment of communism stretching from Japan southward and around the Indian Peninsula." The Joint Chiefs also pointed out the inevitable domino effect the fall of Indochina would have on the other Southeast Asian states, and recommended the "early implementation of military aid programs for Indochina, Indonesia, Thailand, the Philipplines, and Burma." In addition, the establishment of an American military aid group in Indochina was recommended.⁵⁷

On May 1, President Truman approved the allocation of \$10 million for military aid to Indochina, and the decision

to extend this aid was announced by Secretary Acheson on May 8. The planned establishment of an American military and economic mission to the Three Associated States of Indochina was publicly announced on May 25. This policy had therefore been firmly established some weeks before the North Korean invasion of South Korea on June 25. The outbreak of the Korean War did, however, stimulate an acceleration in the allocation of military aid to Indochina, as well as the dispatch of the Military Assistance Advisory Group to Vietnam. This was announced by the President on June 27.

The outbreak of war also had the effect of immediately validating the policy directions and attitudes advanced in NSC 68. As Secretary Acheson remarked later, the document had been a policy in search of an application to confirm its viability until June 25, when "Korea came along and saved us." ⁵⁸ As President Truman stated on June 27, "the attack upon Korea makes it plain beyond all doubt that communism has passed beyond the use of subversion to conquer independent ⁵⁹ nations and will now use armed invasion and war." Indeed, the outbreak of the Korean War did seem to justify the course of American policy toward what was seen as a global communist threat. It served to confirm the direction of American foreign policy toward globalism and increased military preparedness.

Throughout the postwar period, American policy makers had been aware that the economic aid the United States extended to France was being used in various proportions for the French effort in the war with Vietnam. The first direct

U.S. aid to Indochina was allocated in 1950, but this was not so much an abrupt change in policy as the culmination of indirect American involvement in Indochinese affairs since the conclusion of World War II. The increasing lack of flexibility in American foreign policy across the late 1940s, both toward Indochina and toward the communist world in general, led the United States to direct involvement in Vietnam. French unwillingness to grant real concessions to Vietnamese independence compounded by American unwillingness to see a communist government in power in Vietnam made it impossible for the United States to approach its national security objectives in Southeast Asia without becoming directly involved.

The possibility of the existence of Vietnam as a communist state independent of Soviet influence was discussed within the State Department between 1947 and 1950, but the acceleration of the Cold War with the Soviet Union made this appear to be too risky. Also, Titoism was still quite new, and did not have an appreciable impact on foreign policy planning by 1950. The growth of fervent anticommunism in America reached a peak in that year with the beginning of McCarthyism; altogether, the prevalence of the Cold War view of a global Soviet-directed communist threat precluded approaching Ho Chi Minh as a strong and effective nationalist leader first, and a Moscow-trained communist second.

Thus the United States felt forced to some degree to support French policy in Indochina for want of more promising

options. Events in 1949 served to catalyze active American economic involvement in Vietnam. The "fall" of China and the ensuing accusations of weak American policy there resulted in a perceived need to act decisively somewhere in the Far East. This was due to pressures from the military establishment, the Congressional China bloc, and the China lobby. This perceived need was compounded by the authorization of funds for the area, largely due again to pressures from the China bloc, which led to the creation of ways to utilize these funds through a policy reassessment late in 1949. And this in turn led to the push for a more activist policy in Southeast Asia early in 1950.

In broad terms, the extension of direct American aid to Indochina in 1950 can be considered an outgrowth of the Cold War and the attitudes and strategies it produced. By 1950, United States policy toward Vietnam was already established, and while the stakes for the United States would change in subsequent administrations, the ultimate underlying goal of preventing a communist victory in Vietnam would remain constant.

NOTES

1. "United States Assistance to Other Countries from the Standpoint of National Security," report by Joint Strategic Survey Committee to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, April 29, 1947, extracted in Etzold and Gaddis, pp. 71-83.
2. Porter, 1:145.
3. Telegram from Secretary of State Marshall to Ambassador Caffery in Paris, May 13, 1947, US-VN Relations, Book 8, V.B.2, pp. 100-102.
4. See Airgram from Reed to Acheson, June 14, 1947, in Porter, 1:151-156.
5. Telegram from Marshall to Reed, July 17, 1947, in Ibid., pp. 156-157.
6. Telegrams from Vice Consul O'Sullivan in Hanoi and Consul Reed in Saigon to Secretary Marshall, July 21 and 24, 1947, in Ibid., pp. 158-161.
7. Telegram from Ambassador Leighton Stuart in Nanking to Secretary of State Marshall, October 18, 1947, US-VN Relations, Book 8, V.B.2, pp. 114-115.
8. Secretary of State Marshall's address at the Harvard Commencement, June 5, 1947, transcript in Bernstein and Matusow, pp. 257-259, quotation taken from p. 259.
9. John Lewis Gaddis, Strategies of Containment, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 25.
10. [George F. Kennan], "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," Foreign Affairs, July 1947, pp. 572-576, 580-582, quotes taken from pp. 574 and 575.
11. "Resume of World Situation," PPS 13, November 6, 1947, extract printed in Etzold and Gaddis, pp. 90-97.
12. Blum, p. 18.
13. US-VN Relations, Book 1, II.A.2, p. 11.
14. Patti, p. 396.
15. "Review of Current Trends: U.S. Foreign Policy," PPS 23, February 24, 1948, excerpted in Etzold and Gaddis, pp. 97-100, 114-124, 161-163, and (on the Far East) 226-228.

16. "The Position of the United States with Respect to Soviet-Directed World Communism," NSC 7, March 30, 1948, in Etzold and Gaddis, pp. 164-169.
17. Patti, p. 458.
18. Walter LaFeber, America, Russia, and the Cold War: 1945-1980, Fourth ed., (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1980), p. 77.
19. "The Attitude of This Government Toward Events in Yugoslavia," PPS 35, June 30, 1948, in Etzold and Gaddis, pp. 169-172.
20. Telegram from Secretary of State Marshall to U.S. Embassy in Nanking, July 2, 1948, US-VN Relations, Book 8, V.B.2, pp. 127-129.
21. Telegram from Secretary Marshall to Ambassador Caffery, July 3, 1948, in Ibid., pp. 130-133, quotation taken from p. 132.
22. Telegram from Secretary Marshall to U.S. Embassy in Paris, July 14, 1948, in Ibid., p. 135.
23. Department of State Policy Statement on Indochina, September 27, 1948, in Ibid., pp. 143-149.
24. Etzold and Gaddis, p. 236.
25. Blum, p. 22.
26. See "Possible Courses of Action for the U.S. With Respect to the Critical Situation in China," NSC 22/1, August 6, 1948, in Etzold and Gaddis, pp. 238-240.
27. Blum, p. 35.
28. "United States Policy Toward China," NSC 34, October 13, 1948, in Etzold and Gaddis, pp. 240-247. See also "U.S. Policy Toward China," PPS 39/1, November 23, 1948, in Ibid., pp. 247-251. PPS 39/1 is not an official statement of Department policy, but rather an elaboration on the views put forth in NSC 34, by Kennan.
29. Telegram from Acting Secretary of State Robert Lovett to the American Embassy in Paris, January 17, 1949, US-VN Relations, Book 8, V.B.2, p. 152.
30. Telegram from Secretary Acheson to the American Embassy in France, February 25, 1949, in Porter, 1: 183-184.
31. Patti, p. 397.
32. Statement by Secretary Acheson on NATO, March 18, 1949,

from U.S. Department of State Bulletin, March 27, 1949, pp. 384-388, excerpted in Bernstein and Matusow, pp. 275-279, quote taken from p. 277.

33. LaFeber, p. 85.
34. Memorandum from Theodore C. Achilles, Office of Western European Affairs, to John D. Hickerson, Director, Division of European Affairs, March 25, 1949, in Porter, 1:194-195.
35. Telegram from Secretary Acheson to the American Consul at Saigon, May 2, 1949, US-VN Relations, Book 8, V.B.2, p. 153.
36. Despatch from Abbot to Secretary Acheson, May 5, 1949, in Ibid., pp. 154-189, quote taken from p. 157.
37. Telegram from Secretary Acheson to the Consul in Saigon, May 10, 1949, in Ibid., pp. 190-192.
38. Telegram from Acheson to the Consulate in Hanoi, May 20, 1949, in Ibid., pp. 196-199, quote taken from pp. 196-197.
39. Blum, p. 112.
40. Ibid., p. 123.
41. Ibid., p. 124.
42. Ibid., p. 125.
43. "The Position of the United States with Respect to Asia," NSC 48/1, December 23, 1949, US-VN Relations, Book 8, V.B.2, pp. 225-264.
44. "The Position of the United States with Resepct to Asia," NSC 48/2, December 30, 1949, in Ibid., pp. 265-272.
45. Blum, p. 199}
46. Ibid, p. 183. Acheson's speech can be found in the Department of State Bulletin, January 23, 1950, pp. 111-118.
47. Statement by Acheson on Soviet Recognition of the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam, February 1, 1950, in Porter, 1:225.
48. Memorandum of Conversation by Acheson, February 16, 1950, in Ibid., pp. 237-239.
49. Telegram from Stanton to Acheson, February 17, 1950, in

US-VN Relations, Book 8, V.B.2, pp. 280-281.

50. "The Position of the United States with Respect to Indochina," NSC 64, February 27, 1950, in Ibid., pp. 282-284.
51. Telegram from Acheson to Ambassador Bruce in France, March 4, 1950, in Porter, 1:244-245.
52. Blum, p. 202.
53. Gaddis, p. 91.
54. Ibid., p. 102.
55. "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," NSC 68, April 14, 1950, printed in Etzold and Gaddis, pp. 385-442, quotations taken from p. 389, p. 402, and p. 409.
56. Gaddis, pp. 108-109.
57. Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the Secretary of Defense, April 10, 1950, in US-VN Relations, Book 8, V.B.2, pp. 308-314.
58. Dean Acheson at a Princeton Seminar, July 8-9, 1953, quoted from the Acheson Papers by LaFeber, p. 100.
59. Presidential Statement on Korea, June 27, 1950, in Bernstein and Matusow, pp. 437-438.

CHAPTER IV

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

The development of American policy toward Vietnam between 1945 and 1950 can only be understood in the context of Cold War concepts and decision making. Vietnam policy grew out of general principles and global strategies directed toward the Soviet Union and its allies. But it was also a specific policy constructed for a particular area, and must be analyzed as such as well. While none of the standard interpretations of American involvement in Vietnam can by itself sufficiently explain the nature of or impetus behind American policy between 1945 and 1950, taken in combination, these analyses provide a comprehensive framework for understanding changes in this crucial period of Vietnam policy making.

A reexamination of the decisive shifts in American policy toward Vietnam between 1945 and 1950 demonstrates the applications of different interpretations to the actual course of events. The first major policy shift of the period occurred in 1945, when Roosevelt gave up his concept of international trusteeship for Indochina because of French and British opposition. This change was motivated largely by realpolitik imperatives. Roosevelt was truly opposed to colonialism, but Indochina was simply not important enough in the larger scheme of things to risk a breach with the Western Allies. Economic motivations apply to this decision to the extent that the concern for continued cooperative relations

with Western Europe took priority over access to the economy of Southeast Asia.

The nature and course of American policy toward Vietnam through 1946 continued to reflect the high priority given to European recovery more than the direct importance of Southeast Asia. A stable and confident Western Europe was crucial to maintaining the balance of power with the Soviet Union, and therefore the United States felt pressured to support France to the extent of affirming French sovereignty in Indochina (although the United States did not support French policy in the region). This policy of noninvolvement beyond tacit acceptance of the French role in Indochina was based on a pragmatic assessment of the relative importance of strengthening France toward the aim of enhancing American national security.

Ideological and economic motivations influenced the realpolitik approach in American policy at this time, because the American idea of a balance of power assumed the importance of stabilizing capitalism and stabilizing democratic institutions in Western Europe. In other words, these goals served as the foundations for American realpolitik under Truman, because Soviet power was a potential threat not only militarily, but politically, economically, and socially as well. Building a strong and confident Western Europe indicated by definition strengthening the Western economic and political system.

American policy toward Indochina began to shift again in 1947. The United States maintained a policy of "neutrality"

beyond basic support of French sovereignty, but American officials became more critical of French policy and conduct in the Franco-Vietnamese war and the United States began to try to exert more pressure on the French to make an effort toward resolving the conflict. France seemed to be increasingly intent upon recovering complete control, and this was not in the American national interest. The United States began to search in 1947 and 1948 for a viable solution. The State Department briefly discussed the possibility of unifying Vietnam under national communism through Ho in this period. But the suggestion of a communist regime independent of Soviet influence received little attention, even after Tito's break in 1948. Apart from the fact that the outcome for Yugoslavia was not decisive as yet, this is best explained by the growing ideological influence in American policy making. Cold War tensions were on the rise, and the United States tended increasingly toward a globalist outlook in response to the perception of a rapidly polarizing world. The United States continued to base its actions on the imperative of maintaining the balance of power, but in a less and less traditional form. As the Soviet threat seemed to grow, so grew American anticommunism, and American policy makers began to view the global balance of power through an ideological lens.

Since the anticommunist consensus was spreading within both the United States government and American society at large, officials considered it increasingly vital to find

some viable form of "truly nationalist" leadership in Indochina through which French control could be supplanted, and communist control could be avoided. The fact that policy makers felt there was potential for such a leader to draw support from Ho's nationalist following is best explained by the arrogance of power concept within the ideological imperative. According to this interpretation, Americans saw democracy as inherently superior to communism as a national system. This indicates the growing significance of ideology as a motivating force in policy making. Anticommunism was becoming the basis upon which Indochina policy was formulated.

Another crucial policy shift was the push to support Bao Dai in the spring of 1949. Before this point, the United States had been consistently pessimistic about Bao Dai's chances for success. But having found no viable "truly nationalist" leadership, the United States opted for the Bao Dai solution as the only alternative to Ho Chi Minh. This decision is reminiscent of the consistently unenthusiastic support the United States extended to the French in Indochina: in both cases the credibility imperative influenced predominantly realpolitik motivations in that the United States was unwilling to extend direct support in the interest of American prestige. Since neither the French throughout the late 1940s nor Bao Dai in 1949 was considered to have much likelihood for success, the United States was reluctant in both instances to become involved because of the probable negative impact on national credibility.

With Bao Dai as with France, the United States nevertheless agreed to extend some measure of support for the purposes of a more vital national interest. With the French, this had been European recovery; with Bao Dai, it was containment of the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. The balance of power imperative was involved in relation to the imminence of communist success in China. Because of the assumption that communist nations would align with the Soviet Union in a monolithic power base, the expected Chinese Communist victory, and Ho's potential victory would cause a shift in the balance of power in the Soviets' favor. Thus the avoidance of a communist success in Vietnam was a primary national security concern. This illustrates the extent to which realpolitik and anticommunist ideology had merged in American policy considerations. The concept of national security was being redefined in response to the perceived communist threat. This represents a decisive shift in thinking, because it contradicts Kennan's previously accepted division of the world into vital and peripheral areas. The inherent pragmatism of the balance of power approach was being progressively eclipsed by ideological irrationality.

The circular reasoning of this approach would be legitimized in NSC 68: an area was vital to national security if it was perceived as threatened by communism, so a peripheral area that was potentially endangered became a vital interest. There was no differentiation involved, no rational structuring of the world according to priorities.

Rather, the tendency among American policy makers to view the world as involved in a global bipolar struggle prompted a widely expanded redefinition of national security. American policy toward Vietnam began to be transformed by the imperatives of a worldwide ideological struggle.

This interpretation of the motivation behind Vietnam policy planning explains the key decision in mid-1949 to redefine containment in East Asia. Because of the imminence of the communist victory in China, the Pacific perimeter was no longer adequate defense for East Asia. Policy makers began to feel the need to build a line of defense on the Asian continent in order to contain Chinese communism. This illustrates the evolution by this time of the policy of containment to include military means. There was a marked military bias in foreign policy making by 1949, and Pentagon influence would become much more extensive in 1950. This acted mainly to influence the nature and timing of American intervention in Vietnam, but does not explain its underlying themes.

The policy outlook underwent significant changes in 1949, but actual American policy continued to be non-involvement with a measure of support for France. The United States refrained from direct intervention out of concern for the maintenance of credibility. Events in the fall of 1949 precipitated the last and most crucial shift in Vietnam policy between 1945 and 1950: the decision to become directly involved.

The Soviet bomb test in August led to the passage of the

Mutual Defense Assistance Act in September, which authorized funds to be used for military aid in "the general area of China." And the victory of the Chinese Communists by October resulted in the policy reassessment which suggested the use of MAP funding for Asia; this in turn led to the dispatch of the Griffin mission. These events indicate the growing strength of the military bias in foreign policy by 1950.

Domestic politics were also influential in the decision to extend direct aid to Bao Dai's government in 1950. Many of the domestic factors that the "system worked" argument points up acted to constrain presidential decision making at this point. The allocation of MAP funds for Asia was the result of pressure from the China bloc and the China lobby for aid to Chinese Nationalists. Nationalist Chinese. Truman was forced to succumb to that pressure to some extent in order to get his European aid program through Congress without heavy opposition from the China bloc. Popular and Congressional criticism of the Administration's handling of China policy led not only to this legislative pressure but to the beginning of McCarthyism as well. These domestic repercussions of the Administration's policy toward China influenced the timing of intervention in Vietnam in that they created the necessity to act in some greater capacity in Asia in order to placate anticommunist critics.

The stalemate machine has some relevance to the decision to intervene in 1950 in terms of the Administration's pessimism about the outcome of the Bao Dai solution. In

contrast to the quagmire thesis, Truman did not decide to increase American involvement under the optimistic assumption that the relatively small step of extending military aid would resolve the conflict in Vietnam. Rather, this step was taken in a period of pessimism and with full knowledge that it would most likely only perpetuate the stalemate. It was an immediate response to a perceived shift in the balance of power, and was seen as a viable way of staving off a communist victory in Vietnam in the short run. This was the Administration's immediate aim in the face of what was perceived to be a greatly increased Soviet threat. An activist American policy in Southeast Asia was not embarked upon in 1950 with the illusion that it would end the war or eliminate the communist threat in any permanent sense.

Domestic political factors affected the timing of the decision to extend direct aid to Bao Dai, but the balance of power was a much more influential consideration. The immediate cause of intervention was the dangerous shift in the balance resulting from the Soviet atomic capability and the Communist unification of China. The Chinese and Soviet extension of recognition to the DRV in January intensified American anxiety, and motivated immediate recognition of Bao Dai and the decision to support his government.

The decision to aid Bao Dai was fundamentally the result of the alteration of the containment strategy in East Asia. It was enacted toward the aim of restoring the balance of power as redefined by the influence of anticommunist ideology. The way policy makers perceived the role of the

United States in Southeast Asia was a function of the polarization and globalism engendered by the Cold War. The effect of this was the development of policies based on an ideological vision of the balance of power.

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