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THE CASE FOR A WIDER WAR:
A STUDY OF THE ADMINISTRATION RATIONALE
FOR COMMITMENT TO VIETNAM, 1964-1967

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................ ii
VITA ........................................................................ iii
LIST OF FIGURES ................................................... vi

Chapter

I. THE RHETORIC OF VIETNAM COMMITMENT: AN INTRODUCTION .. 1

Vietnam: The Recent Past
Vietnam: Post World War II
Vietnam: The U.S. Presence
Research Questions
Sources for this Study
Review of Literature
Methodology

II. AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE COLD WAR ............ 39

The End of Isolation
The Making of a Cold War
The Strategy of Containment
The Cold War Consensus
Executive Preeminence in Cold War Foreign Policy
The Ideology of American Foreign Policy

III. VIETNAM IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY, 1940-1967 .... 100

America Discovers Vietnam, 1940-1954
The Cold War Comes to Vietnam
Cold War and Containment under Eisenhower
The Geneva Interlude
American Decides for Diem
The Roots of Escalation in Vietnam, 1958-1963
American Escalation of the War, 1963-1967
IV. THE CASE FOR A WIDER WAR: ARGUMENTS FOR INVOLVEMENT, 1964-1967 .................................... 146

The Rhetorical Exigence of Vietnam
Heightened Concern for the War, 1964
Justifying the Commitment in 1965: The Military and Rhetorical Escalation
Policy Defense During the Stalemate, 1966-1967
The Administration Case: The Summary of a Synthesis

V. ARGUMENTATION IN THE CASE FOR VIETNAM INVOLVEMENT .... 219

Language in the Administration Rationale
Argumentative Strategies
Circumstance and Definition: The Interaction and Confusion of Goals

VI. A RHETORICAL CRITIC LOOKS AT VIETNAM .............. 270

Rhetorical Stance: A Choice of Right and Wrong
Reservations to the Case for Vietnam Commitment
The Reservations in Retrospect

VII. THE CASE FOR VIETNAM INVOLVEMENT: A RETROSPECT ..... 304

A Conversation with Dean Rusk
Conclusions Concerning the Rationale for Vietnam Involvement

BIBLIOGRAPHY ....................................................... 326
### LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Extended Model of the Rhetorical Situation</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Model of Vietnam Argumentation System</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter I

THE RHETORIC OF VIETNAM COMMITMENT: AN INTRODUCTION

America's twenty-five year involvement in Indochinese warfare has proven to be oft-times tragic and in at least one sense, ironic. In light of our long and televised experience in Vietnam it seems impossible to imagine a time when affairs in Indochina had little importance to Americans. Yet, until 1949 American diplomats strenuously acted to avoid any commitments in the area. Pre-Pearl Harbor days saw the U.S. State Department sympathetic to France but unwilling to bolster her Indochinese colonies against Japanese designs. Throughout the Second World War Franklin Roosevelt favored independence for French Indochina but did not press the issue in the face of Franco-British opposition.¹ And in the early stages of the Indochina war our French allies accurately accused us of ignoring (and often obstructing) their return to power in the area.

The story of our policy shift from ambivalence toward activism in Southeast Asia is a familiar one to contemporary audiences. Since 1950, policy makers have sought to justify broad commitments and massive assistance to this relatively small and remote corner of the world. And these justifications—expressed in speeches, pamphlets, documents and white papers—form the body of primary source material for this present

study. Specifically, this writer will focus on the strategies of argumentation marshalled to justify American involvement in Vietnam and Indochina. Vietnam may be America's most unpopular and least successful war. It has certainly become the one most talked about. Thus, the scope of this study is perforce restricted toward a focus on the Johnson Administration rationale, or case, in support of escalation of American involvement during the period 1964-1967. During these years, as both spending and suffering mounted, the executive branch of government felt pressure to justify its actions before the Congress and the public. Even a cursory reading of these materials reveals their origin in American values, beliefs and experiences. Our task, therefore, is to study the administration case in its intellectual context. To this end, reviewing the history of and controversy over American Indochina policy will help us to discover and distinguish appropriate research questions in the study of the rhetoric of Vietnam involvement, 1964-1967.

Vietnam: The Recent Past

The definitive history of the Vietnam struggle has yet to be written. In this vortex of opinion and controversy the "facts" will ever serve as grist for generations of scholars and journalists. Like Diogenes, who fruitlessly sought the truly honest man, our brief sojourn into the record of the conflict will produce no clear findings. Indeed, even a hasty reading of the events will unearth more questions than it could ever hope to resolve. However, these questions, once raised, will serve as an outline suggesting appropriate and useful directions for this present research.
The area of Indochina known as Vietnam has experienced few truly peaceful years. Like so many areas of the world, the region saw continual battle for supremacy among ethnic populations—Chinese, Viet, Khmer and Lao. Even the imposition of French control in the nineteenth century did not initially bring a forced peace but, rather, reintroduced the anti-colonial theme into Indochinese politics. Just as they had resisted earlier Chinese domination, the Vietnamese rose against their French masters. Although French power eventually forced an uneasy peace the potential for upheaval remained in abeyance.

Japanese expansion in East Asia in the late 1930's coupled with the fall of France in 1940 served to undermine the old order in all of Indochina. Eager to shut off the flow of supplies to Chiang Kai-shek, the Japanese government began, gradually, to encroach on French sovereignty. Isolated half-a-world away, French commanders in the Far Eastern colony had but little choice to accept these demands. In March, 1945, the Japanese assumed complete control of Indochina from the Europeans, thus severing the line of French sovereignty and undermining French claims to be a protector of the country.

During the early 1940's Vietnamese radical and nationalist elements precipitated several risings against both the French and Japanese overlords. Left-wing Vietnamese revolutionaries exiled in China established a broad-based independence movement known popularly as the Viet Minh. Although prominent members of the Indochinese Communist Party held high positions in the organization—among them Ho Chi Minh—the League for the Independence of Vietnam was a united front and made no declaration of Communist orthodoxy. The Nationalist Chinese, too,
had interests in Vietnam and intervened to unite diverse nationalist parties into "a more docile nationalist coalition." The resulting Dong Minh Hoi functioned, however, as a disorganized confederacy and the allied powers found that only the Viet Minh group had an effective revolutionary network in Vietnam.

After the Japanese dismissed French authorities in March, 1945, the Viet Minh, most active of the Dong Minh Hoi groups, rapidly developed a following and took charge of several provinces in the north. Further to the south the Japanese had sought out Bao Dai, Emperor of Annam (central area of Vietnam), and supported him in order to preserve the continuity of Vietnamese administration. The struggle for Vietnam largely became the contest of will and power between the Bao Dai and Ho Chi Minh governments, their successors and foreign supporters.

Much of the later controversy about Vietnam originated in the early struggle among French, Japanese, and Vietnamese elements. After the cessation of World War II hostilities in Asia, Vietnamese nationalists opposed the return of France, claiming that the former colonial masters had defaulted on their protectorate responsibilities thereby forfeiting any claims to the area. The emergence of competing leftist and rightist Vietnamese native governments set the stage for war and provided the ingredients to allow the later metamorphosis of the war from a colonialist uprising to a full-fledged cold war incident.

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4 Hammer, pp. 46-47.
Vietnam: Post World War II

The sudden Japanese surrender in August, 1945, coupled with the rapid rise of the Viet Minh persuaded Bao Dai to abdicate in favor of the new revolutionary government of Ho Chi Minh. The old communist revolutionary, Ho, proclaimed Vietnam free and independent on September 2, 1945. While this government was strongest in the northern regions of the country, the Viet Minh leaders established a "Committee of the South" to administer the region around the Mekong Delta. Viet Minh control was, however, by no means assured—Japanese forces remained along with other revolutionary elements and armed religious sects. Complicating these divisions was the impending entry of allied forces to accept the Japanese surrender and evacuate allied prisoners of war. The British took charge in the south and Chinese forces accepted the Japanese capitulation in the Tonkin area. Despite strict orders not to intervene in the internal political situation, the British commander in Saigon nevertheless released French soldiers held by the Japanese, rearmed them, and allowed Frenchmen to retake Saigon from the Committee of the South.

Notwithstanding French reoccupation of the south the Viet Minh government held continued power in Hanoi. Since China had nothing to gain from a reestablishment of the old French protectorate, the Viet government in Hanoi benefited from the resulting opportunity, "to consolidate their own independent regime." Though relatively stronger in the north the native Vietnamese government at Hanoi was not powerful enough to refuse French demands to reenter the north. Thus, on March 6,

5Hammer, p. 135 and Fall, pp. 64-66.
1946, an accord was reached whereby the French recognized the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam while at the same time French forces and administrators returned to the north. The ambiguous relationship between France and Vietnam required clarification, but negotiations reached a stalemate leading to war in late fall, 1946. By spring, 1947, the conflict had become one of attrition—neither side able to dislodge the other. Although unable to impose their own solution on the Vietnamese, the French remained unwilling to accede to Ho Chi Minh's demands for the unity of the Vietnamese state plus most, if not all, the trappings of independence. Yet, French policy makers saw the possibility of replacing Ho "with another who, despite his flirtations with nationalism under the Japanese, would, they believed, be content with much less." Ultimately, French officials attempted to rehabilitate ex-Emperor Bao Dai as an acceptable alternative to the more extreme nationalistic demands of Ho Chi Minh.

During these long months of difficulty with France, Ho Chi Minh began to move to open association with communist forces, declaring support for the communist bloc and preference for communist institutions. The effect of such a policy in the cold war atmosphere of 1949 is well described by Ellen J. Hammer.

There is no question at all, however, that Ho Chi Minh and his supporters played into the hands of the French; at a time when the French were stalemated in Indochina, weakened militarily and economically, and with little prospect of extensive foreign support, the Viet Minh made them a present of large-scale American aid

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6See document in Pentagon Papers, I, 18.
7Hammer, p. 207.
8Ibid., p. 208.
against the Vietnamese nationalist movement—not to maintain French colonial rule, which the United States had no particular reason to do, but to fight Communism.9

The United States was thus inclined to view the struggle in Indochina as part of the world-wide communist strategy of aggression; policy makers aided the French expeditionary force as part of the philosophy of containment. Typical of the U.S. position was a memorandum from Secretary of State Dean Acheson to President Truman. Acheson characterized Ho Chi Minh as a "communist agent in various parts of the world since 1925," and favored recognition of the French-supported government of Bao Dai as necessary to strengthen non-communist elements in Asia.10

Vietnam: The U.S. Presence

The "fall of China" in late 1949 was a shock to American foreign policy and led to greater interest in the rest of Asia. As Secretary of State Acheson said in May, 1950, "We now face the prospect that the Communists may attempt to apply another familiar tactic and use China as a base for probing for other weak spots which they can move into and exploit."11 Several months later, on June 25, 1950, the outbreak of the Korean war "sharpened overnight our thoughts and actions with respect to Southeast Asia."12 Aid to the French war effort—seen as part of communist containment—followed rapidly, beginning with seven transport planes in June, 1950.13 The pace of American aid quickened and we soon

9Ibid., p. 248.
10Pentagon Papers, I, 65.
12Pentagon Papers, I, 83.
13Fall, p. 111.
became a mainstay of the French war effort. Despite this assistance, the French were never able to gain sufficient superiority to break the stalemate in Indochina. In February, 1954, the Berlin conference of foreign ministers agreed on a conference to be held in Geneva to settle the situation of the Far East. United States representatives withdrew from the conference after the failure of discussions on Korea. France, Russia, Communist China and Vietnam continued the discussions on Indochina which culminated in three cease fire agreements recognizing the independence of Laos and Cambodia, as well as dividing Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel.  

After Geneva the Secretary of State, John F. Dulles, went ahead with his plan to establish a Nato-like collective defense alliance to block communism in Asia. In September, 1954, representatives of France, Britain, the United States and several Asian nations met in Manila to organize the alliance. A protocol to the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty designated "the States of Cambodia and Laos and the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam" as additional beneficiaries of the collective defense measures.  

The Geneva accords—which gave the Viet Minh control of only northern Vietnam—were, as Bernard Fall comments, "a diplomatic success under the circumstances." Nevertheless, the American delegation refused to sign the final draft and submitted, instead, a declaration

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16. Fall, p. 231.
citing our intention not to disturb the settlement by force and emphasizing our concern for the threat to international peace posed by any "renewal of aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements."\textsuperscript{17}

Clearly, the Geneva agreements were not entirely satisfactory to either the State of Vietnam (government of Bao Dai) or to the United States. And, as the authors of the \textit{Pentagon Papers} relate, this dissatisfaction was a powerful cause of the later breakdown of the Geneva pact.

In the south, Ngo Dinh Diem replaced Emperor Bao Dai as head of the southern-based anti-communist State of Vietnam and consolidated complete control of the southern zone. Diem realized that elections, mandated by the Geneva accords, would certainly lead to a communist victory and refused to abide by the election provision on grounds that, "We did not sign the Geneva Agreements."\textsuperscript{18} To be sure, the U.S. was also less than eager for the proposed elections.\textsuperscript{19} Thus, by 1956 it was clear that the two zones of Vietnam were headed for separate development under opposing governments.

After the Geneva declaration removed France as an active military partner in the anti-communist crusade in Vietnam, American aid to the government of Vietnam was no longer provided via French authorities.\textsuperscript{20} The U.S. government established a Military Assistance Advisory Group and prepared the Saigon government to resist an all-out

\textsuperscript{17}Pentagon Papers, I, 571.

\textsuperscript{18}Quoted in \textit{Pentagon Papers}, I, 278. See also Fall, p. 233.

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20}Fall, p. 318.
invasion from the north. Yet, it was during this period that the struggle in Vietnam returned in the form of guerilla insurgency.

By the middle of 1961, "Saigon had lost control over large areas of rural South Vietnam," and the United States undertook to increase its Vietnamese aid program. This assistance took the form of greatly augmented numbers of advisers and weapons. This aid mounted steadily and--after the Tonkin incident in which North Vietnamese patrol boats interfered with U.S. naval forces--our participation in the war became more direct. A series of retaliatory strikes were begun against the north. These ostensibly "defensive" measures were superseded in March, 1965, by a more sustained American air offensive against North Vietnam. That month also saw the entry of United States ground combat forces into Vietnam. Initially, the prescribed role for these forces was stated to be the defense of American bases. Later, American troops undertook offensive combat operations and the facade of our "advisory role" was discarded.

Research Questions

The expanding physical dimension of America's commitment to South Vietnam required justification. Just as the administration's rhetoric of justification was based on the history of the conflict and our stake in it, so, too, must the focus of this present study be

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21 Ibid., p. 325.
23 Ibid., p. 182.
24 Ibid., p. 183.
guided by research questions emerging from the details of the conflict.

It is only natural that the first focus of this study be
directed toward the nature of the war and our involvement in it. Spe-
cifically, we must address ourselves to question: does the war fit the
stereotype of one independent state waging aggressive war against
another? Or do the specific conditions make the war more of a civil
conflict? Similarly, we must wonder as to the U.S. entry into the fray.
Why did the U.S. initially ignore French efforts to return to the south?
How did this policy of non-interference become one of active support
for the Bao Dai and Diem regimes in the south? The answers to these
questions will go a long way toward providing a basis to evaluate
administration justifications for the war and will also clearly eluci-
date the manner in which policy makers perceived the conflict.

A second area of concern must be the isolation, enumeration and
organization of the arguments cited in defense of the American posture
in Vietnam, 1964-1967. Specifically, what were the arguments for our
involvement in and escalation of the conflict? The process of organ-
izing the arguments will make possible a third line of inquiry--what
assumptions seem to underlie the administration case? The effort to
specify arguments should reveal that some justifications are more basic
than others and that arguments may be related in terms of apparent
stated and unstated beliefs about the world. We might expect the
rhetoric of Vietnam involvement and escalation to be grounded in
specific notions about war, history, politics, and foreign policy.
Such beliefs fill out the intellectual substructure necessary to eval-
uate the argumentation.
A further area of analysis will attempt to relate the case for Vietnam escalation to the general thrust of cold war rhetoric. We may wonder whether the Vietnam arguments are typical of cold war thinking and whether cold war terminology is invoked to characterize the situation of Vietnam. Do policy makers identify Vietnam as an archetype of general cold war struggle against communism or is Vietnam described primarily in terms of local events, facts and judgments peculiar to the Indochina region?

The relationship and, indeed, relevance of the Vietnam conflict to United States foreign policy since World War II is a fifth research concern emerging from the events of Vietnam. Are the policies pursued here consistent with the general thrust of American diplomacy since 1945? Are the arguments for escalation in Vietnam consistent with the aims of American foreign policy in Asia?

Sixthly, the study of the administration case for Vietnam escalation presupposes an attempt to describe the arguments by examining apparent persuasive strategies. What types of arguments do administration spokesmen employ? For example, do they rely on analogy or do they supply much data relevant to the particular case. Do spokesmen make use of unstated premises, presumably supplied by the audience (argument by enthymeme) or is administration reasoning closely detailed in an almost syllogistic form? Do the administration arguments appeal to particular values or beliefs? What is the rhetorical stance of the executive branch--does it argue from absolute authority; does it suggest its position is absolute, without viable alternatives; does it treat the audience of American voters as a decision maker and supply needed information, or does administration rhetoric take the form of a dissemination
of pre-established positions to the relatively passive public? Finally, do government spokesmen seek to promote or discourage public discussion of policy assumptions and alternatives?

Related to a discussion of persuasive strategies is an examination of the fairness and accuracy of the case for American action in Vietnam. Do official spokesmen present a fair and accurate picture of the conflict or does the executive branch overstate, at times, the strength of its case? Does the administration, upon occasion, take an extreme interpretation of events in Vietnam or are the arguments always based on the most reasonable perspective? Is the administration consistent in its argumentation or do the arguments supporting American policy become inconsistent with previous statements and policies in the area? Here we are concerned with the precision with which the administration draws inferences from specific data.

The study of administration language use will introduce an eighth area of research interest. Do terms and catch-phrases reappear frequently? If so, what can be said for arguments habitually described in the same terms? We must consider the way in which language use contributes to the message. We would search to identify the use of language, for example, to dichotomize right and wrong, our nation and the enemy, etc. Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts Tyteca suggest that advocates often employ "philosophical pairs" to differentiate their correct position from the false one of another arguer--e.g., "we are reasonable, they are unreasonable." In any case, research such as that

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of Hugh Duncan on symbols would lead us to expect that within the 
Vietnam debate the administration case is characterized and furthered 
by a certain distinctive costume of words. 26

Finally, our inquiry will focus on the ends or goals of the 
administration argumentation. Do executive speakers couch their claims 
in terms of the need to respond to particular circumstances—U.S. self-
interest—or do they describe the U.S. role as resulting from certain 
fundamental, correct and unchanging principles—e.g., the defense of 
freedom? One would assume both justifications to appear and the 
question is really which seems to predominate.

Sources for this Study

The materials for this present study will be varied in content 
and comprehensive in scope. In addition to primary rhetorical documents 
we will need to consult references in the area of foreign policy, 
presidential politics and history of Vietnam. While a complete listing 
of consulted works will appear in the bibliography, it would be well to 
call special attention to several of the more significant primary and 
secondary source materials. This brief review will serve, further, to 
reveal the focus of this research. There are, generally, three major 
sources of material for this dissertation: (1) public statements of 
executive branch spokesmen, (2) background material on Vietnam and 
foreign policy, and (3) rhetorical models and works concerning argu-
mentation theory.

26 Hugh D. Duncan, Symbols in Society (New York: Oxford University 
The focus of this research—the argumentation for heightened American involvement in Vietnam—suggests that we make particular use of specific rhetorical documents. This primary source data includes written and recorded statements by administration officials found in a host of publications. Inasmuch as the late President Johnson was primary spokesman for his government's policy, the Johnson papers found in the Public Papers of the Presidents series will be vital primary information. Johnson's private papers on the war have not yet been prepared for examination by the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and the Archivist was unable to inform me as to when the materials would be open. The Department of State Bulletin is particularly useful in that speeches as well as written analyses may be consulted. In search of further

27 Letter to this author from Charles W. Corkran, Archivist, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, April 12, 1973. Mr. Corkran informed me that, "Unfortunately, I am unable to tell you when materials relating to your topic will be ready for examination."

28 As it became apparent that the Bulletin was the single best source for obtaining speeches and administration statements on the Vietnam war, I addressed a letter to the Director of the Office of Media Services, Department of State, in which I posed the following questions: (1) What is the composition and organization of the editorial board which oversees the Department of State Bulletin? (2) What criteria govern the selection of material for inclusion in the Bulletin? (3) What efforts are made to search out material for publication or is the material submitted by Executive Branch officials? (4) In your opinion, does the tone of the material in the Bulletin provide an accurate and comprehensive guide to the official and published thinking of the Executive branch on foreign policy? My concern was, thus, to confirm or reject my belief that the articles and speeches appearing in the Bulletin were an accurate index of the administration case for escalation of the Vietnam war.

Although I addressed my letter to the Department on April 13, 1973, I did not receive a reply until July 23, 1973. Nevertheless, Melvin N. Blum, Chief of the General Publications Division, provided me with a very complete answer to the above questions. He indicated that the staff of the Bulletin comprises two editors who receive technical support from other offices in the Department of State. Mr. Blum listed four criteria which govern the selection of material: "First, all material must represent official statements by US Government Officials,
insight into the Vietnam policy makers' rhetorical perspective I addressed letters to seven Johnson Administration officials--Robert S. McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, Dean Rusk, Hubert H. Humphrey, Clark Clifford, Walt W. Rostow and George W. Ball--inquiring about the possibility of an interview. I received replies from McNamara, Bundy and Rostow expressing regret that their pressing duties made an interview session impossible. However, Dean Rusk, now Professor of International Law at the University of Georgia, was very amenable to my request. Unfortunately, he was not able to meet with me until relatively late in my research efforts--July 5, 1973. Nevertheless, I feel that this interview provided me with otherwise unobtainable insight into the thinking of foreign affairs policy makers.

The Department of State Far Eastern Series comprises a large number of pamphlets, many of which are highly relevant to the Vietnam conflict. I have consulted and utilized many of these. A different

with the exception of visiting heads of state. Secondly, the material should be the most relevant, authentic texts obtainable related to the subject at hand. Thirdly, the material must relate to the formulation and conduct of United States foreign policy on the operations of the Department of State or the Foreign Service of the United States. Finally, the material should be chosen in such a manner that the documentary record (as limited by the previous qualifications) should be as complete as possible, within the space and budgetary limitations of this publication." Most material selected for publication, Mr. Blum indicated, is taken from press releases of the White House, Department of State, or U.S. Mission to the United Nations. However, frequently the editors search out other "essential documentation" and other department officers often submit material. Responding to my final question, Mr. Blum emphasized the official character of the Bulletin: "Inasmuch as the material included in the Bulletin is official in nature, and has been carefully edited for accuracy, consistency, clarity, etc., it constitutes in my opinion an accurate and comprehensive guide to the official and public thinking of the executive branch on foreign policy."

perspective on the war comes in the form of the collected State of the Union and Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents. Although the Kennedy and Johnson addresses are most relevant, a good perspective on American attention to and beliefs about war, foreign policy, Vietnam and Southeast Asia may be gained from the addresses of Presidents since Franklin Roosevelt. Of course, no record of the Vietnam conflict could be complete without reference to the celebrated Pentagon Papers. Although a New York Times edition is widely used, I will make use of the more complete Gravel edition. The papers, of course, consist largely of analyses and secret documents. However, each volume of the Gravel edition contains an appendix section on "Justification of the War--Public Statements."

The need to organize and analyze the various rhetorical documents implies readily available background information. This need is filled by various references on Vietnam, executive decision making and foreign policy. The circumstances surrounding and shaping the rhetoric of a particular man, time or campaign has long been studied under varying rubrics--the "environment," the "social setting," or the "climate of opinion." Lloyd Bitzer's oft-cited introduction to the "rhetorical situation" has supplied further reason to investigate, carefully, the

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antecedent influences on given persuasive messages. Bitzer's focus, like ours, is on rhetoric as it "comes into existence as a response to situation. . . ." He suggests that we study the situation on the basis of a problem or "exigence," requiring remedy, "constraints" from the situation and the particular audience. Readings in foreign policy decision making and in the history of Vietnam serve this purpose admirably.

The record of the Pentagon Papers constitutes a check on the motives and beliefs of American policy makers. We may compare stated policy (rhetoric) with the documentary record of actual foreign diplomacy and correspondence. Other studies in Presidential politics and foreign policy decision making serve to elucidate the constraints upon and beliefs of policy makers. The news media and other current events publications provide information concerning the day-to-day events in Vietnam. Other scholarly case studies go beyond this toward an in-depth analysis of the Vietnam conflict. In this regard, Bernard Fall's, The Two Viet-Nams is considered one of the most authoritative discussions of Vietnamese history and politics.

34 Ibid., 5.
The orientation of this present research toward a segment of the Vietnam debate presupposes criteria and standards for analysis. References of this type comprise the third area of source material for the dissertation. I will cite a few of the more applicable works here. I have already touched upon Bitzer's discussion of the rhetorical situation. This theoretical construct is important in that it directs our attention to rhetorical discourse as a response to a given set of circumstances. If anything, the rhetoric of Vietnam escalation is eminently situational—the administration is driven to build a case for its policy in the face of skepticism and opposition. I intend to clarify and extend Bitzer's concept of the elements of a situation through references oriented toward systems theory and information systems.  

The need, of course, is to construct a model of the Vietnam situation which isolates the roots and functions of the administration case for escalation and differentiates this from other rhetoric associated with the war—e.g., war protest.

Having set the framework of the rhetorical circumstances of Vietnam, I will treat the administration arguments making use of the syllogism, enthymeme and Toulmin methods of spatially and sequentially illustrating arguments. Isolating the relationship among conclusions, arguments, assumptions and values within the overall case for escalation


is, to be sure, preliminary to any attempt to analyze the argumentation. Finally, in an analysis of the strategies, techniques and language of the administration's persuasive campaign, I will consult several works on rhetorical and communication theory.38

Review of Literature

America has been preoccupied with Vietnam for over a decade. The federal budget, the news media, and other social indicators clearly reveal the impact of Vietnam on American life and thinking. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to observe that the Vietnam conflict has entered the consciousness of American scholars in many fields. Let me briefly review the scope of dissertation work on Vietnam.

Perhaps the most comprehensive study of the argumentation of the Vietnam debate is a 1968 dissertation by Stephen A. Garrett.39 Garrett, a political scientist, uses the situation of the Vietnam controversy as a data source for the construction of a general model of foreign policy analysis.40 He describes his methodology as "intellectual analysis" by which hierarchies of ideas and policies may be established.41 Garrett then sets up a construct by which he treats the Vietnam discussion in terms of two broad categories: assumptions and proposals. Garrett argues that, "It will be seen, then, that it is the


40Ibid., pp. 7-8.

41Ibid., p. 26.
task of the intellectual analyst to perceive those basic assumptions which inform policy positions, and then to illustrate the process by which these assumptions lead to policy proposals. 42

Within the categories of assumption and policy, Garrett examines the analysis, values, ends and means of policy makers. Basic to this approach is Garrett's typology of universalism and particularism in foreign policy thought and the varying ends of foreign policy--national security and intellectual altruism. Using these categories to render the Vietnam debate more meaningful, Garrett contrasts a systematic approach to the general tendency to label Vietnam-era disputants under the antithetical rubrics of "hawk" and "dove." For example, Garrett explains, the hawk-dove dichotomy is not sufficiently complex to account for the fact that hawk and dove groups differ among themselves over views on foreign policy, communism, the use of force in international relations, etc.

Relevant, also, for our purposes is a 1967 dissertation concerning selected speeches by Lyndon B. Johnson on Vietnam. 43 In this study, Fred Marlin Connelly applies principles of rhetorical criticism to Johnson's Vietnam rhetoric, isolating the appeals Johnson employed and effects he produced. Connelly divides Johnson's Vietnam speaking into appeals directed toward foreign and domestic audiences and confronts the question of whether Johnson's escalation of the war represented a basic

42 Ibid., p. 28.

inconsistency with his stance as the "peace" candidate in the 1964 elections. Connelly concludes, in this regard, that the late President changed his policy mechanisms to meet new circumstances but that this change in tactics marked no departure from traditional and stated American objectives in Indochina. The approach of the Connelly dissertation is highly applicable to this present research in that Connelly—although writing without benefit of Bitzer's excellent theorization on the situational aspect of rhetoric—introduces Johnson's rhetoric as a response to altered circumstances which exerted constraints on the argumentation.

Connelly's discussion of "The Rhetoric of Johnson's Domestic Strategy" is particularly useful. Describing Johnson's attempt to win "continued public acceptance of the American military action in Vietnam," Connelly carefully isolates "three groupings of arguments by which Johnson defended before domestic audiences the American military action in Vietnam." He treats the President's arguments under the rubrics of need, honor, and success, describing in each category the types of positions maintained. For example, under the category of "need," the issue of security in Vietnam, Asia and the United States predominates. This dissertation is, thus, a useful reference for gaining perspective on certain specific lines of administration persuasive strategy in the Vietnam debate.

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44 Ibid., see especially pp. 69-70.
46 Ibid., p. 321.
The Garrett and Connelly studies are highly valuable for this research in virtue of their methodologies and conclusions. However, I should mention other rhetorical inquiries into the conflict. Robert Mullen has studied the impact of the Vietnam war on black communicators and their audiences. He develops a perspective on black commentators and describes their effort to modify the situation of Vietnam, citing specifically Bitzer's analysis of the environmental influences and constraints on rhetoric. In a second section, Mullen devotes several chapters to what he feels are the predominant issues in the black protest against the Vietnam war—the irony of blacks supporting white oppression of other struggling peoples, race genocide, the inconsistencies in fighting for freedom abroad when it is lacking at home, and the waste of needed American resources in Asia.

In two additional Ohio State dissertations Stephen Lemley and Richard Bailey consider issues related to the Vietnam conflict. Lemley is concerned with the struggle between the executive and legislature for control of foreign policy. Lemley relies on testimony found in several Senate hearings as his primary source material. Bailey


48 Ibid., pp. 202-203.


analyzes Senator J. William Fulbright's speaking on the "Arrogance of Power"--a series of lectures which later became a book. Several other studies of Fulbright and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee have been produced in speech communication and political science.  

Many dissertations--like that of F. M. Connelly--have treated selected speakers on the war: Johnson, Wayne Morse, General


Still others have considered persuasive campaigns and opinion groups on the war. Finally, other writers have treated subjects in foreign policy moderately relevant to the present discussion.


I should mention in passing that the various rhetorical situations of Vietnam have prompted several non-dissertation investigations of the rhetoric of Vietnam in the field of speech communication. While I will cite aspects of many of these works in the analysis chapters, let me briefly survey the variety of work on the communication variables in the Vietnam war. Several writers have examined President Johnson's preparation and use of persuasive appeals, chiefly in the campaign setting.59 The most applicable of these is a recent monograph by


Fred M. Connelly dealing with aspects of Lyndon Johnson's rhetoric in the 1964 campaign. Connelly draws the material from his aforementioned dissertation on Johnson's war-related speaking. On the issue of whether Johnson concealed his coming Vietnam escalation in 1964 Connelly argues that the President spoke of his hopes for peace but that he did not seek to mislead the American public. Johnson implied frequently that changes in the situation would mandate a change in American policy. Connelly, however, faults Johnson for leaving the "impression that future United States policy regarding Vietnam would be determined by the unchanging hopes of the American people instead of by the changing international obstacles with which these hopes would have to cope."  

Three authors take an opposite perspective and examine the rhetorical protest generated by the Vietnam conflict. One of the better of these is an article by Jess Yoder dealing with the protest of clergy against the war. Yoder discusses the attempt of the Johnson Administration to cast the war as a moral crusade and finds that the clergy did not generally accept this viewpoint. Whereas many of the clerical war


Ibid., 20.

protesters supported World War II, administration inability to satisfactorily explain Vietnam led to protests. Many clergy focused on alternative moral issues--e.g., asking whether the goal of anticommmunism justified the suffering and death inflicted on the people of Vietnam. Marie Rosenwasser examined another war protest group, electing to study the strategies of six anti-war Senators. She emphasizes what she calls the five "direct appeals" or "open requests for support" found in the Senatorial protests. In her view the Senators sought to employ traditional American values by, for example, arguing that their objections to the war represented democratic free speech and that America supported not freedom but dictatorship in Vietnam. Finally, Howard Martin discusses the rhetorical implications of the early faculty war protest at the University of Michigan. He finds that the teach-ins and other persuasive efforts were hampered by student lack of "hard information" on the war and the relatively greater foreign affairs ethos of administration spokesmen for the war.

In a final set of relevant articles three authors act as rhetorical critics in evaluating the quality of war-associated argumentation. In brief articles Mark Goldman examines Senator Edward Brook's vascillating position on the war and Robert Newman faults McGeorge Bundy for use

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63 Ibid., 54-56.
of ad hominem argument in preference to confronting, squarely, the crucial issues raised by the war. The most rigorous of these studies is one by F. Michael Smith who analyzes the Johnson Administration thesis that the war in Vietnam originated and continued because of North Vietnamese "aggression." Smith concludes that this claim was an overstatement and maintains that it conflicted with earlier administration descriptions of the war as an insurgency. Smith infers that the administration argument of "aggression" was partly shaped by the cold war beliefs of the executive policy makers.

Methodology

The preceding discussion on research questions and source materials should have provided several clues as to the study methods prescribed for this dissertation. In the source description I explained my interest in creating a conceptual model to isolate the position of administration argumentation within the entire spectrum of the Vietnamese debate. Throughout the preceding discussion the need to isolate, organize, and analyze the administration's Vietnam appeals has predominated. Let me now systematically describe the methodological approaches of this study.

I have maintained that the debate generated by the war comprises a complete rhetorical system but that to be meaningful the debate must


69 Ibid., 218-20.
be examined within its surrounding circumstances. The need to put discourse in a context has long been recognized. For the persuader concern for context has meant an effort to discern the beliefs, attitudes and values of his listeners so that suitable messages can be constructed. The rhetorical critic's like-minded interest in the persuasive atmosphere has caused him to view the intellectual climate of opinion confronting a speaker and has made evaluation of the rhetor's "audience adaptation" a standard focal point. As a starting point in the systematic study of the contextual aspects of the administration argumentation, let me again cite Lloyd Bitzer's inquiry into the "Rhetorical Situation." Bitzer roots his notion of the controlling context of rhetoric in what he terms an "exigence." 70 This "complex of persons, events, objects and relations" conveys a need to communicate which is perceived by the rhetor. Once the necessity of communication is established the form and content of the message is controlled by aspects of the situation (constraints) and the given audience. The situation, then, "controls the rhetorical response" inasmuch as inappropriate communication (not attuned to the realities of the occasion) is less effective and may even be counterproductive. 71 The Bitzer approach is clearly deterministic, since rhetoric is determined by the situation. This deterministic perspective of the rhetorical situation enables us to extend its meaning by relating it to another necessarian model by Yovits and Ernst. 72 This model treats actions of a decision maker as being

70 Bitzer, 6.
71 Ibid., 6 and 9-10.
72 See footnote 36.
determined by information available to him—these actions, in turn, enter the environment, interact with other agents and are then transformed into data which return to the decision maker as new information detailing the effect of the actions. The "Generalized Information System" is, then, like Bitzer's, an attempt to describe an entire system of communication. As prescribed by the model the essential functions are three in number: (1) information acquisition and dissemination (IAD), decision making (DM) and transformation (T). The key function in the system is decision making. DM may be an individual person or an organization of decision makers. Decision making involves the creation of appropriate observable actions based on available acquired information. Thus, although the storage of information precedes actual decision making, it is a subsidiary function. The final aspect of the process takes place as the observable actions interact with other elements and are transformed—i.e., return as new feedback information describing the effect of the observable actions.

Translating this process into the terminology of the rhetorical situation: A speaker creates rhetorical responses which are based on his perception of constraints; these rhetorical responses interact with elements of the environment (audiences, etc.) and data about the effect of the rhetoric is returned to the speaker or speakers as new information (perceived constraints). This extended conception of the rhetorical situation appears in Figure 1.

The rudiments of the model now established, we must apply this content-free conception of a communications system to the methodology

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73 Yovits and Ernst, p. 7.
Figure 1. Extended Model of the Rhetorical Situation

Information Acquisition and Dissemination (Constraints)

Information

Transformation (Environment, Audiences)

Data (Effect of Arguments)

Observable Actions (Arguments)

Decision Maker (Rhetor)
for analyzing the Vietnam debate. The Executive Branch of Government clearly fits the definition of the decision maker in this present study. Indeed, as our concern lies with administration argumentation it is appropriate to place the administration at the focal point of the system. In this scheme administration policy makers act on information available to them—information which shapes or constrains their actions. This information constitutes the policy makers' perceived exigence and encompasses the policy makers' beliefs, attitudes and values concerning the United States, the world and U.S. foreign policy. In addition, to the extent that "facts" can be separated from "beliefs," the policy makers are privy to diplomatic, military and intelligence data on world conditions. In the context of Vietnam the policy makers' information acquisition function would include cold war beliefs, beliefs about foreign policy, data about ongoing foreign policy and information on and attitudes toward events in Vietnam.

In a very real sense the information acquisition function is critical to the process. Policy makers can only act on the basis of their perceptions of the world. Thus, the IAD function acts as an image system to organize cognitions into a coherent and meaningful picture of the world. New feedback data from transformations are screened through (interpreted against) the existing image configuration. Kenneth Boulding's discussion of image is relevant to our model at this point. 74 Boulding discusses the attitudinal frame of reference by describing a person's image, or subjective knowledge of the world. 75 In his view

75 Ibid., chapter 1, especially pp. 7-13.
there are no "facts" as such, just images—messages mediated through individual value systems. Behavior results from image, therefore, not from reaction to any objective truth. Much of Boulding's book deals with how messages effect changes in image. In his conception messages enter the image system and are mediated by the system according to several criteria—the message's value, its certainty, etc. The result of the interaction of message and value system (image) will be one of the following: (1) no change, (2) radical change, (3) addition to the image, and (4) clarification of the image. Boulding relates this theory of human perception to communication writing that, "It is discourse or conversation which makes the human image public... The term 'universe of discourse' has been used to describe the growth and development of common images in conversation and linguistic intercourse."

The information function or image system is further clarified by reference to Milton Rokeach's work on Beliefs, Attitudes and Values. Not satisfied with the plethora of work on attitudes, Rokeach attempts to conceptualize man's cognitive system. He asks, concerning belief systems: (1) what are the structural patterns of beliefs? and (2) what conditions facilitate or hinder the modification of belief systems? In the attempt to answer these questions Rokeach establishes a hierarchy of beliefs, attitudes, and values. His system is complicated but rests on

76 Ibid., pp. 47-62.
77 Ibid., pp. 7-10.
78 Ibid., p. 15.
these ideas: (1) beliefs are organized into a hierarchy of importance, (2) many beliefs combine to form an attitude toward a specific object and (3) attitude-value system change comes through a search for consistency among the constituent elements of the system.

My analysis of the intellectual background to the administration rhetoric justifying escalation will serve to fill in the belief system which motivated policy makers. Research questions one, three, four and five—which treat the relationship between the Vietnam rhetoric and foreign policy, the cold war and administration beliefs—are all part of the analysis of the information acquisition dimension of the Vietnam debate system.

In the aforementioned rhetorical system the arguments for involvement in and escalation of the Vietnam war are seen as observable actions initiated by the policy makers. Once the policy maker has transformed information into rhetorical responses we may analyze the Vietnam-era rhetoric according to a variety of critical standards which I described in the section on "sources." The arguments, once isolated, may be separated into their constituent parts and scrutinized via the syllogism, enthymeme and Toulmin model. Further, the arguments will fall into certain categories or patterns. The result will be a notion of the rhetorical strategies pursued by administration spokesmen. The organization of argumentation into categories and hierarchies will facilitate the analysis of the administration persuasive campaign.

The transformation function—or interaction of rhetorical responses with the environment or audience—is the final structure

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Ibid., see chapters 2 and 5 especially.
prescribed by the model. Obviously, audience members may have differing beliefs or image systems and we may, therefore, expect many of them to oppose both the policy and the rhetoric of the administration. In practice, however, the American people are not well informed in foreign policy and usually support the decisions made by policy makers—thus, the majority of the audience will not be actively opposed. Although these audience effects of the Vietnam debate are part of the rhetorical system no attempt will be made to analyze the protest to the war.

Let me now set forth the completed model for this present study. (See Figure 2.) In this arrangement policy makers' image-information system creates a perceived rhetorical exigence which mandates and dictates appropriate policy and rhetorical justification of that policy. Both the rhetoric and policy enter the environment and are transformed. We are particularly concerned with the subset of transformation which involves the American public as opposed to foreign governments, etc. Public expressions will vary from support to indifference to opposition. These expressions are perceived immediately by policy makers and also enter and modify the image-information system.

The model allows us to prescribe those aspects of the rhetorical situation of Vietnam which are relevant to our present research aims. These are as follows:

Analysis 1: Study of the background of cold war rhetoric and beliefs, foreign policy beliefs and the history of Vietnam.

Analysis 2: Study of the way in which the image-information system shapes the rhetoric.

Analysis 3: Study of the arguments and the rhetorical strategies of the administration.
Figure 2. Model of Vietnam Argumentation System

*Numbers refer to elements of the system analyzed in this study.
Analysis 4: Study of administration reaction to criticism and opposition to its chosen policy.

Analysis 5: Study of the accuracy of the administration claims based on data available.

Chapters II and III will provide a basis to understand the policy makers' image of Vietnam. Here I chronicle the development of cold war beliefs and rhetoric, relating this background to the history of Vietnam as a cold war conflict. In the opening section of chapter IV, I attempt to synthesize the preceding discussion, setting forth the resulting rhetorical exigence of Vietnam—the matrix of perceptions and circumstances which called forth the rhetoric of Vietnam involvement. In succeeding sections of this chapter, I summarize the case for commitment. Chapters V and VI are devoted to an analysis of the rhetorical stance and argumentative strategies assumed by the Johnson Administration. In chapter VI, I give particular attention to the Government's reaction to its critics. And in the latter portion of the chapter I detail certain objections made against the rationale for commitment. Finally, in chapter VII, I discuss my interview with Dean Rusk, and cite the several overall implications coming out of this study.
Chapter II

AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE COLD WAR

The decade of the 1940's marked a period of rapid national identity change for Americans whereby their homeland forsook its limited role in world politics to become the leading internationalist power with a truly global foreign policy. With but few exceptions--notably in 1898 and 1917--American citizens and their leaders saw the Western Hemisphere as our legitimate sphere of concern and regarded foreign entanglements as probably dangerous and certainly immoral. America's "Manifest Destiny"¹ to possess and protect a North American empire had recognizable boundaries. As the old colonial charters granted land from sea to sea, so, too, did the new pioneer nation regard its critical national interest as extending to the water's edge--but not beyond. The picture of an "isolated" America can, however, be easily overdrawn. From the barbary pirates to the Open Door in China our interests did bridge the oceans. But Columbia's national self-image remained rooted to the conception of America as guardian of the Western Hemisphere.

¹This term denoted an early conception of America's duty to develop its free institutions and extend its benevolent influence over the North American continent. See Richard W. Van Alstyne, The Rising American Empire, Quadrangle Paperbacks (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965).
The story of our progression from a limited manifest destiny to a world-wide "Pax Americana" necessarily begins with the World War II experience. Our entry into that conflict was gradual—beginning with the Atlantic Charter and Lend Lease; but the shock of Pearl Harbor confirmed for even a leading pre-war isolationist—Senator Arthur Vandenberg—that isolation was at an end. The war heralded an unlimited crisis and mandated a global strategy of total U.S. commitment. Yet, entry into the world's bloodiest holocaust was only the first shock to the ethos of America's role as a regional power. The shooting in Europe and the Pacific had hardly stopped when the nation seemingly faced another totalitarian challenge—the "cold war" confrontation with the Soviet Union and its allies. The hoped-for postwar spirit of allied cooperation gave way to a bitter struggle for world power and prestige as the United States felt itself threatened by an intransigent and malevolent Stalin. As before, the spectre of an international threat seemingly dictated an international vigilance. Our security interests became total and our concerns encompassed the continents from Asia to the Antarctic.


3 These measures progressively signaled U.S. support for and commitment to the allied powers. See Alexander DeConde, A History of American Foreign Policy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), pp. 592 and 600.

The definitive story of America's metamorphosis from a Western Hemisphere to a world-wide power has yet to be written. Indeed, United States domestic and foreign policy in the world war and the cold war will long be a subject of study for generations of scholars. Yet, an introduction into the intellectual thought of the period can be seen as a necessary backdrop to this present study. Central to the Vietnam debate is a pattern of thought forged in the 1940-1960 period. Cold war thinking constitutes a sort of philosophical system with carefully refined assumptions about the world and America's place in it. This thought is expressed in a characteristic and vivid dictionary of terms--"aggression" versus "collective security," "communism" versus the "free world." In a real sense this world view amounted to an intellectual consensus and served as a way of organizing the details of foreign policy into a coherent and meaningful whole. Against this background, the purpose of this chapter is to trace the bases of the revolution in United States foreign policy thought and the rhetoric which clarified and confirmed it.

The End of Isolation

The extent of American isolation in the 1920's and 1930's is open to controversy. A good case can be made that the United States was far from insular in its world-wide interests and aspirations during the period. Yet, there can be little doubt that our nation, sobered by the World War I experience, sought strenuously to avoid involvement in foreign alliances and military commitments. Thus, while our

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diplomats preached an Open Door doctrine of free trade in China, such moral judgments were not enforced against Japan. The posture of interested nonaction was perhaps best exemplified by the Stimson Doctrine which held that, "the United States would not recognize any agreement or situation impairing American rights, the Open Door policy, or any gains made in violation of the Kellogg Pact." Such a low diplomatic profile accorded well with the popular retreat from internationalism in the aftermath of the first World War. While isolationist thought was far from homogeneous, there was a pervasive feeling for the need to avoid foreign military conflicts. This revulsion to foreign-bred wars, exemplified by the Nye war profits hearings, continued well into the 1930's. Cordell Hull, Secretary of State to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, relates that the strong isolationist sentiment as late as 1939 deterred the President from pursuing more active support for the beleaguered allies.

During the isolationist 1930's, however, President Roosevelt became the major spokesman for a broader intervention into the widening world crisis. Although preoccupied with the domestic depression, it is

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7 See DeConde, p. 528.
10 DeConde, p. 566.
clear that FDR and his Secretary of State saw a growing danger of world war in German, Japanese, and Italian activity.\textsuperscript{12} The increasing urgency and expanding impact of foreign relations are revealed clearly in the President's speeches of the period. Roosevelt gave almost no attention to foreign affairs in his 1934 and 1935 State of the Union addresses.\textsuperscript{13} Yet, by 1936 events dictated a more extensive treatment of world affairs. Almost wistfully, Roosevelt told the Congress, on January 3, 1936: "The rest of the world--ah, there's the rub." The President set forth his view of the rising trend to world disorder and its meaning for the American people:

Since the summer of that same year of 1933 the temper and the purposes of the rulers of many of the great populations in Europe and Asia have not pointed the way either to peace or to good will among men. Not only have peace and good will among men grown more remote in those areas of the earth during this period but a point has been reached where the people of the Americas must take cognizance of growing ill will, of marked trends toward aggression, of increasing armaments, of shortening tempers--a situation which has in it many of the elements that lead to the tragedy of general war.\textsuperscript{14}

In succeeding months the President continued to worry, publicly, over the United States' passive role in the crises of the decade. Whereas in 1936 he spoke for a "well-ordered neutrality" and measures of "adequate defense," the President assumed a more interventionist stance in 1937. In Chicago, on October 5 of that year, he pointed to the

\textsuperscript{12}Hull relates that as early as 1933-1934 he and the President began to work to combat this danger. See Hull, I, 665.

\textsuperscript{13}Fred L. Israel (ed.), The State of the Union Messages of the Presidents, 1790-1966 (3 vols.; New York: Chelsea House-Robert Hector Publishers, 1966), III, 2806-2818. This collection, from which I shall quote extensively, shall be cited hereafter as Israel (ed.), Messages.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 2820.
worsening trend to international violence and cautioned that, "If those things come to pass in other parts of the world, let no one imagine that America will escape, that America may expect mercy, that this Western Hemisphere will not be attacked. . . ."  

In face of the pressing conflict, the President argued for a cooperative world effort to head off the danger, warning of the futility of isolation: "Those who cherish their freedom and recognize and respect the equal rights of their neighbors to be free and live in peace, must work together for the triumph of law and moral principles in order that peace, justice and confidence may prevail throughout the world." Enjoining his listeners to "look ahead," FDR underscored his plan in vivid, metaphorical terms:

It seems to be unfortunately true that the epidemic of world lawlessness is spreading. And mark this well! When an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in a quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of disease.\(^\text{17}\)

The response to this dramatic appeal for positive United States involvement in the deepening disorders of the day was not entirely favorable and the President stepped back from so emphatic a stand.\(^\text{18}\) Yet, FDR continued to speak to the issue of U.S. interest in the affairs of Europe and Asia.

In January, 1939, FDR described the State of the Union in terms of the need, "of putting our own house in order in face of storm signals

\(^{15}\)Basil Rauch (ed.), The Roosevelt Reader: Selected Speeches, Messages, Press Conferences, and Letters of Franklin D. Roosevelt (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 188. This speech has often been referred to as the "Quarantine the Aggressors" address.

\(^{16}\)Ibid., p. 189.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 191.

\(^{18}\)DeConde, pp. 10 and 590-91.
from across the seas." The President pointed to the threat of aggression and argued that military crises imperiled three institutions indispensable to Americans—religion, democracy and international good faith. Roosevelt appealed to the lessons of the past, counseling that "survival cannot be guaranteed by arming after the attack begins..." In unmistakable terms FDR sketched the danger as a struggle between our way of life and dictatorial powers hostile to our philosophy and beliefs. And in September, 1939, when the long-feared war materialized, the President, while proclaiming American neutrality added that he did not expect Americans to "remain neutral in thought as well" for even neutrals had a right to exercise their conscience. By 1940 the problem of war was uppermost on the President's mind as he devoted the bulk of the State of the Union address to the implications of a Second World War. Again Roosevelt described the danger in terms of alien dictatorships which restricted worship and thought—whose policies led to the enslavement of millions. As before he stressed that the happenings in Europe had profound importance for the United States, arguing that our nation might not survive in a world dominated by "vast and powerful military systems." The President called for increased defense spending.

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19 Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 2842.
20 Ibid., 2843.
22 Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 2849-51.
23 Ibid., 2851.
24 Ibid., 2852-53.
In the months that followed these three themes—the evil of dictatorships, the danger of the war to our nation, and the need for defense—dominated the President's speaking. Progressively he became, himself, less neutral in thought and speech. In June of 1940 Roosevelt speculated that Hitler might attempt to conquer the Western Hemisphere. The President characterized the danger as coming from those who would threaten war upon free people and repeatedly underscored his belief that neither oceanic distance nor calculated isolation could assure our freedom. Less than a year later the President was openly describing the Nazi danger as a threat to law, liberty, morality and religion. He boldly asserted that, "And we know by now that our place—the place of the whole Western Hemisphere—in the Nazi scheme for world domination has been marked on the Nazi timetable." Roosevelt had few kind words for Japanese policy, characterizing it as "parallel with the Hitler methods in Europe." He emphasized in private letters that the German


26 Presidential address on Selective Service Registration Day, October 16, 1940 in Ibid., p. 258.

27 See radio address on national defense, May 26, 1940 in Ibid., p. 232 and speech at the University of Virginia, June 10, 1940 in Ibid., p. 252.

28 Radio address on the battle of the Atlantic, September 11, 1941 in Ibid., pp. 286-88.


danger was "a simple fact"—one of the "facts of life" of which the American people were only too slowly beginning to take heed.

It would be misleading to suggest that FDR's call to a new internationalism fell upon totally receptive ears. Considerable opposition arose to both his perceptions of and policies toward the foreign wars. Most isolationists and anti-interventionists of the time felt that some form of trade embargo would be likely to keep America clear of war. This popular reasoning was reflected in the first three Neutrality Acts enacted by Congress in the 1935-1937 period. The acts initially prohibited arms sales to either side but, eventually, in 1937, allowed purchases in cash if the warring nations carried the material in their own ships.

Although the administration triumphed over opposition to enact the Lend Lease, Selective Service, and other war preparedness measures, the final blow to the non-interventionists came as the Japanese suddenly attacked American outposts in the Pacific. Isolationist Senator Vandenberg wrote of the attack that, "In my own mind, my convictions regarding international cooperation and collective security for peace took firm form on the afternoon of the Pearl Harbor attack." Certainly, Vandenberg's conversion cannot have been atypical. Whereas the Selective Service Act was extended by a margin of a single vote (July, 1941), the

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32 Letter to Norman Thomas, May 14, 1941 in Ibid., 1156.
33 See Jonas, pp. 33-34.
34 DeConde, pp. 567-69.
Declaration of War on Japan carried with but one dissenting member in the House.\textsuperscript{36} The attack on Pearl Harbor seemingly confirmed the Roosevelt thesis that the United States could not avoid conflict in a world war precipitated by aggressive dictators. As America set to work to win the war the "lesson of Pearl Harbor" became a catch-phrase not to be forgotten.

Diplomat George Kennan has observed what he calls the "emotional" and "punitive" tone to warmaking in a democracy which results from the conviction that "other people have finally provoked us to the point where we had no alternative but to take up arms."\textsuperscript{37} Such a crusading spirit perhaps helps to account for the intense and vituperative rhetoric of the Second World War. Basic to the American position in World War II was the conviction that the intentions of our enemy were unlimited and amounted to nothing less than a conspiracy to conquer the world. Witness this assessment by a political relations adviser to the State Department: "The programs of conquest pursued by Japan and by Germany have been and are such as to necessitate for their success the destruction of every democracy and therefore the attempt, sooner or later, by one or both of those countries to subjugate the United States."\textsuperscript{38} President Roosevelt was no less emphatic in his State of the Union address on January 6, 1942—just one month after the outbreak of war.

\textsuperscript{36}See Garraty, p. 762 and DeConde, p. 610.

\textsuperscript{37}Kennan, p. 73.

Japan's scheme of conquest goes back half a century. It was not merely a policy of seeking living room; it was a plan which included the subjugation of all the peoples in the Far East and in the islands of the Pacific, and the domination of that ocean by Japanese military and naval control of the western coasts of North, Central and South America.

A similar policy of criminal conquest was adopted by Italy. The fascists first revealed their imperial designs in Libya and Tripoli. In 1935 they seized Abyssinia. Their goal was the domination of all North Africa, Egypt, parts of France, and the entire Mediterranean world.

But the dreams of empire of the Japanese and Fascist leaders were modest in comparison with the gargantuan aspirations of Hitler and his Nazis. Even before they came to power in 1933, their plans for conquest had been drawn. Those plans provided for ultimate domination, not only of any one section of the world, but of the whole earth and all the oceans on it.

Continuing, the President argued that the separate intentions of the three enemies were in actuality part of one conspiracy: "With Hitler's formation of the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo alliance, all these plans of conquest became a single plan." These claims of the totality of our adversaries' war aims are not mere rhetorical flourish. They form a central strain in the rhetoric of the Second World War and lead directly to the conclusion that, as the danger is unlimited, so, too, must be the response.

A second and related theme in wartime communication also reinforced the need for a total war against the aggressors—the enemy was characterized as being absolutely depraved. Roosevelt maintained that, "Our enemies are guided by brutal cynicism, by unholy contempt for the human race." The conflict was drawn in terms of the figure of

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40 Ibid., 2867. FDR called the conflict "the world's greatest war against human slavery." See State of the Union Address, January 11, 1944 in Ibid., 2875.
antithesis. "Concisely put," it was said, "this war . . . is a world conflict between concepts and practices of civilization and concepts and practices of barbarism."\(^4^1\) The war was viewed as a struggle between "survival and destruction,"\(^4^2\) and so conceived, total victory was necessary: "There has never been--there never can be--successful compromise between good and evil. Only total victory can reward the champions of tolerance and decency and freedom and faith."\(^4^3\) Secretary of State Hull echoed these sentiments arguing that we could not exist in the same world with aggression: ". . . free governments and Nazi and Fascist governments cannot exist together in this world because the very nature of the latter requires them to be aggressors. . . ."\(^4^4\) Hull added that compromise with Fascism had been proven impossible.\(^4^5\) The policy implication of such feelings was the doctrine of unconditional surrender--that allied war aims required either the capitulation or complete destruction of the enemy.\(^4^6\)

The Roosevelt preference for collective action against aggression first expressed in the "Quarantine the Aggressors" speech in 1937 soon

\(^4^1\) Hornbeck, p. 17.
\(^4^2\) Ibid.
\(^4^3\) State of the Union Address, January 6, 1942 in Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 2867.
\(^4^4\) Cordell Hull, "Foreign Policy of the United States of America: Address by the Secretary of State," Department of State Bulletin, X, No. 251 (April 15, 1944), 335.
\(^4^5\) Ibid., 337.
\(^4^6\) This position was formulated at the Casablanca conference in January, 1943. See Rauch (ed.), Roosevelt Reader, p. 321. Some have argued that this decision prolonged the war by eliminating flexibility for political maneuver with the enemy and by the enemy. Notwithstanding, this policy was consistent with American perception of the war.
became policy as the United States joined with other axis enemies to formulate the United Nations on New Years Day, 1942. Isolationist effort to separate America as a regional power had given way to the new ideology of collective security. Seemingly, FDR's prewar call to mutual action was proven right and the President encouraged Americans not to allow the axis powers to divide and conquer. The Secretary of State pointed to the lessons of the recent past which taught that, "only through unity of action can there be achieved in this world the results which are essential for a free people."48

A necessary corollary of united action was the notion that some form of collective security mechanism would be needed in the aftermath of the war. Indeed, concern for the coming peace was present from the beginning and followed logically from the prewar principle that aggression must be resisted in its early stages. Thus, in May, 1942, State Department official Stanley Hornbeck spoke of the need for a peace settlement with provisions to discourage aggression. He invoked the "lessons of experience" reciting instances of prewar aggression in Asia, Africa and Europe. He reminded his audience of "the failure of the peace-loving peoples and their governments to resort to effective measures to halt that march of aggression until it became more than obvious that it was a movement for universal supremacy."49 Plans for a postwar security system were afoot early in 1943 when British Foreign Secretary

47 Radio address, February 23, 1942 in Rauch (ed.), *Roosevelt Reader*, pp. 304-305.
48 Hull, "Foreign Policy," 335.
49 Hornbeck, pp. 24-25.
Anthony Eden visited Washington to confer on matters of postwar allied cooperation.\textsuperscript{50} FDR described these tentative discussions in a news conference held soon after Eden's departure. He spoke of United Nations' concern "in safeguarding the world from future aggression."\textsuperscript{51} And in his address to the Congress a year later the President maintained that, "The best interests of each nation, large and small, demand that all freedom-loving nations shall join together in a just and durable system of peace."\textsuperscript{52}

It is well at this juncture to reflect, briefly, upon the implications of America's dramatic rejection of regionalism in the early 1940's. Already a pattern of thought was coalescing. Seemingly FDR's endorsement of a global foreign policy had been proven. Many isolationists admitted the failure of their policies in the 1930's and came to accept the new ideology of internationalism.\textsuperscript{53} The new internationalist consensus was born in the lessons of the 1920's and 1930's--the preceding decades had seemingly proven that aggressive nations could not be restrained save by force and that force must be applied early if peace-loving nations were to avoid a bloody struggle. The era had demonstrated--to the satisfaction of most--that attempts to avoid war by withdrawal to a hemispheric bastion were in error--aggression had no limit as the Nazi-Japanese conspiracy had shown. Finally, Roosevelt's call for

\textsuperscript{50}DeConde, p. 621.


\textsuperscript{52}See Israel (ed.), \textit{Messages}, III, 2876.

\textsuperscript{53}DeConde, p. 622.
international cooperation—unheeded in the 1930's—was now part of the accepted world view of many Americans and most policy makers. After all, hadn't the war experience shown that weak collective action encouraged Italian, Japanese and German aggression? And had not the war been won through cooperative efforts of the United Nations? Indeed, the United States had learned its lesson and would not retreat from its collective responsibilities as it had in 1920. With fifteen years of hindsight, Arnold Wolfers, Yale professor of International Relations, wrote of the period that, "Isolationist sentiments vanished as a result of the bitter experiences of the two world wars, which, it was believed, could have been avoided if the United States had collaborated with others prior to the outbreak of hostilities."\(^{54}\) This is not to suggest that every American subscribed to the thesis that U.S. policy had irrevocably changed in the 1940's. Yet, the new doctrine of internationalism, and its attendant assumptions and policy corollaries amounted to a powerful system of thinking which foretold the coming era of the United Nations. This intellectual consensus would be powerfully reinforced by the emerging cold war conflict.

### The Making of a Cold War

The American view of postwar cooperation was predicated on the belief that all nations would work collectively to restrain war and encourage peaceful growth and development. However, within two years of the war's end collective security had taken on a new meaning—mutual

defense against the Soviet Union. While this development surprised and saddened policy makers it seems in some ways to have been foreordained. George F. Kennan's analysis of a hidden dilemma in World War II deserves mention. Kennan writes that the triumph of either the German or Russian regimes in alliance with the west meant the victor would attain a local hegemony in Eastern Europe: "... any war in which one of these two powers was fighting on the side of the democracies could scarcely be fought to a complete and successful finish without placing the collaborating totalitarian power in occupation of large parts of eastern Europe simply by virtue of the sweep of military operations." ^55

It would be misleading and unfair to impute that allied policy makers could not have seen the implications of a total defeat of Nazi Germany. Yet, the hope remained that the USSR could be made to feel secure and that such assurances would win a certain measure of cooperation from Stalin.

However much policy makers hoped to work with Russia in the postwar days, the fact remains that the roots of the coming hostility existed before the guns fell silent. The communist ideology of the USSR had always been suspect and the potent "Red Scare" in the years following World War I showed that this concern could engender powerful social turmoil. ^56 Indeed, the United States extended diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union only in 1933, largely to curb Japanese and German plans for expansion. ^57 Throughout the 1930's many continued

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^55 Kennan, pp. 66-67.

^56 Garraty, pp. 700-702.

^57 DeConde, pp. 531-32. Secretary of State Hull relates that the results of recognition and diplomatic contact were "disappointing."
to feel that the real enemy was Russia not Germany. Distrustful of the
Soviet Union, William C. Bullitt, envoy to Paris, failed even in late 1938 to realize the danger emanating from Germany. His three-year experience in Moscow convinced him that, "the aim of the Soviet Government is, and will remain, to produce world revolution." Joseph P. Kennedy, FDR's Ambassador to Britain, did not fully perceive the revolutionary character of Nazi power but was, like his counterpart in Paris, quite concerned about the USSR. Certainly the behavior of Soviet Russia gave little assurance of its pacific aims. Two weeks after the German invasion of Poland, Russian forces entered from the east and took the eastern portion of hapless Poland for itself. Some weeks later Russia invaded Finland in a move that provoked outrage in the United States. Roosevelt felt the Soviet dictatorship to be less of a threat than the Nazi variety; but after Hitler's invasion of Russia, popular antipathy toward the USSR obliged him to proceed cautiously in aiding her. And from the beginning the Soviets qualified their acceptance of the principles of the Atlantic Charter, making


59 Quoted in Ibid.

60 Ibid., p. 659.

61 DeConde, pp. 581-82. FDR avoided invoking the Neutrality Act against Russia hoping not to strengthen Nazi-Soviet solidarity.

62 Garraty, p. 762.

63 In a letter to Pope Pius XII, September 3, 1941, FDR wrote: "I believe, however, that this Russian dictatorship is less dangerous to the safety of other nations than is the German form of dictatorship." See Rauch (ed.), Roosevelt Reader, p. 281.

64 Garraty, p. 762.
it known that they intended to retain control of the three Baltic States, eastern Poland, and sections of Rumania and Finland. Churchill and Roosevelt refused to accept the legitimacy of these claims and, thus, postwar control of Eastern Europe was problematic from the start.

It is true to say that the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union represented something of a marriage of convenience. To an extent the hope for cooperation was built on what John Spanier calls the "unsuspecting and utopian nature of American wartime thinking." Yet, private dispatches reflected worry over future Russian aims and FDR cautioned the Congress not to engage in "perfectionism" in receiving the coming peace settlements. He frankly conceded concern over the situation in Greece and Poland. Further, there is evidence of an undercurrent of hostility to the USSR in Congress. Late in the war presidential aide Harry Hopkins felt constrained to urge Marshal Stalin to disregard "expressions of the Hearst newspapers and the Chicago Tribune."

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65 DeConde, p. 615. Of course such reservations negated both the letter and spirit of the Charter.


67 State of the Union Address, January 6, 1945 in Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 2892.


American public opinion was divided on the question of Russian cooperation in the postwar period with fifty-five percent expressing an expectation of cooperation and thirty-one percent indicating some doubt.  

In retrospect, of course, we are familiar with the postwar breakdown in the wartime grand coalition. The standard interpretation of the 1945-1947 period holds that the failure of the hoped-for cooperation resulted solely from Russian intransigence and that, only gradually and reluctantly, did the United States respond to Soviet challenges hoping thereby to avoid the mistakes of the 1930's. Few major disputes are so one-sided and thus it is not surprising to find that some contemporary historians find the United States partly or mostly to blame for the cold war stalemate. Yet, the assignment of "fault" is tangential to our purposes. As before, we will seek to discover and isolate the feelings of policy makers--their image of the origin of the cold war. And, again, it will appear that American policy makers responded almost univocally to the cold war crises. Another intellectual consensus developed. The birth of the cold war pattern of thought would have continuing domestic and foreign implications.  

It is evident that as the war drew to a close in Europe the major allies had many issues to settle. "There are a considerable number of major questions of policy on which no decisions have been reached," wrote Foreign Secretary Eden to the Prime Minister in the  

70 See "The Quarter's Polls," Public Opinion Quarterly, IX, No. 1 (Spring, 1945), 103. The percentage of those expecting Soviet postwar cooperation increased steadily from 1942 to 1945.
month preceding the Yalta conference. And in the weeks before Yalta the allies were already maneuvering to set up a workable postwar settlement. FDR confided to his Secretary of State that on the issue of German reparations, "we have to remember that in their Soviet occupied territory they will do more or less what they wish." Two weeks later Churchill advised the President of a conversation he had with Stalin. "U.J. wants Poland Czecho and Hungary to form a realm of independent anti-Nazi pro-Russian states, the first two of which might join together." The following excerpt from a pre-Yalta briefing paper summarizes the thinking of at least some U.S. officials on the coming difficulty over postwar settlements in Europe.

Recent events in Europe have demonstrated the very real danger not only to Allied unity during the war but to the hope of a stable peace, as a result of the failure of the Allies to evolve an agreed and mutually acceptable political program.

Growing evidence of Anglo-Soviet rivalry on the continent of Europe and the resulting power politics scramble for position is due less to the difficulties over territorial questions than to the question of the political character of the governments in various countries of Europe beyond the Soviet borders. On the one hand it is evident that the Soviet Government suspects that Great Britain desires to see installed wherever possible right-wing governments which from the Soviet point of view would be hostile to the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the British view with apprehension the possibility that the Soviet Government will endeavor in its turn to install and support left wing totalitarian governments as far west as possible.

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72 Letter of President Roosevelt to the Secretary of State, September 29, 1944 in Ibid., p. 155.

73 Telegram from Churchill to Roosevelt, October 22, 1944 in Ibid., p. 159. "U.J." was an expression used by FDR and Churchill to denote "Uncle Joe" Stalin.

As the Yalta conference drew near allied statesmen saw difficulties coalescing around the peacetime settlements in Iran, the Balkans and Poland. U.S. diplomats were concerned over growing Soviet and British difficulties in Iran. Early in the war the two powers had occupied the country to safeguard its oil resources. Now it seemed as though each supported rival factions in a widening civil conflict. Americans were also troubled by British and Soviet friction in the Balkans where, in Spring, 1944, the powers had agreed on spheres of influence. The United States did not favor such spheres, feeling that arrangements of the sort, "mitigate against the establishment and effective functioning of a broader system of general security in which all countries will have their part." The United States tended to hold the Soviets more to blame and Russian "unilateral" action in Rumania and the Balkans was deplored. In face of Soviet actions future allied cooperation was at stake and a pre-Yalta briefing paper on Bulgaria illustrates western feelings of foreboding over Russian Eastern European policy: "The present stage through which Bulgaria is passing is of great importance not only because of its probable future influence on the Balkans generally but also because Bulgaria in certain respects is a testing ground in the relations of the three principal allies." Relations among the major allied powers were strained also in regard to the future of Poland. Soviet armies had already entered the country and


76"American Policy Toward Spheres of Influence," unsigned Briefing Book Paper in Ibid., p. 104.

77Unsigned Briefing Book Paper in Ibid., p. 240.
the Russians seemed about to recognize the Soviet-sponsored Lublin government. Fearing the establishment of a Soviet puppet regime FDR wrote Stalin hoping that the Soviet leader would delay recognition of a Polish government until after a general allied conference.\(^78\) Stalin replied, complaining of interference by the pro-western Polish government in exile and emphasizing that the Soviet Union had interests in Poland "more than any other power."\(^79\) The President forwarded a copy of Stalin's letter to Churchill who responded that it "shows how serious will be the difficulties we shall have to face."\(^80\)

U.S. and British representatives held joint talks in Malta preparatory to the tripartite Yalta conference and difficulties with the USSR were a major subject. In a Foreign Minister's meeting, there, on February 1, 1945, representatives expressed anger at Russian interference with British-American oil companies in Iran; complaints concerning Russian conduct in Eastern Europe were exchanged and the conferees agreed on the need to insist that the Russians begin to take prior consultation with allied control commissions in Eastern Europe.\(^81\) In a private conversation Churchill confided to Secretary of State Stettinius that, relative to Poland, "If the Russians persist in their present policy, that would only neutralize the efforts of all those in our two

\(^{78}\) Letter of President Roosevelt to Stalin, December 16, 1944 in Ibid., pp. 216-17.

\(^{79}\) Letter of General Stalin to Roosevelt, December 27, 1944 in Ibid., pp. 221-22.

\(^{80}\) Ibid., p. 223.

\(^{81}\) Minutes of the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the U.S. and U.K. on Malta, February 1, 1945 in Ibid., pp. 501-505.
countries most anxious to work with Russia."

At Yalta the allied leaders worked out agreements on these major issues, but, in retrospect, it is clear that the language of the final declaration was ambiguous and allowed for considerable misunderstanding of the text—intentional as well as unintentional. For example, the final accord on Poland provided for "reorganization" of the Lublin provisional government on a "broader" and "democratic" basis and called for "free" elections involving "democratic" parties. Such high-sounding but open-ended terminology made both for easy agreement and ready misunderstanding. Thus, while the President spoke of frank discussions and "unanimous" agreement it soon became clear that agreement on words did not herald unanimity of interpretation.

By the time of Harry Truman's assumption of the Presidency in April, 1945, western concern over the future in postwar Europe was rising. In a revealing telegram to Truman, Churchill expressed anxiety over Russian "misinterpretation of the Yalta decisions," citing Soviet influence and intrigue in Poland, Austria, Greece, and the Balkans. Echoing a phrase made famous in a later speech Churchill maintained that, "An iron curtain is drawn down upon their front, we do not know what is going on behind." The Prime Minister advised his less experienced American colleague that the time for settlement was immediate, "before we weaken our armies mortally or retire to the zones of

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82 Ibid., p. 509.
83 Final Communique, Yalta Conference in Ibid., p. 973.
84 Address to Congress on the Yalta Conference in Rauch (ed.), Roosevelt Reader, pp. 383-84.
occupation."\(^8^5\) Truman shared the Prime Minister's misgivings and revealed in his Memoirs, "We had already discovered how difficult the Russians could be, but in the months that immediately followed the war this was revealed even further."\(^8^6\) It would be a mistake to assume that the British and Americans forsook hope of cooperation with the USSR; but, nothing was taken for granted. Secretary of Defense Forrestal believed that it would not be difficult to deal with the Soviets—unless their postwar policy called for continuation of anti-capitalist crusading.  

On April 13, 1945, Secretary of State Stettinius submitted a report to President Truman touching on the major aspects of United States relations. The report stressed the "firm and uncompromising" actions of the USSR since Yalta and complained of Russian unilateral interference into the internal affairs of liberated countries.\(^8^8\) Truman was particularly fearful, in this context, of a communist government in Poland, and it is clear that the difficulties over Poland soon became symbolic of allied difficulties in achieving a mutually satisfactory political settlement in all of Europe.\(^8^9\) In response to western

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\(^8^5\)Churchill telegram to Truman, May 12, 1945 in Foreign Relations, Conference of Berlin, II, 8-9.


\(^8^7\)Walter Millis (ed.), The Forrestal Diaries (New York: The Viking Press, 1951), p. 72. This was a diary entry for June 30, 1945.

\(^8^8\)See report in Truman, I, 15-16.

charges, Stalin complained of similar U.S. provocations and justified his admittedly unilateral activity in Poland by describing the need to set up a provisional administration in the country. Marshal Stalin maintained that the United States and United Kingdom were not fairly interpreting the Yalta provisions on Poland and opined that Britain wished to revive the *cordon sanitaire* around the USSR.

Truman attempted to allay this fear--striving not to convey the impression that the United States wished to ring the Soviet Union with hostile states but U.S. officials continued to believe that all would be well if only the USSR would cooperate fairly. Thus, the President determined to take a firmer stance in negotiations with the Russians. Ambassador Harriman supported Truman in this matter reporting that some around Stalin interpreted our willingness to cooperate as a sign of weakness. Although Truman took a tough stance at the Potsdam meeting with Stalin and Churchill, George Kennan argues that the negotiated agreement contained ambiguity which the Soviets could exploit.

Allied solidarity diminished even more as in 1946 the United States felt a need to stiffen its stance against the USSR. Early in

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91 *Ibid.*, 28-33. The *cordon sanitaire* was the prewar western policy of creating a buffer of anti-communist states in Eastern Europe.

92 Truman, I, 25. Ambassador Harriman wrote to Truman that Stalin was unable "to understand our interest in a free Poland as a matter of principle." Stalin suspected an ulterior motive. See *Foreign Relations, Conference of Berlin*, I, 61.

93 Truman, I, 70-71.


95 Kennan, p. 259.
the year the Department of State publicly expressed concern over Soviet actions in Iran, and Truman told his Secretary of State that the Soviets planned to absorb the country as they had taken over Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania. "I do not think we should play compromise any longer," said the President.  

Truman expressed similar sentiments concerning Russian policy in the Black Sea and Mediterranean areas.  

Soviet pressure on Turkey concerning the Straits caused the President to fear a Soviet invasion and led the Secretary of Defense to wonder whether we would "take a firm attitude" on the Straits question or continue our tendency to "protest but ultimately give in. . . ." Senator Vandenberg of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee spoke of "a general disposition to stop this Stalin appeasement." He believed that cooperation would be forthcoming "when Russia learns that the 'appeasement days' are over. . . ."  

These words by U.S. officials reveal a common opinion that the United States had been so moderate as to invite Soviet action. Already the confrontation with the USSR was seen in terms of prewar appeasement of Hitler. Thus, Secretary of State Byrnes, in a major address, spoke to the prewar "example of weakness" set by the United States in relation to the axis powers. "This tragic experience," he said, "makes us

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96 Truman, I, 551-52.

97 Ibid., 522.


realize that weakness invites aggression." It is evident that the World War II pattern of thought--appeasement brings aggression/resistance stops it--was even then being extended into the new crisis. Diplomats, like all men, learned by experience; the past seemed to suggest a need for a more resolute policy vis-a-vis the Soviet diplomacy. John Spanier's version of the beginnings of the cold war supports the generally-held view that the time for general and meaningless paper agreements had passed. The need was to be firm so as to force the Soviets to be reasonable. The failure of friendly overtures toward the USSR and the repeated pressures by the Soviets gave further confirmation to the new direction in U.S. foreign policy since Pearl Harbor. Seemingly the assumptions and policy correlates of the activist model of foreign policy were being vindicated as, slowly, the United States reevaluated its relationship to the USSR.

But the reservoir of good feeling for the Soviets was not yet depleted. The new posture of firmness had not yet come to imply outright hostility. In his 1947 report to Congress and the nation the President spoke of "difficulties" but maintained that we shared a commonality of basic interests with the Soviet Union. The President emphasized the need for strong forces but, at the same time, expressed hope for the coming Moscow-based negotiations on the German and Austrian

101 Spanier, pp. 18-32.
102 Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 2948.
peace treaties. However, upon his return from Moscow, Secretary of State Marshall reported unreasonable Soviet positions which prevented resolution of German reconstruction. By this time Marshall had come to believe that the United States needed greater military strength "to back up our views on foreign policy questions." Marshall, too, began to see the new deadlock with the Soviet Union in terms of the previous struggle with aggressors in the decade of the 1930's, relating his belief that World War II could have been avoided if the United States had either been stronger or had made decisive commitments.

The Foreign Ministers, unable to come to any agreement at Moscow, scheduled a meeting in London for later in the year. Here too, however, the discussions dissolved into an exchange of polemics. The Moscow and London meetings marked an epoch in relations with the Russians for it was in 1947 that the deadlock and differences with the Soviets became publicly formalized in the "containment" doctrine.

103 Ibid., 2947-49.


107 Telegram from Marshall to Truman in Ibid., II, 770-72.

108 In his 1959 State of the Union Address, Eisenhower referred to the active defense of the free world which began in 1947. See Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 3093.
The Strategy of Containment

The Greek revolution became the final crisis leading to a formal redefinition of the U.S. role in postwar world politics. For some time a communist-led uprising in the north of Greece had been aided by the neighboring communist governments of Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania. The British, in early 1947, gave notice of their inability to provide further aid to the right-wing government in Athens. The President perceived the crisis to be severe and felt that an American failure to aid Greece (and its neighbor, Turkey) would signal United States weakness and contribute to instability in Western Europe and the Middle East.109 Fearing a return to isolation, the President consulted his advisers to formulate a policy. Secretary Forrestal described his role in the meeting, relating his interpretation of the postwar deadlock. "In my remarks I said that what was occurring was simply the manifestation of what had been in progress of development for the last four years; that if we were going to have a chance of winning, we should have to recognize it as a fundamental struggle between our kind of society and the Russians' and that the Russians would not respond to anything except power."110 This view represents the final triumph of the World War II ideology in which a struggle with an implacable adversary with alien beliefs, required the application of force. This thinking was clearly reflected in the President's March 12, 1947, address to Congress in which he articulated the Truman Doctrine of cold war containment.

109Truman, II, 100-101.
110Millis (ed.), Forrestal Diaries, p. 251.
In the President's speech to a joint session of Congress he recited the plight of Greece threatened by communist insurgents. Admitting the Greek government was not ideal, the President nevertheless described it as "free," "independent" and "democratic." Truman called for aid to Greece and its neighbor, Turkey, in order to preserve their integrity. The President frankly conceded the "broad implications" of the actions he proposed; but Truman maintained that the program of aid to the embattled states followed logically from United States' dedication to national freedom and self-determination. Reminding his audience of the struggle against Germany and Japan the President emphasized the need "to help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes." While not mentioning the USSR by name, Truman spoke of coercion against the peoples of Poland, Rumania, and Bulgaria. He set the struggle as a choice of antithetical ways of life--as suggested by Forrestal--and he put forth a sweeping statement of policy, declaring that, "I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure." The President concluded by stressing that "confusion and disorder" in the Middle East and fear in Europe would inevitably result from the collapse of Greece and Turkey.

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111 U.S. Congress, Joint Session of the House and Senate, President Harry S. Truman, 80th Cong., 1st sess., March 12, 1947, Congressional Record, LXXXIII, 1940-81. All references to the speech are taken from this source. For data on the popular reaction to the speech see "The Quarter's Polls," Public Opinion Quarterly, XI, No. 2 (Summer, 1947), 285.
Truman's speech was followed, four months later, by George F. Kennan's anonymous article on the "Sources of Soviet Conduct." In this monograph, which some have called the first detailed presentation of the new strategy of containment, he described Soviet strategy as rooted in both ideology and circumstance. Emphasizing the Soviet view of an innate struggle between communism and capitalism, Kennan advised that the Soviet policy was based on persistence and must be met by a "long-term patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies." Such a counterforce, he maintained, would exacerbate basic weaknesses of the Soviet regime.

Kennan's feelings toward the Soviet Union originated from his wartime years in Moscow when he came to feel that postwar cooperation with the Soviets would be difficult if not impossible. However, although Kennan's monograph endorsed a containment of the USSR, Kennan "took exception" to Truman's policy statement to Congress "because of the sweeping nature of the commitments which it implied." Kennan had participated in policy discussions preceding the President's March 12 address to Congress and Kennan recognized the serious implications if Greece or Turkey should fall; but he was not so sure as the others that a communist takeover in Greece necessarily meant Soviet

112Kennan's article is reprinted in Kennan, American Diplomacy, pp. 89-106.
113Spanier, p. 30.
114Kennan, p. 99.
116Ibid., pp. 319-20.
domination of the Middle East. He looked to such local factors as the Moslem religion to operate against foreign intrigue, especially of an anti-religious variety. On balance, Kennan supported the action in Greece, but he objected to the fact that our aid was placed "in the framework of a universal policy rather than in that of a specific decision addressed to a specific set of circumstances." But, of course, such universals were part and parcel of the emerging cold war ideology.

George Kennan's critique of the Truman Doctrine is important for it underscores the universality of the policy. Truman's address seemingly pledged the United States to protect "freedom" everywhere with lesser regard to local circumstances. The "sweeping" nature of the containment strategy accorded well with the "lesson of World War II" which taught that failure to contain totalitarian aggression even in remote places (e.g., Manchuria and Ethiopia) inevitably led to further disorder. The transfer of the World War II pattern of thought became complete. We were struggling against an evil totalitarian enemy whose way of life was antithetical to our own. This enemy desired to dominate the world and, in pursuit of this aim, would attempt aggression in many areas. Failure to stop the aggression would lead to a wider war later, with the totalitarian power now stronger for its conquests.

Apparently reinforced by ten years of history, the containment consensus of thought on foreign policy became a powerful motivating factor guiding both the thinking and actions of policy makers. Cordell

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117 Ibid., p. 317.
118 Ibid., pp. 319-20.
Hull wrote in 1948 of the need to be firm with the USSR—not to tolerate her "intervention into other nations." George Marshall argued that the Soviet group of nations refused to cooperate and thus precipitated a "rift" between them and other nations. In his 1948 State of the Union Address President Truman spoke of the totality of U.S. involvement in the world maintaining that, "the loss of freedom in any area of the world means a loss of freedom to ourselves."

The cold war philosophy of containment thus involved a symbolic transfer in which the USSR took the place of Nazi Germany in the thinking of policy makers. In a perceptive essay historians Adler and Paterson describe this redefinition of roles by which similarities in Nazi and communist government (totalitarianism), ideology (world conquest), leadership (dictatorship) and policy (aggression) "shaped American perception of world events in the cold war." The old terms of "appeasement," "aggression," etc., returned and dictated an anti-Soviet cold war policy along the same lines as the anti-Nazi policy of World War II. Thus, Adler and Paterson write, "Once Russia was designated as the 'enemy' by American leaders, Americans transferred their hatred for Hitler's Germany to Stalin's Russia with considerable ease.

119 Hull, Memoirs, II, 1739.
121 Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 2957.
and persuasion. As Matthews put it, 'It is really a matter of labels.' 123

The Cold War Consensus

The experience of post-World War Russian intransigence created a meeting of minds on the meaning of the cold war just as Pearl Harbor had cemented the "hot war" intellectual unanimity of World War II. Wiser for the lessons of the late war, policy makers came to describe the cold war against communism in much the same language as the world war against Nazism. Such a world view had an inevitable implication for policy as we now reacted to aggression wherever it appeared with only a cursory examination of local conditions. Succeeding Presidents and foreign policy leaders became spokesmen for the cold war consensus. 124

The public statements of Harry Truman, the initial cold war leader, first set forth the assumptions and policy correlates of this cold war consensus. In Truman's words the United States sought "world peace" and worked to encourage freedom throughout the world. 125 However, these aims, so clearly demonstrated after World War II, were deliberately frustrated by the USSR in its pursuit of world domination. "The world is divided," said the President, "not through our fault or

123 Ibid.
125 State of the Union Addresses of 1948 and 1950 in Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 2957 and 2967.
failure, but by Soviet design. They, not we, began the cold war."\textsuperscript{126} Truman described the Soviet effort to confront the "free world" and he emphasized the evil attributes and malevolent intentions of our adversaries. The Soviets represented an "atheistic" force steeped in "dictatorship" and "tyranny."\textsuperscript{127} In his Inaugural Address of 1949 he characterized the threat as an alien philosophy antithetical to American beliefs and practices.\textsuperscript{128} Indeed, the figure of antithesis is a prominent one in cold war rhetoric. Stressing American ideals Truman described the cold war confrontation as "right and justice in the world against oppression and slavery;"\textsuperscript{129} he spoke of a contest pitting "all the great resources of freedom" against "the slave world."\textsuperscript{130} And in his final message to the Congress, January 7, 1953, President Truman wrote that, "It is a struggle as old as recorded history; it is freedom versus tyranny."\textsuperscript{131}

The policy implications of a contest with evil were clear as Truman counseled that moral rightness was not enough--strength was the best safeguard of freedom.\textsuperscript{132} He reiterated the need for a universal

\textsuperscript{126}1953 State of the Union Address in Israel (ed.), \textit{Messages}, III, 2999.
\textsuperscript{127}Addresses of 1950 and 1951 in \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 2970 and 2979.
\textsuperscript{129}1951 State of the Union Address in Israel (ed.), \textit{Messages}, III, 2980.
\textsuperscript{130}1952 State of the Union Address in \textit{Ibid.}, 2986.
\textsuperscript{131}1953 State of the Union Address in \textit{Ibid.}, 2998.
\textsuperscript{132}State of the Union Addresses of 1951 and 1949 in \textit{Ibid.}, 2980 and 2966.
policy against all aggression because, "the loss of independence by any nation adds directly to the insecurity of the United States."133 Defending this bold internationalism, Truman explained that because the Soviet Union could succeed by isolating us,134 "Our allies are essential to us."135 Thus, the President repeatedly invoked the need for measures of collective security.136 He buttressed this claim by recalling the spectre of failure to take such measures in the 1930's. Echoing his predecessor, Truman reminded the Congress that, "it has been scarcely 15 years since most Americans rejected out-of-hand the wise counsel that aggressors must be 'quarantined.'" Recalling that the democracies failed to act in the case of Manchuria, Ethiopia, or Austria, the President argued that prompt action then would have altered the course of history.138 He reiterated the proven bankruptcy of isolation139 and chronicled contemporary successes in stopping communist aggression in Greece, Turkey, Europe and Korea.140 When such examples of the defense of freedom had taught the communist world that aggression would not

133 1948 State of the Union Address in Ibid., 2957.
134 1951 State of the Union Address in Ibid., 2978.
135 1952 State of the Union Address in Ibid., 2987.
137 1953 State of the Union Address in Ibid., 3010. This was a reference to Roosevelt's "Quarantine the Aggressors" speech of October 5, 1937.
138 1952 State of the Union Address in Ibid., 2980.
139 1948 State of the Union Address in Ibid., 2957.
140 State of the Union Addresses of 1948, 1950 and 1952 in Ibid., 2957, 2967 and 2984-85.
succeed, the President held forth the hope that the Soviets would "recede from the cold war they began."\textsuperscript{141}

If the potency of the cold war consensus were even in question, doubts of its efficacy were removed by the precepts and policies of succeeding administrations. Although President Eisenhower characterized his program as a "new, positive foreign policy," his first message to the Congress echoed many of the Truman-era assumptions.\textsuperscript{142} Calling for a "global" defense of freedom President Eisenhower invoked the "truth that no single country . . . can alone defend the liberty of all nations threatened by communist aggression from without or subversion within." Eisenhower appealed to the American desire to "hold the line of freedom" against "enslavement." And he proposed United States leadership of a world-wide collective effort to deter aggression. Eisenhower's subsequent addresses repeated the ideology and language of the cold war consensus. "Freedom is pitted against slavery," he said, "lightness against the dark."\textsuperscript{143} General Eisenhower pointed to the continuing "threat to the free world" and spoke of the need to reject isolation.\textsuperscript{144} Decisive and swift responses to aggression, Eisenhower

\textsuperscript{141}1953 State of the Union Address in \textit{Ibid.}, 3009.

\textsuperscript{142}See Dwight D. Eisenhower's first Presidential Address to the Congress, February 2, 1953 in \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 312-25. The new administration felt that the term "containment" implied negativism and, although the "new" policy was sometimes termed "liberation," it was really no different than Truman's. For a statement of the intentions of the new administration see John F. Dulles, "A Policy of Boldness," \textit{Life}, XXXII, No. 20 (May 19, 1952), 146-60.

\textsuperscript{143}Eisenhower 1953 Inaugural Address in \textit{Lott (ed.)}, \textit{Inaugural Addresses}, p. 259.

\textsuperscript{144}1957 State of the Union Address in \textit{Israel (ed.)}, \textit{Messages}, III, 3072.
maintained, would convince the communist rulers to reconsider military actions. 145

John F. Kennedy, born of a different generation than his predecessors in the Presidency, nevertheless mirrored the cold war beliefs of his elders. In his stirring Inaugural Address, Kennedy encouraged a new vigor in American foreign and domestic policy. He endorsed a continuation of our unlimited diplomacy with these oft-quoted words: "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty." 146 In the months that followed, the new President spoke with a certain urgency to the task of containment. Kennedy characterized the tide and times as critical. He drew a dark picture of continued communist penetration and propaganda, and called for a new dedication to the task of liberty. 147 Kennedy pledged his administration to a campaign against aggression declaring that "we shall never weary in defense of freedom." 148

In the preceding pages I have sketched the development and eventual dominance of the policy maker's view of the cold war--what I have termed the cold war consensus. The consensus became an intellectual barometer imbuing post-World War II history with a definite

145 1955 State of the Union Address in Ibid., 3040.
146 Kennedy Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961 in Lott (ed.), Inaugural Addresses, p. 269.
148 1963 State of the Union Address in Ibid., 3153.
direction and meaning. The strength of this thought pattern can scarcely be overemphasized as it remains, yet today, the standard historical interpretation of the period since 1945. In his widely-read work on American Foreign Policy Since World War II, John Spanier acts as a spokesman for the standard interpretation that the cold war was thrust upon the United States by the USSR. Spanier discusses what he terms the "utopian nature of American wartime thinking" and argues that the "dream of postwar peace" was shattered by Soviet actions in Eastern Europe. Not satisfied with regional dominance, the Soviet Union next exerted pressure on the neighboring states of Greece, Turkey, and Iran. Spanier describes the next eighteen months as a period of "reassessment" during which American policy makers reevaluated official attitudes and actions toward the Soviet Union. Only slowly did the United States come to accept the "realistic" notion of the inherent hostility of the USSR necessitating a change in U.S. policy. The crisis in Greece brought the issue to a head. Unable to further assist the Greeks, Britain turned the matter to the United States. In Spanier's view, "The cold fact of a bipolar world suddenly faced the United States. The country could no longer skirt the responsibilities of its tremendous power." Realizing that collapse in Greece endangered the security of the entire Mediterranean and Western European regions the United States embarked on a massive program of aid for the country and thus came to adopt the new policy of containment.

149Spanier, pp. 19-23.
150Spanier, p. 34.
Spanier's perspective is mirrored by John A. Garraty in his standard text in American history. Garraty, too, traces the process by which U.S. hopes were dashed and our nation "reluctantly" concluded that full cooperation with the USSR was illusory. And soon further Soviet pressure on Iran, Korea, Turkey, and Greece caused the United States to react more forcefully; a generalized doctrine of containment emerged in response to the specific crisis of Greece.  

Nor are Spanier and Garraty alone in attributing the cold war to Soviet actions. Others take a similar approach and as Daniel Smith writes in his introduction to the origins of the cold war, "Most scholars have accepted the popular and official view that Russian intransigence and unilateralism were alone to blame for termination of wartime cooperation and the beginning of postwar tensions and conflict." Thomas Paterson speaks of this "entrenched official explanation" as a "consensus in the Truman years" and writes that dissenters to the view were never particularly successful in marketing an alternative perspective.

151 Garraty, pp. 780-83.
Seemingly, however, no one historical viewpoint remains long undisputed. Just as "progressive" historians found fault with the "patriotic" version of the American Revolution so, too, have modern-day revisionists attacked the traditional picture of the cold war as freedom versus aggression. The general thrust of this thought holds that the United States was partly to blame for the postwar breakdown in allied solidarity. The most lengthy of the dissenting tracts is a two volume work by research professor D. F. Fleming--The Cold War and Its Origins. True to its title the piece treats the 1917-1960 period, finding considerable fault with United States policy. Fleming writes that as Soviet consolidation of Eastern Europe seemed to threaten the west, western opposition to Russian moves similarly signaled hostility to the Soviets.\(^{155}\) This was true especially in view of the fact that the Soviet Union regarded border actions as more relevant to the USSR than to Britain and the far distant United States. Fleming faults Truman for his heavy-handed effort to "lay down the law" in a period when allied cooperation was yet possible.\(^{156}\) He accuses U.S. officials of utilizing the atomic bomb as a weapon in a diplomatic offensive against the USSR.\(^{157}\) Finally, Fleming argues that public utterances by Congress, Churchill, and Truman precipitated changes in Russian policy significantly contributing to the cold war.\(^{158}\) The stated implications of Fleming's thesis are twofold: (1) that the United States was at times wholly or

\(^{155}\)Fleming, I, 249.

\(^{156}\)Ibid., 268.

\(^{157}\)Ibid., 331.

\(^{158}\)Ibid., 334, 350-52, and 471-76.
partially culpable for the outbreak of cold war with Russia, and (2) that the United States overreacted to Russian activity assuming an excessively interventionist posture. Simply stated, the United States learned its lessons but too well: "However, after World War II our leaders quickly swung all the way over from our isolationist refusal to accept any responsibility in the world and came close to assuming military responsibility for everything everywhere."\(^{159}\)

The "shared guilt" thesis espoused by D. F. Fleming is shared by another revisionist historian--Gar Alperovitz. Alperovitz traces U.S. diplomacy during the months of 1945 and offers an alternative interpretation. He disputes the notion that the United States was merely a passive observer of Russian initiatives. Rather, he argues, armed with the atomic bomb, Truman determined to roll back Soviet influence in Europe.\(^{160}\) Thus, the United States is seen as an active initiator in the cold war rather than a passive onlooker, only slowly and reluctantly responding to the USSR.

Insofar as they deviate from the norm it is not surprising that both Fleming and Alperovitz are assailed on a number of counts. John Snell criticizes Fleming for his "illusions about the USSR and Soviet policy."\(^{161}\) Specifically, he faults Fleming for failing to acknowledge the "aggressive attitude of Communism as an ideology. . . ." Alperovitz, too, seems occasionally to prefer the esoteric to the obvious, as when

\(^{159}\)Ibid., xi.

\(^{160}\)Alperovitz, see especially pp. 12-14, 29, 146 and 227.

he alleges that the atomic bomb was used on Japan more to scare the powerful Soviets rather than to impress the already-defeated Japanese. 162

Fortunately, for our purposes the fact of actual fault for the cold war is less relevant than American policy makers' perceptions of that fault. In no uncertain terms, American leaders uniformly gave public and private expression of their belief in the real dangers posed by an increasingly hostile Russia. These perceptions became policy in the 1945-1947 period as the lessons of earlier years were applied to the new exigence. Thus was born a cold war consensus—a synthesis of beliefs about the world and our nation's place in it. Accurate or exaggerated, this unanimity of opinion nevertheless operated to shape the attitudes and guide the actions of a generation of U.S. policy makers.

Executive Preeminence in Cold War Foreign Policy

No survey of post-World War II United States foreign policy would be complete without an examination of the process by which executive control of the policy process became the accepted practice. The assumption that cold war activity required quick and decisive action by a strong President with united, bipartisan support was yet another policy corollary to the consensus of thought on conducting the cold war.

In theory the President and Congress share a joint responsibility for the conduct of foreign policy. Hence, the President's power to make treaties is tempered by his duty to submit such foreign arrangements

162 See Alperovitz, pp. 106-14 especially.
to Senate scrutiny and approval.\textsuperscript{163} Though the framers of the Constitution seem to have contemplated "a division of powers in the external field comparable to that provided for in domestic affairs,"\textsuperscript{164} the document places the actual \textbf{conduct} of foreign relations in Presidential hands—providing, therefore, for executive initiative.\textsuperscript{165} From the first, the major policy innovations have come from the executive branch of government.\textsuperscript{166} Although Presidential leadership has been traditional, the Congress retains potential power to stay or undo Presidential policy. For instance, the debate on the federal budget exists as a major opportunity for Congressional review of foreign spending.\textsuperscript{167} "Like any business, foreign affairs cannot be conducted without funds, and it is the Congress which appropriates them."\textsuperscript{168} A parallel power is the Congressional function of enacting enabling legislation.\textsuperscript{169}

While the potential for legislative action in foreign relations remains great, the \textbf{actuality} of a Congressional role remains reduced in view of the real limitations of organization and equipment. At the root

\textsuperscript{163} U.S., Constitution, Art. III, sec. 2.


\textsuperscript{167} Murray, pp. 72-76.

\textsuperscript{168} Wanamaker, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid. and Murray, p. 72.
of Congress' inherent inequality in foreign affairs is the structural
fragmentation of that body. Whereas authority is well defined in the
executive branch, the legislature is characterized by its "fragmenta-
tion" and wide dispersal of power. Congress is composed of indi-
vidual members and committees, a fact which precludes sustained and
constant pursuit of foreign policy objectives. Only the appearance of
coordination is afforded by the committee system which provides for
"narrow jurisdictional prerogatives" rather than "comprehensive evalu-
ation of the nation's foreign and security policies." A major
limitation remains the lack of an independent Congressional source of
foreign policy information. The executive normally controls the major
diplomatic, military, and intelligence sources.

In this atmosphere of executive initiative and Congressional
acquiescence the impact of legislative checks on foreign activity has
atrophied to a "mere shadow of that intended by the framers." The
vaunted power to cut off funds is, in the words of Clinton Rossiter,
"more rhetoric than fact." This observation may come as no real
surprise as the Congress is fearful of causing (or appearing to cause)
an American military or political setback. The following exchange

170 See Edward A. Kolodziej, "Congress and Foreign Policy: The
Timid Political Will," Nation, CCII, No. 11 (March 14, 1966), 293.
171 Ibid., 293.
172 Murray, p. 64.
174 Rossiter, p. 48.
175 Murray, p. 75.
between Senator Joseph Clark and Professor W. Stull Holt illustrates the practical import of the "power of the purse:"

Senator Clark. Do you know of any instances of where we denied appropriations where the President was conducting some action in the foreign policy field which the Congress thought unwise? Mr. Holt. I cannot think of any.176

Several aspects of the current practice of diplomacy have further eroded the actual significance of Congresses' role in foreign policy formulation. As the cold war period has meant a continuing series of international crises, power has inevitably gravitated to the executive department.177 The superior resources of the Presidency are generally conceded--administrative machinery, information, speed, unity, and organization.178 These resources have made the Congress dependent on the executive for the actual leadership in and administration of policy. Thus, the initiation of policy--control of the vital day-to-day events--has passed completely to the Chief Executive and the Congressional role often becomes that of ratification of predetermined courses of action.179

Illustrative of the process by which the President has come to dominate the actual conduct of diplomacy is the increasing use of the executive agreement. The Presidential power to make accords with


177 Schwartz, p. 184, Rossiter, pp. 2, 4 and 86 and Kolodziej, 292.


179 Murray, p. 76 and Rossiter, p. 25.
foreign states has long been recognized. In theory these less formal agreements protect the treaty making power of the Senate from the burden of the daily minutiae of detail. However, in the period since the Second World War these initiatives have served to insulate the executive from the traditional treaty-making function of the upper chamber of Congress.

The whole pattern of diplomacy in the cold war has, therefore, enhanced executive initiative in the administration of overseas policy. In this atmosphere, the Congress often finds itself unable to do other than support a virtual executive fait accompli. Nowhere is this scenario more prevalent than in instances of foreign military commitments. Acting as Commander-in-Chief, modern Presidents have submitted ongoing military engagements for Congressional legitimization. Ruhl J. Bartlett argues, "This puts the Congress in a very difficult position. It is almost inevitable that it will act in favor of what the situation demands once it has been created." The Congress, then, is not a full partner in policy formulation; rather it is requested "to consent to what has already been reduced to finality." Practically speaking a military initiative is irreversible by the time it is baptized by the blood of U.S. fighting men. Congress fears appearing "unpatriotic" and

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182 Ruhl J. Bartlett in U.S. Commitments, Hearings, p. 22.

183 Senator Dominick in Ibid., p. 236.
is not likely to embark upon a course that, in the words of one Representa­
tive, "might be interpreted as causing extra hazards to men who are in the field."^{184}

It is evident that the major military commitments of the last generation have been made at the discretion of the executive with little real Congressional participation. In the case of Korea, President Truman committed U.S. forces to the conflict on his own authority as Commander-in-Chief--only later meeting with Congressmen "to inform them of decisions already taken."^{185} In the Eisenhower years Senators were presented the Middle Eastern Resolution (the Eisenhower Doctrine) on a "take-it-or-leave-it basis that provided no opportunity for suggestions."^{186} In both the Lebanon intervention of 1958 and the Formosa Resolution of 1955 authorities suggest that the after-the-fact role of the Congress allowed for nothing but acquiescence.^{187} The same format held true in the Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban missile crisis.^{188}

Thus, when President Johnson asked for a resolution confirming the American interest in Southeast Asia (the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution) the pattern was well established. The immediate impetus for the resolution was two attacks on United States ships; Senator J. William Fulbright, Rep. Paul G. Findley in Ibid., p. 235.


^{186} Jewell, p. 157 and Murray, p. 63.


Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, laments that the commitment was ratified in a hurried manner with a lack of complete information and meaningful debate.\(^{189}\)

The result of the foregoing has been a wide Presidential power to initiate, unilaterally, sweeping military commitments. The potential Congressional checks are rendered impotent when Congress is not part of the real decision making process and is presented a virtual fait accompli. "There is a difference," writes Professor Bartlett, "between the Congress approving something once the situation has become involved and the Executive asking for authority once the situation is being initially considered. . . . These are vastly different things."\(^{190}\)

In an atmosphere where major commitments are made at executive discretion, the virtue of "bipartisan support" for Presidential policy has become a catchphrase. In the cold war climate of crisis and confrontation the appearance of national disunity is afforded by partisan activity; such activity has become heresy. Thus, just as FDR called for a bipartisan policy of support for World War II,\(^{191}\) succeeding Presidents have called for like-minded assurances of Congressional unity in the face of the Communist threat. Faced with a Republican Congress, Harry Truman invoked the memory of bipartisanship in the war years.\(^{192}\)

\(^{189}\)Fulbright, pp. 50-52.

\(^{190}\)Bartlett, U.S. Commitments, Hearings, p. 16.

\(^{191}\)See Roosevelt State of the Union Addresses of 1940, 1941 and 1944 in Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 2850, 2857 and 2878.

\(^{192}\)1947 State of the Union Address in Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 2939. Senator Arthur Vandenberg, Foreign Relations Committee Chairman during the period, shared these feelings. See Vandenberg (ed.), Vandenberg Papers, p. viii.
Throughout his administration the President continued to speak for a "bipartisan foreign policy for peace;" and in a 1952 meeting with Eisenhower, Truman emphasized the need to avoid partisan practices in foreign relations. Both Eisenhower and Kennedy accepted this goal.

The foreign policy of the last thirty years has seen an expansion of America's role in the world and a consolidation of authority for that role into executive hands. These developments, which seemed perfectly right and natural, created a pattern of thought which powerfully motivated policy makers in the cold war era. In a real sense it is true to observe that recent American diplomacy took on both an ideology of thought and language of expression. In the final section of this chapter I will attempt to synthesize the preceding pages into a consolidated and coherent notion of policy makers' beliefs about foreign policy.

The Ideology of American Foreign Policy

Ideology most often denotes a mode of thinking or a means of interpreting events. The consistency of American cold war policy and arguments for that policy suggest that a system of thought and interpretation underlay the diplomacy of the period. Clearly, the foreign policy of the 1940-1960 years was rooted, firstly, in a regard for the

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194 Truman, Memoirs, I, 509.
lessons of experience. By 1939 FDR was already speaking of the precepts garnered from the "new wars" of the late 1930's. Other U.S. foreign policy formulators spoke of similar "lessons of the past" or "lessons in our recent history" by which Americans came to realize that "weakness invites aggression." During the decade of the 1940's many statesmen took the view that if the democracies had stood firmly against the totalitarian aggressors world war could have been avoided. President Truman spoke frequently of the failure to utilize collective security when it was needed and maintained that if such measures had been taken, "the whole history of our time would have been different." The President repeated this belief in his message to the nation on United States response to North Korea's attack on South Korea in June of 1950. The Eisenhower Administration exhibited a like regard for the lessons of the past where the President invoked the analogy of appeasement at Munich, 1937, to support the effort to resist Communist Chinese pressure on the Nationalist-held islands of Quemoy and Matsu.

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196 1939 State of the Union Address in Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 2843.

197 See Bernard G. Noble, "American Policy in the Far East," Department of State Bulletin, XV, No. 387 (December 1, 1946), 975; Hull, "Foreign Policy," 335 and Byrnes, 482.


199 State of the Union Addresses of 1951 and 1953 in Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 2980 and 3010.

200 "Initial Measures Taken by the United States in the Korean Crisis; Statement by the President, June 27, 1950" in Smith, II, 614.

The twice-proven adage that aggression requires a collective response became a powerful assumption of diplomacy in the atomic age and the image of a conflict between good and evil was a logical second focal point of the cold war consensus. Just as we had desired peace before Germany and Japan thrust war upon us, so too, were our post-1945 motives pure. Our goal, maintained Truman, was peace and freedom—America subscribed to the lofty ideas of free nations. Since our aim was liberty our alliances, then, threatened no one and our use of force was simply "to defend against aggression and to protect our vital interests." In contrast to our vision of a "peaceful world community," American adversaries pursued a selfish policy of "imperialism," calculated to achieve domination of other societies. As FDR had spoken against the "dictators," his successors cast the new Soviet threat in a similar "totalitarian" mold.

Antithesis once again helped to convey the stark image of righteousness versus depravity and the employment of that figure did not change


204 1962 State of the Union Address in Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 3137.


206 State of the Union Addresses of 1939 and 1941 in Ibid., 2844 and 2859.

207 1950 State of the Union Address in Ibid., 2967.
significantly over a twenty year period. Compare and contrast these statements.

On the contrary, we are engaged in ... a conflict between concepts and practices of democratic self-determination and concepts and practices of total autocratic domination; a conflict, world-wide, between principles and procedures of law on the one hand and principles and procedures of brute force on the other hand.\(^{208}\)

There never has been--there never can be--successful compromise between good and evil.\(^{209}\)

To the west of the line that tragically divides Europe we see nations continuing to act and live in the light of their own traditions and principles. On the other side we see the dead uniformity of a tyrannical system imposed by the rulers of the Soviet Union.\(^{210}\)

It is a struggle as old as recorded history; it is freedom versus slavery.\(^{211}\)

The great quality of the free world is that it combines unity with difference. In that respect it contrasts with communism, which seeks a society of abject conformity.\(^{212}\)

... because we are a part of a world-wide community of free and powerful nations, our own security is immeasurably increased. By contrast, the Soviet Union has surrounded itself with captive and sullen nations.\(^{213}\)

By extending this help we hope to make possible the enthusiastic enrollment of the nations under freedom's banner. No more startling contrast to a system of sullen satellites could be imagined.\(^{214}\)

\(^{208}\)Hornbeck, p. 6.
\(^{209}\)1952 State of the Union Address in Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 2867.
\(^{210}\)Truman, 1953 State of the Union Address in Ibid., 2998.
\(^{211}\)Ibid.
\(^{213}\)1958 State of the Union Address in Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 3078.
\(^{214}\)1960 State of the Union Address in Ibid., 3100.
Nationalism, that is to say, the aspiration of peoples to be themselves, is threatened by its antithesis, international communism.\textsuperscript{215}

We can welcome diversity—the Communist cannot. For we offer a world of choice—they offer the world of coercion.\textsuperscript{216}

Spoken over a span of twenty years—1942-1962—these pronouncements nevertheless contain the same message: our guard must be up against an adversary whose government, values, and policy are anathema to our own.

Related to the idea of antithesis is the notion that only through Communist distortion and propaganda has the stark contrast distinguishing communism and freedom been obscured. Thus, to conceal their imperialistic aims Soviet propagandists have attempted to "deceive and confuse the world concerning the policy of our Government toward the newly established nations of Southeast Asia."\textsuperscript{217} Commenting upon the use of "upside down language" U.S. policy makers supplied alternate definitions to the communist costume of words. Thus,

\begin{itemize}
  \item "peace" \textit{really meant} "war" or "communist domination of the world"
  \item "anti-imperialism" \textit{"empire"}
  \item "peaceful coexistence" \textit{"bitter struggle"}
\end{itemize}


\textsuperscript{216}1962 State of the Union Address in Israel (ed.), \textit{Messages}, III, 3137.

Protesting against what Eisenhower called "a storm of semantic disorder" a United States Representative to the United Nations argued that, contrary to the Soviet charge, the U2 reconnaissance flights over the USSR were not "aggressive" in intent. In a similar vein, John Kennedy protested that, "The systematic aggression now bleeding that country is not a 'war of liberation'--for Vietnam is already free." And Eisenhower warned that communist words were misleading and their promises questionable.

The rhetoric of the cold war is thus a study in the maintenance of dichotomies. As our adversaries' aims were anathema, so, too, were their policies totally threatening. The image of an unlimited threat became a third postulate of the cold war foreign policy ideology. Echoing the rhetoric of World War II, cold war spokesmen repeatedly stressed the communist desire to conquer the world. Eisenhower reminded the Congress of the declared world aims of the Soviets, and Kennedy similarly cautioned that, "We must never be lulled into believing that either


221 State of the Union Addresses of 1959 and 1960 in Ibid., 3087 and 3096.
power [China or Russia] has yielded its ambitions for world domination. . ."  

Central to the picture of a world-wide communist conspiracy was the commonly held premise that the era of conflict originated from these great and global ambitions. "In simple terms," wrote Undersecretary of State Merchant, "it [the cold war] results from the determination of the Communist rulers progressively to expand Communist power and influence until they achieve a universal Communist society."  

Truman and Eisenhower espoused a similar interpretation of the cold war's origins arguing that our efforts were defensive.  

Since the enemy's objectives were international every conflict was seen as but a part of the communist world-wide conspiracy. Policy makers downplayed the nationalist differences of individual communist states, and treated the threat as monolithic. Truman, for example, believed that, "the Chinese Communists were Russian satellites." Others subscribed to this belief and each world troublespot was interpreted as part of a coordinated communist plan of aggression.  

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225 Truman, Memoirs, II, 399.  

Policy makers' reaction to the Korean conflict epitomized the tendency to discern the broader implications of a particular conflict. Thus, Truman labeled the North Korean invasion of South Korea as, "part of a greater plan for conquering all of Asia..." Calling the conflict a "war by satellite" Secretary of State Acheson saw in later Chinese intervention the attempt to preoccupy the U.S. in Asia thereby giving Russia a free hand in Europe. Korea and other conflicts were now seen as a "test case" of America's resolve to resist. Three Presidents--Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy--came to accept the "test case" philosophy that communism was in many respects a single agent pressing simultaneously in various directions according to plan. If the tactic succeeded once, more such attacks would be forthcoming.

The foregoing perception of a global threat emanating from a cohesive and conspiratorial enemy mandated unlimited and world-wide United States intervention. The precepts of an interventionist foreign policy became the fourth dimension of the cold war ideology. Clearly, our aim was defensive: we sought foreign alliances not for our own sake--the policy was thrust upon us. It was thought to be evident, then, that peace could be had if only the instigators of the conflict would

choose it. "In short, let our adversaries choose," said Kennedy; "The Communist side must now choose its course of action," maintained Truman. To safeguard our security and encourage the enemy to prefer cooperation over conflict the United States assumed an almost unlimited policy of world commitment. The discredited strategy of isolation gave way to alliance as cold war Presidents spoke of the need to join our freedom with that of others. The Soviets could isolate us by "swallowing up all our allies." Hence, if independent nations were to fall the "balance of world power" could shift against the free world. Truly the lessons of history taught that "the loss of independence by any nation adds directly to the insecurity of the United States and all free nations." All areas of the world were, in this scheme, seen as crucial to free world security.

The teaching--weakness invites aggression and defense constitutes safety--having been absorbed, American policy now looked to strength rather than "appeasement." In this context the mechanism of collective security became a fifth cornerstone of the internationalist

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233 1951 State of the Union Address in Ibid., 2978.

234 1957 State of the Union Address in Ibid., 3074-75.

235 1948 State of the Union Address in Ibid., 2957.

philosophy in the cold war. Having experienced that the only security lay in "banding together" the free world took collective measures throughout the world. United States policy encouraged and supported free world unity and both our alliances and foreign aid were predicated on a policy of "mutual security." As unity abroad was essential to the maintenance of freedom the concept of bipartisan Congressional support for the President, discussed earlier, became a corollary to the policy of unity against communism.

The assumption that collective resistance discouraged aggression was embodied in a sixth element of the cold war consensus. Simply stated, policy makers hoped that by resisting aggression they would discourage it. The communist powers would see the folly of their ways and abandon their delusions of world empire through covert and overt aggression. Thus, Truman spoke of the Korean action as an effort to discourage the communist leaders. Both Eisenhower and Kennedy mentioned successes in stopping communist advances by warning and action. The expectation that resistance would discourage communist aspirations flowed logically from the thesis that appeasement encouraged aggressive adventures. The expectation of an eventual understanding with communist powers was at the heart of the containment mentality.

We have observed that the cold war ideology preached a set of fairly consistent propositions about the world and our place in it. The

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policies of the confrontation era were expressed in a characteristic language which reinforced these beliefs. As the ideology of the cold war was rooted in a careful regard for the experiences of the past, the rhetoric of the period spoke of certain derived "realities." Similarly, the cold war notion of a struggle pitting goodness against evil was embodied in a particularized vocabulary. Throughout the literature "freedom" or the "free world" is juxtaposed to "slavery;" "dictatorship" is contrasted with "democracy;" communist "conspiracy" is rhetorically distinguished from free world "collective partnership." In policy terms United States activity is portrayed as the rejection of "isolation" and "appeasement" and the assumption of "mutual security." Communist policy is seen as "aggression." Such dichotomous language has a persuasive impact in that specific actions may be categorized as good or bad by identification with one of a set of polar terms. Further, by constant use of similar terms disparate and miscellaneous events are given meaning as a coherent part of the official world view of the cold war.

The foregoing introduction into the thinking, policy, and rhetoric of the cold war is a necessary backdrop to the coming discussion of the rhetoric of Vietnam involvement. The official argumentation on Vietnam was produced by men whose beliefs were formed in the period and who were, therefore, guided by the prevailing opinion of the times. I have maintained that the perception of danger from strong

totalitarian regimes created a virtual unanimity of opinion that sweeping internationalism was the only viable guarantor of national security. Generalizations were formed concerning the nature of the threat and the appropriate responses to it; these assumptions remained remarkably consistent across three administrations. Neither the accuracy nor the applicability of these foreign policy beliefs is relevant. Rather, the importance of the cold war ideology lies in the fact that policy makers evaluated the status and security implications of each crisis on the basis of a well-defined world view. Vietnam would be no exception and, to that extent, the origin of the administration argumentation on Vietnam, 1964-1967, lay in certain preconceptions formed some years earlier.
Chapter III

VIETNAM IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY, 1940-1967

Depending on one's political persuasion America's role in Vietnam has been seen, variously, as appropriate, halfhearted, or foolhardy. Moral judgments differ, equally, as Johnson-era policy makers were assailed, on the one hand, for the immoralities of modern war and, from another perspective, for their decision to limit military sanctions against communism. Scholarly, journalistic and polemic treatments of the war abound; there is no lack of reading matter pertaining to any phase of the long Indochinese conflict. The abundance of current information on the Vietnam crisis suggests that any present attempt to chronicle it be brief. Indeed, the evolution of events in Vietnam is relevant to the present study only as a springboard to the analysis of the Johnson Administration case for escalating the war. As the administration drew its claims from the history of the war, so must any rhetorical criticism of the administration rhetoric be attune to the data base of Vietnamese and American history. Further, the coming narrative will reveal that for a period of twenty years policy makers viewed American interest in and diplomacy toward Vietnam in a

\[1\text{Bernard Fall writes that from the point of view of syntax and semantics, the proper construction of the word is Viet-Nam. See Fall, p. 9. This two-word hyphenated construction was the common mode until around 1967. I shall maintain the more current practice of rendering the name as a single word throughout this study.}\]

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consistent framework of resistance against communism. In this context
the rhetorical exigence confronting the Johnson Administration was
already cast in a definite mold—a policy perspective which called
forth appropriate responses and distinctive rhetoric.

America Discovers Vietnam, 1940-1954

As the costs of American involvement in Indochina rise the con­
viction grows, in all circles, that it would have been a far better fate
never to have entered the area. And in this context our relationship
with Indochina conceals a double irony—for, over and above the present
war, our interest in the area helped precipitate American entry into the
Pacific war against Japan.\(^2\) By 1940, when Japanese penetration of
Southeast Asia was on the rise, the United States saw its Far Eastern
interests threatened by the further expansion of Japan into Indochina.
The Japanese saw a need to render impotent the "privileged sanctuary" of
French Indochina, which was the major conduit of supplies to Japan's
Chinese adversary, Chiang Kai-shek. Taking advantage of the deterior­
ating French military position in Europe, the Japanese extracted an
ever-increasing series of concessions from the hapless Indochinese
administration.\(^3\) By June, 1940, the French were compelled to sanction
the stationing of Imperial Japanese troops in Indochina to police the

\(^2\)Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and
p. 22. It is possible that Schlesinger overstates his case somewhat.
More appropriately we may view the events in Indochina as but a small
part of the overall Japanese imperial policy confronting the United
States.

\(^3\)Edward R. Drachman, United States Policy Toward Vietnam, 1940-
1945 (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1970),
pp. 1-2.
agreed-upon cut off in rail traffic to Southern China. Roosevelt was concerned with the new Japanese penetration, which seemed to surround the U.S. position in the Philippines. Thus, while American diplomacy had formerly ignored the area, policy makers now saw a strategic significance in Vietnam. FDR sought immediately to arrange for the neutralization of the region; but this failed. Although the British expressed a willingness to extend substantive diplomatic and military aid to the isolated French bastion, the United States was reluctant. Instead, U.S. policy took the form of chastisements of the Japanese and moral support for the French. In neither case were our rhetorical blandishments successful. Later, Imperial coercion caused the United States, belatedly, to freeze Japanese assets in the U.S.—an action which moved us along the rocky road toward a confrontation with the island empire.

Wartime American policy toward French Indochina was a study in divided purposes. "On the one hand," the Pentagon Papers reveal, "the United States appeared to support Free French claims to all of France's overseas dominions. . . . On the other hand in the Atlantic Charter and other pronouncements the U.S. proclaimed support for national self-determination and independence." The record was further muddied by President Roosevelt's personal distaste for colonialism in general and French Indochinese policy in particular. FDR frequently spoke privately

4 Ibid., p. xii.
5 Pentagon Papers, I, 8.
6 Drachman, pp. 5-6, 8 and 19-20.
7 Pentagon Papers, I, 9.
of his aversion to what he felt was French collaboration and misrule in the region. In retrospect Bernard Fall finds that Roosevelt's feelings toward Indochina amounted to what he terms a "fixation." The effects of our divided pursuit of the contradictory goals of allied solidarity and native self-determination are amply revealed in the diplomatic history of the period.

During the later stages of the war, DeGaulle's Free French pressured the United States for aid to their military plans in Indochina, but FDR remained somewhat aloof. Although the French could not fathom FDR's reluctance to provide assistance, such an action flowed logically from the President's unwillingness to subsidize a return of Metropolitan French colonial rule. The President directed General Wedemeyer in the China theater to see to it that Lend Lease aid to Britain and France went only to activity directly relevant to the war against Japan. The Office of Strategic Services (OSS)--precursor to the CIA--in its Indochinese operations was under similar orders not to aid the French. As late as February, 1945, FDR gave blanket approval to all needed American military activity in Indochina--provided we did not work with the French.

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9 Fall, p. 58.


11 See Foreign Relations, Conference of Berlin, I, 917.

12 Drachman, pp. 86-87.

13 See Foreign Relations, Malta and Yalta, p. 566.
Such a policy of nonassistance for France was not mere pique—FDR realized that any French reconquest of the region would have a dramatic bearing on the post-war settlement throughout Southeast Asia. The President had other plans for Indochinese reconstruction. Roosevelt seems to have favored some sort of trusteeship arrangement, and he lobbied for this pet plan at the Cairo and Tehran conferences. The President held this view throughout the later stages of the war. At Yalta, FDR commented to Stalin that he favored a trusteeship for the Japanese-occupied colony but that the British, he knew, feared the implications of such act for their empire. The Soviet leader, ever generous with property other than his own, expressed complete agreement. FDR carried this conviction homeward and told reporters on the return voyage that, "Stalin liked the idea. China liked the idea. The British don't like it. It might bust up their empire, because if the Indo-Chinese were to work together and eventually get their independence, the Burmese might do the same thing to England." Regarding publication of the story, FDR cautioned that "it would only make the British mad. Better to keep quiet just now."

Yet, opposition to French colonialism was only one consideration. The desire for cordial cooperative allied relations was another; clearly the administration was sensitive to this need. Britain was unhappy

14 Fall, p. 52.
15 See documents and analysis in Pentagon Papers, I, 10.
16 Foreign Relations, Malta and Yalta, p. 770.
with the broad sweep of United States policy on self-determination, feeling that such a philosophy mitigated against her Commonwealth system. Sensitive to both the emotional and political needs of his allies FDR refused to take a definitive policy position on Indochina. In January of 1945 the President informed his Secretary of State, "I still do not want to get mixed up in any Indo-china decision. It is a matter for the postwar." And when Patrick Hurley, Ambassador to China, complained of British, French, and Dutch efforts to reclaim their colonies FDR replied in a similar vein, responding that the United States had made no firm and final decisions on Indochina. Already by 1944 FDR reluctantly began to accept the fact that the trusteeship for Indochina might be only a voluntary measure: The U.S. representatives at the United Nations Dumbarton Oakes Conference proposed only a voluntary placement of territories into trusteeship.

Truman's assumption of the Presidency altered United States policy regarding Indochina. Although the new President did not seek overtly to abandon the policies of his predecessor he, nevertheless, lacked Roosevelt's personal commitment to Indochinese independence. Further, our policy toward the region was unclear; the need for cooperation with France appeared to be far more pressing than any pipe dreams.

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18 Memorandum to Secretary of State Stettinius, January 1, 1945 in Pentagon Papers, I, 11.

19 Roosevelt note to Hurley, November 21, 1944 in Foreign Relations, Conference of Berlin, I, 916.

20 Drachman, p. 51.

21 Ibid., p. 89. Drachman cites DeGaulle's apparent realization that the death of Roosevelt improved French chances to regain their colony without interference.
of Indochinese self-determination. Secretary of State Stettinius advised the President of French suspicions of our intentions in Indochina, suggesting that Truman be mindful of the French psychological state. Thus, while Hurley and Wedemeyer sent alarming reports of French-British collaboration to recolonize Asia, Truman did not act on their suggestion to terminate Lend Lease in the Southeast Asia Theater. Growing distrust of the USSR dictated an effort to promote good relations with the Western Europeans. As a result, at the San Francisco United Nations conference, Stettinius assured French Foreign Minister Bidault of our total recognition of French sovereignty in Indochina.

The immediate postwar period, thus, saw American efforts directed toward keeping clear of the Franco-Vietnamese difficulties. Although OSS cooperation with the Viet Minh gave the Ho Chi Minh provisional government reason to expect American sympathy toward Vietnamese aspirations for independence, urgent appeals to Truman from Ho were ignored. The prevailing mood of detachment applied to our Far Eastern policy toward France; the U.S. government prohibited the use of

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22 Stettinius report to Truman, April 13, 1945 in Truman, Memoirs, I, 15.
24 Drachman, p. 72.
25 Stettinius report to Truman in Pentagon Papers, I, 15.
27 Drachman, pp. 123 and 135 and Pentagon Papers, I, 17 and 20. Ho Chi Minh had set up a government in Hanoi and was facing French pressure.
U.S.-flag ships to transport French forces to Indochina. Total detachment was easy in precept but difficult in practice as the United States increasingly saw need to revive French power against the growing Soviet menace. Increasingly we became an unwilling partner to French efforts in Asia although in our military aid program a clumsy attempt was made to exclude sales which "appear to relate to Indochina."**29**

**The Cold War Comes to Vietnam**

As the cold war in Europe mandated a closer relationship with France, parallel perceptions of the communist spectre in Asia called for a cautious policy toward Ho Chi Minh. Even before Franco-Vietnamese fighting began, the Acting Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, instructed the American representative in Hanoi to exercise restraint in dealings with Ho's government. "Keep in mind," the Secretary emphasized, "Ho's clear record as an agent (sic) international communism."**30** As relations between Ho's provisional republic and the French passed from negotiations to outright battle, the United States encouraged French concessions to Vietnamese nationalism; but our diplomats, fearing Ho's communist antecedents, held back from an endorsement of his party—although it was by far the strongest.**31** The fact of our disapproval of Ho was communicated to the French.

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**28** Pentagon Papers, I, 17.


**30** Ibid., 20.

**31** Ibid., 28-29.
By late 1948 United States foreign policy makers increasingly came to evaluate American interests in Indochina in terms of the perceived world communist threat. The Viet Minh movement of Ho Chi Minh was seen as an agent of Soviet-led international communism. In a cable to the Ambassador in China, the Department of State acknowledged that, "Dept has no evidence of direct link between Ho and Moscow," but nevertheless policy was made on the basis of an assumed connection.\(^\text{32}\) Minimizing local factors, the United States emphasized the assumed international aspects of the Franco-Vietnamese conflict.

The relationship of Vietnam to the perceived international menace of communism was powerfully influenced by a further development external to that Southeast Asian area—the fall of Mainland China. As the Chinese Nationalists seemed incapable of effective action in mid-1949, a National Security Council study determined that "it is now clear that Southeast Asia is the target of a coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin."\(^\text{33}\) This study, which the authors of the Pentagon Papers regard as the "key document" in framing the "domino" principle,\(^\text{34}\) cast the Southeast Asian threat in monolithic terms and seemed to dictate a more active American participation in the affairs of the region. The National Security Council recommended in December that the French be encouraged to develop non-communist nationalism as an

\(^32\)Cable in Ibid., 34. See also Truman, Memoirs, II, 331.


\(^34\)Simply stated, the "domino theory" held that the fall of one country to communism would hasten the demise of its neighbors. See Ibid., 82.
alternative to the Viet Minh. The subsequent flight of the Nationalist Chinese to Taiwan rendered the communist threat in Indochina doubly dangerous. The French effort to restore their pre-war hegemony now became, in the minds of American leaders, but a part of the world-wide containment of communism. Immediate efforts were made to provide major United States assistance. Much of the original money for Indochina came from unexpended funds destined at first for China. The war and American participation in it was now described in the vivid rhetoric of the cold war. To be sure, the French colonial administration did not see the war as an anti-communist crusade, but, if it meant more American aid it was more than willing to play up their role as the Asian defenders of the free world. Thus, Robert Good accurately concludes that, "in 1949, Indochina was transformed from a battleground in a local colonial dispute to a theater in the cold war." 

Although by 1949 American policy makers began to emphasize the international and cold war aspects of the French war, two events in 1950 solidified this perspective. The first of these happenings came as the United States agonized over the seeming inability of the French Indochinese administration to develop effective anti-communist nationalism. While a relatively unhurried effort to foster native leadership was understandable on the part of the French--they were, after all, the

35 National Security Council Study, December 30, 1949 in Ibid., 39.
36 Kahin and Lewis, p. 31, Hammer, pp. 3 and 267, Schlesinger, p. 24 and Spanier, p. 112.
colonial masters--the United States took no pleasure in supporting colonialism. Thus, when protracted French negotiations with the pre-World War II Emperor of Annam led to a pro-western native government, the American government promptly and enthusiastically recognized it. The process of east-west polarization was completed in January, 1950, when Russia and Communist China recognized Ho's Viet Minh forces as the legitimate Vietnamese regime. Secretary of State Acheson issued a public statement, February 1, 1950, to the effect that, "The recognition by the Kremlin of Ho Chi Minh's communist movement...should remove any illusions as to the 'nationalist' nature of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals Ho in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina." Thus, another development entirely external to Indochina solidified the American conviction that Kremlin-led international communism was the threat in that region. As historian Norman Graebner concludes, "The events of January and February, 1950, finally rendered Ho Chi Minh a mortal enemy of the United States." The outbreak of the Korean war in June, 1950, seemed to confirm the correctness of American policy in Indochina. The perception that we and the French fought a common enemy lent a sense of urgency to the American program of aid to Indochina. Truman saw the country as

38 Hammer, p. 250.

39 See statement in Pentagon Papers, I, 41.


vulnerable to Soviet intervention and, writing later in his memoirs, relates that "We were seeing a pattern in Indo-China and Tibet timed to coincide with the attack on Korea as a challenge to the western world." The pattern was, of course, one of our own making; the war in Indochina had begun some four years before. Nevertheless, at the same time Truman ordered U.S. forces into Korea the President authorized additional shipments to the French Expeditionary Corps.

Thus, under the impact of factors largely external to Southeast Asia--the cold war with Russia, the fall of China and the Korean war--the Franco-Vietnamese war became but another battlefield in the free world struggle against communism. In his State of the Union Address of 1951 Truman rhetorically connected the two Asian contests, counseling the Congress that the single threat emanating from the Kremlin was a two-edged sword bringing in its wake both direct aggression (Korea) and covert subversion (Indochina). "The Soviet imperialists have two ways of going about their destructive work. They use the method of subversion and internal revolution, and they use the method of external aggression." This image of the hydra-headed Russian menace was repeated in the President's address to the nation on April 11, 1951. "Our resolute stand in Korea," said Truman, "is helping the forces of freedom now fighting in Indochina and other countries in that part of the world."

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42 Truman, Memoirs, II, 380.
43 1951 State of the Union Address in Israel (ed.), Messages, III, 2977.
44 Truman Address, April 11, 1951 in Smith (ed.), Major Problems, II, 615.
The American tendency to neglect the particular circumstances of the war in Indochina and to connect that conflict to the wider war against alien Marxism is documented richly in the private and public thinking of the Truman Administration. The National Security Council employed the general rubric of "communism" to describe the problem in Indochina. This was consistent with the NSC fear that an overt, Korea-style, Chinese intervention was imminent.\(^{45}\) Increasingly, as the entry of Chinese forces was felt in Korea, the United States came to regard China as the major threat in Indochina.\(^{46}\) The authors of the *Pentagon Papers* summarize administration thinking of the time which focused on "the attempt of the patently Communist Ho Chi Minh regime to evict the French from Indochina," and which perceived the struggle "as part of the Southeast Asian manifestation of the Communist world-wide aggressive intent."\(^{47}\)

In public the monolithic nature of the threat became part of the issue as the war in Indochina was described as but one of many similar efforts against specific penetration by world communism. "Where conditions permitted," said Truman, "the Soviet rulers have stimulated and aided armed insurrection by Communist-led revolutionary forces, as in Greece, Indochina, the Philippines, and China, or outright aggression by one of their satellites, as in Korea."\(^{48}\) In his memoirs Truman


\(^{48}\) 1953 State of the Union Address in Israel (ed.), *Messages*, III, 3000 and the 1952 Address, 2985.
described aid to Indochina as part of "our policy to strengthen the weak spots in the defenses of the free world." and he publicly maintained that, in Indochina, "our assistance has helped sustain a staunch resistance against Communist insurrectionary attacks." Both private analysis and public statement characterized the situation in the troubled French colony as a specific symptom of a general malady. The specific and local circumstances of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were not forgotten but were pushed aside.

Ronald Steel and others have seen in American support of French efforts a reluctant but nevertheless definite American collaboration with colonialism. This interpretation is an apt description of the inherent dichotomy of purpose distinguishing French and United States policy in Indochina. Washington viewed the war as a struggle against aggressive communism and, to justify the "free-world-versus-communism" interpretation pushed the French to give greater autonomy to the non-communist nationalists. Paris, on the other hand, fought a primarily colonial war designed to reestablish its territory as a viable overseas dependency. Understandably France took its time in granting real authority to the government of Emperor Bao Dai. This reluctance to match the promise of independence with anything approximating its actuality was a continuing source of embarrassment to American policy makers. National Security Council reports of the day are dotted with

49Truman, Memoirs, II, 346 and 1953 State of the Union Address in Ibid., 3003.

50Steel, p. 273 and Good, pp. 233-36.

51See Pentagon Papers, I, 81, Hammer, p. 325 and Kahin and Lewis, p. 27.
acknowledgments of the need to encourage the French to "make Bao Dai a success" or, more diplomatically, to "use our influence with France and the Associated States to promote . . . such reorganization of French administration and representation in Indochina as well be conducive to an increased feeling of responsibility on the part of the Associated States." To compensate for the dismal absence of non-communist nationalism and independence the administration engaged in public displays of wishful thinking. In a speech before the Commonwealth Club of California Secretary Acheson spoke of a "new relationship" between France and the Indochinese states featuring "mutual consent." Repeatedly the U.S. government intoned that its policies supported "genuine nationalism" and that "the Bao Dai Government of Viet Nam reflects more accurately than any rival claimants to power in Viet Nam the nationalist aspirations of the people of that country." When three years later similar statements issued from the succeeding Eisenhower Administration, a young Senator named Kennedy spoke of the anomaly posed by the continued assurances of Viet, Laotian and Cambodian independence. "Every year," he said, "we are given . . . assurances: first, that the independence of the associated states is now complete; second, that the independence of the associated states will soon be completed under steps 'now' taken. . . ." The reality of the situation--despite the lip service

52 See documents in Pentagon Papers, I, 367 and 388.
53 Acheson, United States Policy Toward Asia, p. 3.
54 See statements in Graebner, 81 and Johnstone, 3.
paid to Indochinese self-determination—was that our fears of communism caused us, in the words of John Spanier, "to support almost any 'anti-Communist' regime." "Thus," he writes, "the United States associated itself with traditional regimes whose days were numbered because they had alienated mass support: Bao Dai in Indochina and King Faisal in Iraq were just two examples of such regimes." Washington's claims that the non-communist Imperial Government represented the free world seemed to rest on a deductive sort of reasoning:

(1) all communist movements are controlled from Moscow, and

(2) thus, the Viet Minh rebels are subservient to a foreign state;

(3) hence, the alternative Bao Dai government is the only genuine nationalist party.

In the final years of the Truman Administration, the cold war had come to Vietnam. The parties to and events of the Franco-Viet Minh war were forced into the previously established mold of freedom versus communism. The particular realities of the situation were distorted when perceived in terms of the cold war consensus: French efforts were not colonial, but were part of communist containment; Bao Dai was not a weak, isolated monarch for he represented our side—the side of freedom and self-determination. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

Cold War and Containment Under Eisenhower

It would be next to impossible to understand the Vietnam policy of the Eisenhower Administration without taking into account that administration's fear of Chinese aggression and its adherence to the

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56 Spanier, p. 192.
concept that the loss of one Asian state foretold a succession of losses. A perceptive practitioner, analyst, and critic of American foreign policy has observed that diplomacy is cumulative—that the actions (and, we may add, perceptions) of one administration exert a formulative influence on the actions of succeeding policy makers. Realization of this process helps to further enlighten the way in which American policy toward the states of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia became further entrenched in the cold war ideology.

The fall of China and Korean war had given the Eisenhower Administration a model of how foreign policy should and should not be conducted. The administration felt that the "loss" of China could have been prevented by vigorous, though unspecified, American action. Similarly the administration felt that Truman policies in Korea had been defeatist and half-hearted. In retrospect it is possible that the Korean war, the McCarthy era and the virulent anti-China feelings of the day combined to lend a certain air of dogmatism and rigidity to America's China policy. This ideology of opposition to Peking and Asian communism acted as a powerful guiding force for the Eisenhower foreign

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57 Kennan, American Diplomacy, p. 47.
59 See Roger Hilsman, The Politics of Policy Making in Defense and Foreign Affairs (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 82-83 and Steel, pp. 131-32. Symptomatic of China policy rigidities was the fact that well into the 1960's policy makers referred to the capital of Mainland China as "Peiping" despite the fact that Mao Tse Tung's government had early changed the city's name to "Peking."
policy. Although the administration preached a disdain for mere containment, the Eisenhower-Dulles diplomacy in Asia was essentially Trumanesque containment dressed in Far Eastern garb. And the new administration embraced a related notion that the fall of one nation meant a chain reaction of western reversals as other states accommodated themselves to communism. This feeling was focused on the associated states of Indochina in particular. Perhaps the most famous rendering of what became the "domino theory" occurred in 1954. Questioned at a news conference about the strategic importance of Indochina, the President answered.

Q. Robert Richards, Copley Press. Mr. President would you mind commenting on the strategic importance of Indochina to the free world? I think there has been, across the country, some lack of understanding on just what it means to us.

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

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

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

Finally, you have the broader considerations that might follow what you call the "falling domino" principle. You have a row of dominos set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences.60

Eisenhower continued to hold this view throughout his tenure as President and described a similar scenario in his memoirs, *Mandate for*.

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Change, published in 1963.\textsuperscript{61} The Pentagon Papers confirm that during the 1950's "The 'domino theory' and the assumptions behind it were never questioned."\textsuperscript{62}

To this feeling was added a further belief that communism in Asia presented a united front and represented, therefore, a unified threat. The prime mover of American foreign policy--Secretary of State John Foster Dulles--felt that the attack on Korea had been part of a plan and that Asian communism represented a single hostile front.\textsuperscript{63} At his confirmation hearing in 1952 Dulles announced that Soviet communism was a "monolithic structure," and, as Schlesinger points out, most public men of the day shared this impression.\textsuperscript{64}

The foreign affairs beliefs and policy assumptions of the administration were manifested in a posture of hostility toward Communist China. Though China was regarded as somewhat subservient to the USSR,\textsuperscript{65} it was felt that she would pose a serious threat in her own right. At the very least China would serve as a base for aggression and subversion.\textsuperscript{66} In addition, China was seen to pursue a policy of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61}Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mandate for Change, 1953-1956 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1963), p. 333.
\item \textsuperscript{62}Pentagon Papers, I, 87.
\item \textsuperscript{63}See statements in Graebner, 82 and DeConde, p. 823. See also earlier statements in Dulles, Laying Foundations, p. 12.
\item \textsuperscript{64}Dulles in Smith (ed.), Major Problems, II, 648 and Schlesinger, p. 32.
\item \textsuperscript{65}See Dulles, Laying Foundations, p. 12, Lindbeck, Communist China, pp. 4 and 21 and McConaughy, China in the Shadow, p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{66}Lindbeck, Communist China, p. 1.
\end{itemize}
hostility toward U.S.-supported Nationalist China. Increasingly, the containment philosophy was applied to Asia for the purpose of deterring "Red Chinese" expansion. United States aid to Asia became a tool of this approach and was directed almost entirely to military or defense support functions. The structure of alliances, successful in Europe, was superimposed—with less viability—on the Asian scene. The major defensive system was negotiated by the Secretary of State in 1954—the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). The treaty was spawned by communist successes in Indochina and was designed to "prevent and deter further aggressive expansion into Southeast Asia by armed force and subversion. . . ." Forbidden by the 1954 Geneva Accords to enter into military alliances, the Indochinese states were made quasi members via a protocol which extended them the protection of SEATO. A major shortcoming of the treaty was the refusal of the larger Southeast Asian nations to join—Burma, Indonesia. Nevertheless the Secretary regarded SEATO and the other Asian alliances as a firm bulwark against aggression.

In the atmosphere of cold war polarization in Asia the administration, like its predecessor, discussed Indochina in bipolar terms. While commander of NATO forces in Europe, Eisenhower had observed the debilitating effect of the Viet Minh war on France and favored allied

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67 Ibid., p. 16 and statements by Dulles and Eisenhower in The Communist Threat.
68 Steel, p. 134.
69 Spanier, pp. 187, 193 and 198.
70 U.S. Department of State, SEATO, pp. 2-5.
71 Lindbeck, Communist China, p. 15.
assistance for her. Even at this time the future President believed that the French war "was in no sense an effort . . . to sustain their former domination over the area, but was in fact a clear case of freedom defending itself from communist aggression." As President he felt that the Communist affiliations of Ho Chi Minh were alone sufficient to make the conflict a western concern. Ho Chi Minh, in the eyes of the Department of State, was a "professional Communist 'liberator'" who established a "police state" in the north and who, with the help of China, fomented revolution against the "legitimate Governments" of Indochina. Echoing the words of his predecessor in the Presidency, Eisenhower connected the Indochinese war to other instances of communist subversion.

The policy aspect of these beliefs was a step-up in aid for the French immediately after the new administration took charge. Confident in the belief that "in the conflict in Indochina, the Communist and non-Communist worlds clearly confront one another on the field of battle," the administration was determined not to "lose" the area. For better or worse, however, the issue was out of our hands.

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72 Eisenhower, Mandate, p. 336.
75 DeConde, p. 823 and Hammer, p. 313.
When our French allies gave up the ghost, the cold war in Indochina took a dramatic new turn.

The Geneva Interlude

The Byzantine complexity of the Geneva sessions on Indochina seem to cast United States diplomacy in the form of a primer on Machiavellian methods. Actually the intention of American policy makers was straightforward, but conflicting pressures made the diplomats' task doubly difficult. The uncomfortable position of the American negotiators is well described by Bernard Fall who calls attention to our diplomatic "Janus-faced quality of presenting at times a forceful posture on the home front while being conciliatory abroad, or of being cautious at home while taking a tough stand in the councils of the world."\(^\text{77}\) In the case of Geneva the latter situation prevailed as the administration—which had promised both to liquidate the Korean war and stop communism—tread a soft path at home but stood its ground firmly abroad.

In actuality the Geneva situation was passing out of our hands even before the conference convened. The French military position in the associated states had deteriorated substantially in 1954 and as the encirclement and annihilation of the Dien Bien Phu garrison approached, French desires for peace mounted. Secret American assessments of the situation were uniformly glum; the National Security Council concluded in January, 1954, "That in the absence of a marked improvement in the military situation there is no basis for negotiations with any prospect

\(^{77}\)Fall, p. 230.
for acceptable terms." A memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff rejected, in turn, a ceasefire, a coalition government, a partition of Vietnam and elections. Arthur Radford, Chairman of the JCS continued, adding that if the outcome of Geneva should be unfavorable "the United States should decline to associate itself with such an agreement, thereby preserving freedom of action to pursue directly with the governments of the Associated States and with other allies (notably the United Kingdom) ways and means of continuing the struggle against the Viet Minh in Indochina without participation of the French." A memorandum for the National Security Council, drafted five days later, concluded that "no solution to the Indochina problem short of victory is possible." Secretary Dulles held a similar gloomy image of the situation and worked to dissuade France from her intention to negotiate. Privately, Dulles expressed fears of a French "sell out" or "surrender." Publicly giving vent to a similar opinion, Eisenhower maintained that the United States would not accede to another "Munich," expressing total opposition to any agreement which "makes anybody a slave." Commuting

79 Joint Chiefs of Staff memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, March 12, 1954 in Ibid., 448-50. Chairman Radford recommended unilateral military intervention if necessary.
80 Memorandum from General Erskine, March 17, 1954 in Ibid., 451.
81 Ibid., 96.
82 See Dulles cables of April 4, 1954 and April 26, 1954 in Ibid., 461 and 478.
across the Atlantic in the weeks before the scheduled Geneva sessions on Indochina Dulles attempted to arrange a military intervention to save the French position. For several weeks an interagency debate raged about the format for action. While some pushed for a unilateral American entry into the war, the President, following a meeting with Congressional leaders, opted to support only a united action with other allies. Thus, the administration faced a dilemma. Eisenhower had campaigned against both the "loss" of China and the limited war in Korea; the administration faced a choice of a probably limited intervention or the "loss" of Indochina. When the British opposed "united action," however, the choice was made for us—we would help preside over a "surrender" at Geneva.

The discussions at Geneva dragged on from early May to late July with U.S. diplomats frantically attempting to stiffen French resolve. Finally, the stalemate was broken as a new French government took power and the major communist powers pressured Ho Chi Minh to accept temporary partition of Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel. The agreements at Geneva were embodied in a document of forty-seven

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84 The authors of the Pentagon Papers indicate that government sources provide little enlightenment about this meeting and the Papers' account is drawn from published sources. Two of the best are Fletcher Knebel, "We Nearly Went to War Three Times Last Year," Look, XIX, No. 3 (February 8, 1955), 26-27 and James Shepley, "How Dulles Averted War," Life, XXXX, No. 3 (January 16, 1956), 70-72, 77-78 and 80.

85 See Knebel, 26, Pentagon Papers, I, 100-105 and Eisenhower, Mandate, pp. 347-48.

articles and a final declaration. The essential thrust of the accords pertaining to the State of Vietnam provided for two "regroupment zones" above and below the seventeenth parallel pending general elections scheduled for July, 1956. The United States opposed even a temporary partition of Vietnam for it meant de facto communist control of the north pending elections which, presumably, would extend communist domination into the south. Thus, our diplomats refused to put their signatures to the agreements and substituted a unilateral declaration to the effect that the U.S. would "refrain from the threat or the use of force" to disturb them and that the government "would view any renewal of the aforesaid Agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security."  

**America Decides for Diem**

Like the fabled phoenix which carried the seeds of its own ultimate destruction, the Geneva Accords embodied the causes and circumstances of their eventual collapse. The agreements never laid to rest the fundamental difficulty of the war--the inability of the communist and western sides agreeably to unite the nation of Vietnam under one mutually acceptable government. The temporary expedient of partition pending elections was to become the cause of a renewed struggle.

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87 See "Current Documents," *Current History*, L, No. 294 (February, 1966), 113-14 for the text of the final declaration. The forty-seven articles are reprinted in Kahin and Lewis, pp. 348-76.

88 See text in Kahin and Lewis, p. 373.

89 *Pentagon Papers*, I, 244.
Resolved that half a loaf was better than none at all, the United States quickly took an interest in the fledgling government of the southern zone. Simply stated, the United States resolved to transform the weak native regime in Saigon into an anti-communist bastion. And when Emperor Bao Dai chose Ngo Dinh Diem as his Prime Minister, the problem of weak anti-communist leadership was seemingly solved. Dour, authoritarian, but resourceful, Diem maneuvered successfully around rival generals and hostile religious sects. It was not long before Diem dispatched his mentor--dispensing with the old Annamese monarchy in a suspiciously one-sided (98.2% to 1.1%) plebiscite.  

(Reportedly, American officials counseled the Prime Minister that sixty percent would do but Diem wanted ninety-eight.) Although the French disliked Diem for his open Francophobia, American representatives embraced the new Free Vietnamese chief of state enthusiastically.

What followed has been called the "Diem Miracle." Lavishly funded with American aid, the government of South Vietnam made economic progress. Department of State spokesmen enthused over the "energetic action" and "economic headway" of the regime. Labeling Diem a "sincere exponent of democratic principles," a State Department pamphlet recited the economic and political successes of "Free Viet-Nam."  

Wesley Fishel, a Michigan State political scientist, lent support to these claims detailing the Vietnamese advances in transportation,

90Fall, p. 257.

91Wanamaker, p. 172. Temple Wanamaker served as Director of the Office of Public Services of the Department of State and wrote the book on leave from the department.

92U.S. Department of State, Southeast Asia, p. 12.
agriculture, and education. By all accounts Diem was, by 1956, secure politically; one-half billion dollars in American economic aid had made progress a reality. The authors of the Pentagon Papers conclude that, although he alienated many, "Ngo Dinh Diem really did accomplish miracles, just as his American boosters said he did." After years of failure with the colonialism of France and the ineptitude of Bao Dai the United States felt it had finally found its man--the tough, efficient and anti-communist nationalist needed all along. Events would prove these prognostications only partly true.

A key provision of the final settlement at Geneva was the provision for reunification elections in 1956. The accords provided that a period of consultation commence in 1955; speculation mounted as to the possibility of the promised reunification. Opinions differ on the reasons behind the ultimate failure to conduct the scheduled plebiscite. The official United States interpretation holds that "The elections were never held, because of the unwillingness of the northern regime to guarantee truly free voting processes." "In face of the facts," William Bundy writes, "Diem refused to go through with the elections and we supported him in that refusal."

\[\text{Fishel, 297-98. Regarding this analysis it must be borne in mind that Professor Fishel was an old acquaintance of Diem and headed the Michigan State University Vietnam project, 1956-1958. See Fall, p. 242 and Kahin and Lewis, p. 95, footnote number 27.}\]

\[\text{See figures in Kahin and Lewis, pp. 73-74.}\]

\[\text{Pentagon Papers, I, 252.}\]

\[\text{Wanamaker, p. 172.}\]

\[\text{William P. Bundy, "The Path to Viet-Nam: A Lesson in Involvement," Department of State Bulletin, LVII, No. 1471 (September 4, 1967), 279.}\]
refusal from a different position, other official sources mention the fact that the Saigon government never signed the Geneva accords and thus was not bound to accept the elections.\(^98\) The record reveals that the real story was somewhat more complex. The *Pentagon Papers* seem to indicate that neither Dulles nor Diem ever favored active cooperation with the North Vietnamese regime.\(^99\) The United States, however, urged Diem at least to consult with Hanoi on the elections. Our policy makers counseled Diem to demand free elections with a secret ballot on the assumption that "Communists in Korea and Germany had rejected these conditions; hopefully the Viet Minh would follow suit."\(^100\) Diem felt that in abiding by the consultation provisions of the agreement he would give a de facto recognition of the legitimacy of the Geneva document. This he refused to do and the United States supported Diem in his refusal, privately lamenting, nevertheless, that the onus for upsetting the elections could not be shifted to the other side. For the record Secretary of State Dulles explained that since Free Vietnam never signed the accords she was not bound by them. Dulles added that, "if there are conditions of really free elections, there is no serious risk that the Communists would win. . . ."\(^101\) Privately, officials realized the strong nationalist appeal of Ho Chi Minh as evidenced in this oft-quoted excerpt from Eisenhower's memoirs. "I have never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgeable in Indochinese

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\(^98\) See Lindbeck, *Communist China*, p. 10.

\(^99\) *Pentagon Papers*, I, 211 and 213.

\(^100\) See *Ibid.*, 239.

affairs who did not agree that had elections been held as of the time of the fighting possibly 80 percent of the population would have voted for the Communist leader Ho Chi Minh as their leader rather than Chief of State Bao Dai."\(^{102}\) (We must remember, however, that Diem would have made a far stronger candidate than Bao Dai and that conditions in 1956 would probably have differed somewhat from those prevailing in 1954.)

If the cause of the failure to hold elections is in dispute, the effect is certainly not. The temporary partition line became a de facto border dividing what functioned as two separate and opposing nation states. The decision to support Ngo Dinh Diem in the creation of an anti-communist redoubt south of the seventeenth parallel had profound consequences for the United States. As in a Greek tragedy, succeeding events inexorably drew us toward an unforeseen but foreordained cataclysm. Arthur Schlesinger perceptively writes that "President Eisenhower, after rejecting American military intervention in 1954, set in motion the policy of support for Saigon which resulted, two Presidents later, in American military intervention in 1965."\(^{103}\) The American commitment to Vietnam had deepened dramatically. In a letter to Diem on October 1, 1954, President Eisenhower pledged a "greater contribution to the welfare and stability of the Government of Vietnam" designed to assist in "developing and maintaining a strong viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion through military means."\(^{104}\) This seemingly innocuous declaration reveals our

\(^{102}\)Eisenhower, Mandate, p. 372.

\(^{103}\)Schlesinger, p. 47.

\(^{104}\)See text of letter in Kahin and Lewis, pp. 382-83.
newly-established goal of sustaining an anti-communist quasi-client state in the south. Although the means to achieve this end grew ever more costly, the goal remained the same.

The Roots of Escalation in Vietnam, 1958-1963

Eisenhower's 1954 letter to Diem was much quoted by the Johnson Administration to prove that administration policies were grounded soundly on past commitments. In many respects a 1960 open letter from President Eisenhower to Diem is more revealing of the United States position. Mindful of the incipient insurgency then in progress, the President maintained that the cause of North Vietnam's efforts against the south was partly the viability of the south. "Viet-Nam's very success as well as its potential wealth and its strategic location have led the Communists of Hanoi, goaded by the bitterness of their failure to enslave all Viet-Nam, to use increasing violence in their attempts to destroy your country's freedom."

From the first, therefore, the insurgency was seen as a Hanoi-produced conflict directed and supplied from the north. Whereas the President's 1954 letter promised only to review aid programs to make them more effective, the President, in 1960, pledged that "Although the main responsibility for guarding that independence will always, as it has in the past, belong to the Vietnamese people and their government, I want to assure you that for so long as our strength can be useful, the United States will continue to assist Viet-Nam in the difficult yet hopeful struggle ahead."

106 Ibid.
It was well for the United States to pledge increased aid as the Diem government, in the years after 1958, was faced with a growing problem of rural-based insurgency. Up to 1958 U.S. policy makers clung to the conclusion that insecurity in Vietnam resulted from a "last remnant" of banditry in the countryside which was, properly, a matter for the police. The serious implications of Diem's failure to "pacify" the country were soon clear as the incidents mounted and took on the character of a guerilla war. The mainstay of the dissident military movement against Diem was drawn from a "cadre" of approximately 6,000 armed Viet Minh forces. The sporadic incidents coalesced into a powerful threat to the government as by 1959 the Viet Cong (an unfavorable term for "Vietnamese Communist") began to field battalion-size forces. A large number of sources apart from the United States government (supported by the Pentagon Papers) suggest that the insurgency originated in the south and that outright support and direction from Hanoi came gradually and possibly reluctantly at a later time. Of more interest to us at this point, however, is the government position that the war was born in the north and baptized by Hanoi. The following expression by a U.S. official in Vietnam conveys, almost dramatically, Washington's position that the ongoing insurgency was

107Fall, p. 324.


109While I will examine these claims later in more detail, see, for example Schlesinger, pp. 34-35 and Kahin and Lewis, p. 119. The Pentagon Papers, I, 260, quote Kahin and Lewis specifically and conclude that their description, in so far as it relates to a genuine rebellion in the south, is "probably valid." See also Pentagon Papers, I, 243.
"just like" other instances of attempted subversion directed by the controlling forces of communism. Speaking to the Saigon Rotary Club on September 22, 1960 Arthur Z. Gardenier, Director of the U.S. Operations Mission in Vietnam, compared his experiences in Greece with those in Vietnam.

I very recently reviewed some personal files and found a speech which I made in 1948 on the subject of the Greek aid program. I have shown this paper to some of my colleagues and friends here in Viet-Nam. I mention it because, with a few changes of dates and of terms and of names, what was said about Greece in 1948 applies with almost equal force to the circumstances and to the situation in 1960 in Viet-Nam. (emphasis added)

Frankly, I can imagine no clearer articulation of the tendency to translate the situation in Vietnam into the ideology and policy correlates of the cold war consensus.

In this period of growing difficulty for Diem, despite bleak intelligence reports, the United States continued in fealty to a perceived commitment to maintain not merely a non-communist but an anti-communist South Vietnam. It may well be, as Bernard Fall suggests that the United States failed to recognize the real and ultimately fatal weaknesses of the Diem regime; but there can be no doubting Fall's conclusion that: "The Eisenhower Administration left office apparently without ever having understood the extent to which America was committed to Viet-Nam's survival." 111

The new Kennedy Administration addressed itself immediately to the problem of Vietnam; although the cost of our commitment increased,


111 Fall, Two Viet-Nams, p. 331.
there was no diminution of our resolve to hold onto the south. As we have seen Kennedy's first Inaugural and State of the Union Addresses conveyed a sense of urgency in the conflict with communism and there can be little doubt that the administration emphasized—as did its predecessors—the wider world implications of localized conflicts. It is true, as Senator Gale McGee states, that policy makers from Truman onward were able to distinguish differences among the communist states. McGee argues that "No American administration has ever regarded world communism as a monolithic phenomenon." But McGee's invocation of the term "world communism" bespeaks of the irrepressible tendency to picture conflicts as part of a continuing struggle with an implacable foe—communism. Policy makers may not have believed in a monolith but they certainly acted and spoke as if they did. Once a conflict became associated with the cold war, a consistent policy of heightened interest and directed anti-communism was likely to follow. The Kennedy Administration was no different, as after the Bay of Pigs fiasco in Cuba the President realized that the American public would tolerate only so many defeats to communism. John Kenneth Galbraith later said of his superior: "I heard him say many times . . . there are just so many concessions that one can make to the communists in one year and survive politically. And I remember his saying we, we just can't . . . have another defeat this year in Vietnam." Former State Department official Roger Hilsman could well conclude that although events proved the existence of differences within the communist camp, "policy based on

112 McGee, p. 143.
the assumption that it was a monolith continued through the sheer inertia of the process itself."\textsuperscript{114}

President Kennedy was particularly worried over an apparent communist shift to an intense policy of insurgent wars of "national liberation." Impressed with Khrushchev's publicizing of the strategy, Kennedy was reinforced in his conviction that the coming conflict with communism would take the form not of overt war but of counter-insurgent guerilla operations. And these beliefs helped form the American attitude toward the growing war below the seventeenth parallel.\textsuperscript{115} The communists had said that they would foment wars of national liberation and there was such a conflict in Vietnam—what should be done? Within the administration the goal of arresting the situation in the south was taken as almost a given. Interviewed years later, George Ball was to say, "I think the President, er President Kennedy had considerable reservations about it [getting into Vietnam], but at the same time he had a very strong feeling that the communist powers were in an expansionist mood and he was not prepared to see us abdicate leadership or responsibility in Vietnam."\textsuperscript{116} When similarly interviewed by NBC news, General Maxwell Taylor added, "I know of nobody, I heard of no one in this period [1961-1962] who opposed the broad goal, the prevention of the imposition of a communist government on the state of South Vietnam against the will of its inhabitants."\textsuperscript{117} Thus, Kennedy carried forth

\textsuperscript{114}Hilsman, p. 128.


\textsuperscript{116}Former Undersecretary of State George Ball in National Broadcasting Company, Act II, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{117}Taylor in Ibid., pp. 2-3.
the commitment in Vietnam in much the same fashion as his predecessors informing the Congress: "In Asia, the relentless pressures of the Communist Chinese menace the security of the entire area--from the borders of India and South Viet Nam to the jungles of Laos..."\textsuperscript{118}

Publicly the Kennedy Administration couched its claims in arguments similar to those of the Eisenhower and Truman governments. The definitive answer to the soon-to-become-familiar question "why are we in Vietnam" was given in the form of a 1961 white paper--\textit{A Threat to the Peace: North Viet-Nam's Effort to Conquer South Viet-Nam}. Just as the title of the paper was taken from a phrase in the 1954 unilateral U.S. declaration at Geneva, so, too, was the argumentation a restatement of longstanding United States policy. In this foreign policy briefing paper the administration argued that the Vietnamese insurgency was "not new" maintaining that, in the context of previous communist subversion there was little "peculiar to the Viet-Nam situation..."\textsuperscript{119} Repeating the now-familiar litany that the communists would not allow the free elections promised by Geneva, the document blandly asserted that, "The authorities in South Viet-Nam refused to fall into this well-laid trap."\textsuperscript{120} The white paper made mention of the "economic miracle" of South Vietnam, 1956-1960, arguing that progress in the country so far outdid conditions in the north that

\textsuperscript{118}1961 State of the Union Address in Israel (ed.), \textit{Messages}, III, 3126.


\textsuperscript{120}Ibid., p. 3.
Hanoi, not able to "accept that prospect . . . decided on a course of violence. . . ." Continuing this theme the paper emphasized Hanoi's control over the southern-based National Liberation Front with these words: "Clearly the Liberation Front is Hanoi's creation; it is neither independent nor southern, and it hardly seeks what most men would consider liberation. The only accurate word in the title of the organization is 'front.' That it is!" The succeeding pages and the entire second part of the report were directed toward proving the claim of Hanoi's leadership and control.

As the war was seen as a "terrorist" phenomenon cast in the climate of containment, the response was, understandably, primarily military in nature. Aid increased and a host of U.S. officials periodically examined the progress of counter-insurgency. The most significant of these missions culminated in the Taylor-Rostow recommendations to the President in late 1961. The report advised a posture of "limited partnership" with South Vietnam and suggested the introduction of U.S. ground combat forces (which could enter, if necessary under a pretext of helping to control the recent Mekong floods). The recommendations also touched on the possibility of bombing the North if infiltration were not reduced. The President was skeptical about combat forces and ultimately acted only to increase the corps of military advisers. Kennedy, however, concurred in proposing "a phase of

121 Ibid., p. 7.
122 Ibid., p. 15.
123 See Pentagon Papers, II, 92-120.
intense public and diplomatic activity to focus on infiltration from the north." This intent was, of course, embodied in the publication of *A Threat to the Peace*.

Parallel with increased aid to Diem was the effort to induce some reforms in the military, political, and economic activities of the Saigon regime. Efforts to stimulate reform in Vietnam had failed before and, in view of the military crisis, some in the administration counseled restraint on a policy of pressure, arguing that "Diem was the key to stability and that the only policy was to win Diem's confidence by assuring him of Washington's unconditional support." These were arguments similar to those voiced by the Pentagon during the Eisenhower years. This stratagem became known to Saigon wags as "sink or swim with Ngo Dinh Diem." Ultimately our experience with Diem would embrace both those contingencies. Thus, while the U.S. made efforts to bring some reform to the disorder in Saigon the usual scenario, described by Roger Hilsman, took this form: "It was so easy for President Diem to put us on. We would send our Ambassador in and mention the need for reforms and Mr. Diem would agree and say, well, I certainly will do that--and nothing would happen."

124 See cable to Ambassador Nolting in Ibid., 118.
125 Schlesinger, p. 37.
126 Ibid., p. 38.
127 *Pentagon Papers*, I, 268-69.
128 Schlesinger, p. 38.
The program of increased military assistance nevertheless rendered some immediate favorable pay-offs. Unfamiliar with sophisticated American weaponry--particularly the American-piloted helicopters--the Viet Cong forces were often dispersed and disrupted in early 1962. Glowing reports of success illuminated desks in the Washington winter as optimism abounded. Speaking of those days Presidential Adviser Rostow commented: "No one I knew was throwing his hat into the air at the end of '62 and early '63. But the evaluation I think of all hands at the time was that . . . the crisis of '61 had been surmounted and that they were on an improving track and without the use of regular American forces."130 The official mood of confidence was infused into Kennedy's January, 1963, address to the Congress as the President related: "The spearpoint of aggression has been blunted in South Vietnam."131

The underlying reality of the matter was somewhat more ominous as the Viet Cong soon adjusted to American firepower. At a remote remove called Ap Bac the continued weakness of the Southern Vietnamese army was dramatically demonstrated. Two thousand heavily armored and American-supported government regulars fought reluctantly and ineffectually against a force of 200 Viet Cong.132

130 W. W. Rostow in Ibid., Act IV, p. 7.
The month of November 1963 saw many developments decisive to the American role in Vietnam—Ap Bac, the overthrow and murder of Diem, and the assassination of John Kennedy. The new President, Lyndon Johnson, faced a deepening crisis as the military momentum purchased by American arms was thrown away by the Saigon government. We had underestimated the problem and as political chaos reigned in Saigon the insurrection in the countryside mounted.

American Escalation of the War, 1964-1967

It is clear that President Johnson came to the Vietnam situation with a policy perspective similar to his predecessors, believing that our efforts in Southeast Asia were of the same spirit "that motivated us to give our support to the defense of Western Europe in the 1940's..." Johnson acted immediately to "persevere in the policies and actions in which were already engaged." Reports from the field soon documented the deteriorating situation. As Saigonese junta replaced Saigonese junta the U.S. government—ever desirous of a stable ally—constantly reassured whomever held the capital that our moral commitment and military assistance would be unfailing. Disappointed at the shuffle of military governments the United States hoped for a return to civilian control. (Illustrative of endemic governmental instability was the array of titles held by successive


134 Ibid., p. 45.

135 Pentagon Papers, II, 278.
strongmen from 1964-1967: General, Marshal, Chairman, Prime Minister, Premier and President.) However, when it became clear that no civilian formation could long endure we accommodated our aspirations to the reality of a military regime.  

Official optimism continued unabated, despite it all, as Temple Wanamaker (a State Department spokesman on leave) penned this effusive endorsement of the second Saigon strongman: "Since the change of government [Washington's way of describing a coup] General Khanh has restated the Vietnamese Government's dedication to free-world principles..." Five "changes of government" later, embarrassed by Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky's statement to the effect that his government needed a resolve similar to Hitler's, similar verbal efforts to improve the Marshal's image were taken.

Two attacks on U.S. Seventh Fleet ships off the coast of North Vietnam coinciding with further deterioration of the military situation led President Johnson to ask for a Congressional resolution expressing support for American actions in Southeast Asia. The resulting "Southeast Asia Resolution" (known popularly by the specific Gulf of Tonkin incidents which spawned it) gave broad support to American involvement in Asia. This resolve of the Congress spoke of a recognition that peace and security in Southeast Asia were vital to our national interests and pledged its support of "all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia

136 Ibid., 362.
137 Wanamaker, p. 176.
138 See Kahin and Lewis, pp. 241-44.
Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom. By November, 1964, in pursuit of this policy a special National Security Council "working group on SVN/SEA" was formed to study future courses of action open to the United States in the area. Lingering doubts that the policy makers' perceived reality of Vietnam differed from the public rhetoric of involvement are dispelled by this report of the "working group" on U.S. objectives and interests. Three underlying factors were specified as central to American policy:

A. The general principle of helping countries that try to defend their own freedom against communist subversion and attack.

B. The specific consequences of communist control of South Vietnam and Laos for the security of, successively, Cambodia, Thailand (most seriously), Malaysia, and the Philippines--and resulting increases in the threat to India and--more in the realm of morale effects in the short term--the threat to other nations in Asia.

C. South Vietnam, and to a lesser extent, Laos as test cases of communist "wars of national liberation" worldwide.

As before, the policy correlates of such beliefs dictated aid commensurate to the threat--i.e., as Eisenhower had once promised, "so long as our strength can be useful." The resulting American

139 See document in "Current Documents," Current History, LVII, No. 336 (August, 1969), 113 and see U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations and Committee on Armed Services, Southeast Asia Resolution, Joint Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Committee on Armed Services, Senate, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., August 6, 1964.


141 Ibid., 216.

escalation of the war came in 1965. President Johnson has often been accused of misleading the American people via his stance as the "peace" candidate in 1964. Hasty readings of the *Pentagon Papers* has convinced others that he made these professions of peace in full knowledge of plans to escalate the war. Obviously, the matter of timing is critical and in this regard the authors of the *Pentagon Papers* report that the President did not grant even approval "in principle" to an air campaign until after a post-election policy review completed in December, 1964. The final go-ahead for sustained bombing of the north under operation "Rolling Thunder" did not go out until February 24, 1965.

The air escalation of 1965 was paralleled with a decision to increase United States troop strength and to shed the advisory role for active combat participation. Before February of 1965 there seem to have been few suggestions to commit U.S. ground combat forces; but, a consensus quickly emerged that such forces would be needed to defend U.S. bases--particularly in light of the increased bombing campaign. On March 8, 1965 two Marine Corps battalions were deployed to guard the big U.S. base at Da Nang. By late March various recommendations on a combat commitment circulated in the administration. Despite warnings

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143 See conclusions in *Pentagon Papers*, III, 5 and 251. It is also charged that the administration may have provoked the North Vietnamese attacks on U.S. ships in the Gulf of Tonkin in order to justify bombing and an enlarged commitment to South Vietnam. Careful reading of the *Pentagon Papers* and of hearings on the subject causes me to discount such accusations. See *Pentagon Papers*, III, 185-86 and U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incidents, Hearings* before the Committee on Foreign Relations, Senate, 90th Cong., 2nd sess., February 20, 1968.

144 See *Pentagon Papers*, III, 16.

145 Ibid., 398-99.
from officials such as CIA Director McCone, the deteriorating situation prompted serious discussion about ground forces and throughout the period April to July, 1965 such plans were made. United States strength was 180,000 by year's end. Escalation was in force in Vietnam. Explaining his decision to expand the physical dimensions of our commitment, the late President Johnson wrote in 1971 that "I believed that we should do what was necessary to resist aggression but that we should not be provoked into a major war." The policy of increased commitment in Vietnam was initially a popular one. Measured by public awareness, "Vietnam only became really significant in 1965" with the advent of overt Americanization of the war. In 1964 twenty-five percent of the population admitted to knowing nothing about fighting in Vietnam and even after the Tonkin Gulf incidents "20 percent still were paying no attention to what was going on in Vietnam." As more troops entered the south expressed popular support for the escalation increased to a peak of sixty-five percent in late 1965. However, as escalation produced no conclusive results and as casualties mounted, "support for the war suffered a

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146 Ibid., 401-16.

147 Johnson, p. 149.

148 Public support indices cited herein are taken from a survey of attitude polling results compiled in research sponsored by the National Science Foundation. See John E. Mueller, "Trends in Popular Support for the Wars in Korea and Vietnam," American Political Science Review, LXV, No. 2 (June, 1971), 358-75.

149 Ibid., 364. Finding that only the Gallup organization consistently polled opinion on the Vietnam war, Mueller concludes that, "survey data on war support are less rich in the Vietnamese War period than in the Korean War period, despite the increased popularity of polling in the decade separating the wars." (p. 362).
slow and somewhat ambiguous decline, while opposition grew at a slightly faster rate."^{150}

Another index of war support comes in the form of press treatment of and attitudes toward the war. Clearly as NBC news commentator Kalber said of the early years of the war, "To the degree that we in the media paid any attention at all to that small dirty war in those years, we almost wholly reported the position of the government."^{151}

That a free press should so overwhelmingly support the government was almost embarrassing to the administration as this Presidential statement revealed: "I am exceedingly pleased with the unanimity with which the Congress and the people--and, if you will pardon me, the press--supported this movement [action in Vietnam]."^{152} One complication, however, was the Saigon press corps which, after 1963, became increasingly critical of the official government position.^{153} An excellent measure of press endorsement for the administration argumentation comes from data gathered from the reporters themselves. Vietnam correspondents responding to a survey conducted by Lawrence Lichty reveal a dramatic shift to the "dove" column by reporters who labeled themselves attitudinally "hawk" or "neutral" before covering the war from Vietnam.^{154}

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^{150} Ibid., 365.


Yet, the increasingly "dovish" perspective of field reporters was not (overtly, at least) reflected in information programs dealing with the war. Data compiled by Carroll and Lichty indicate that spokesmen for the hawk position received twice as great an opportunity to present their case than their dovish counterparts. The evidence cited heretofore about the cold war consensus suggests that war opponents would come, initially, from among those who rejected the applicability of the consensus to the situation of Vietnam. Mueller's reading of opinion measures bears this out. Mueller finds that war opposition came primarily from the "intellectual left" who, because they perceived a thaw in the cold war found "the wisdom of an anti-Communist war in Vietnam . . . difficult to grasp."

In the words of Bernard Fall, Johnson's escalation had the effect of making the war "in the short run military unlosable." However, the influx of foreign military power did not necessarily mean victory—when Hanoi upped its infiltration of the south a military stalemate ensued. Hoping to break the deadlock a new emphasis was placed on pacification of the countryside in tandem with military measures. However, as usual it was difficult to persuade Saigon to


156 Mueller, 371.

157 See reference in Dudman, 95.

158 Pentagon Papers, II, 542.
act on its promises of reform. Negotiations were pursued throughout the period of escalation and President Johnson, in his memoirs, insists that he sought the conference table openly and eagerly. But in the period 1964-1967 serious negotiations did not materialize and the pace of the war increased unabated.

The foregoing discussion of Vietnam in American foreign policy serves to complete our analysis of the intellectual framework of Johnson-era policy makers. Uniformly, they held beliefs about the world, foreign policy, and America's responsibilities which were closely related to the cold war consensus. Further, the administration inherited a commitment habitually described in terms of the consensus—the objective of preserving an anti-communist government in the south. After Truman, each succeeding administration paid a higher price in tears and treasure; but the futile pursuit of a cold war victory remained the same. In the following chapters we will examine the rhetoric of Vietnam involvement as it grew from the beliefs and policy of the Johnson Administration.

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159 See especially Ibid., 368-69 and 392.

160 Johnson describes peace efforts in Vantage Point. See especially pp. 248-56.
Chapter IV

THE CASE FOR A WIDER WAR: ARGUMENTS
FOR INVOLVEMENT, 1964-1967

Modern presidential campaigns are usually identified by characteristic claims and modes of expression often embodied in what is called "The Speech." This ever-repeated amalgam of the candidate's themes and thoughts sets the tone and moderates the temperament of a man's quest for the oval office. In many respects the administration campaign to convey the wisdom of its Vietnam policy to the American people took on the form of such an "all-purpose speech." And if these expressions became familiar to audiences the argumentative ground certainly seemed well trod to the policy makers themselves. By February of 1965 the Secretary of State confided to reporters that "some of the things I shall say will repeat what has been said before. . . ." Two months later the President declared in a similar vein that "We have stated this position over and over again 50 times and more to friend and foe alike."  

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There can be little doubt that the rhetoric of Vietnam involvement, 1964-1967, became an exercise in the repetition of well-worn arguments. This writer has surveyed one hundred speeches, news conferences, interviews and statements produced by twenty spokesmen and despite the sheer mass of material the administration argumentation emerges as a consistent case. In reviewing the case for involvement in the war it would be well to first capsulize the foregoing discussion of intellectual inputs affecting the Vietnam policy makers. Treatment of the rhetorical exigence of Vietnam will confirm that the administration rationale was almost dictated by the situation of the mid-1960's. The beliefs of decision makers, conditions in Vietnam and the twenty year position of Vietnam as an archetype of the cold war converged to produce a set of necessary rhetorical responses.

4 Of the hundred documents analyzed fifty-three were drawn from the Department of State Bulletin, forty-three from Public Papers of the Presidents, one was drawn from a Congressional hearing and three were items from the Department of State Far Eastern Series. Sixty of the documents were originally presented as public speeches, thirteen as news conferences, eight as interviews and nineteen as statements or reports. Works by eighteen individual spokesmen were surveyed plus a White House statement and three untitled Department of State reports (one of these State Department reports was drawn from a speech by McNamara). The major spokesmen--in terms of number of documents attributed to them--were President Johnson (forty-seven), Secretary of State Dean Rusk (twenty-two), William Bundy (eight), Secretary of Defense McNamara (five), Vice President Humphrey (three), and Ambassador Arthur Goldberg (three). One work was consulted from each of the other spokesmen--except, of course, that there were three untitled Department of State publications.

Throughout subsequent chapters I shall cite these works extensively. To avoid confusion I will cite the complete source of each document in the first reference to it. Subsequent references to previously-quoted works will be in abbreviated form. Department of State references will be cited later only by last name, Department of State Bulletin, date and page--omitting the author's full name, title of article, volume and issue number. References to documents in the Public Papers of the Presidents collection will be cited as Public Papers, date, volume and page--omitting the title of the document and full citation of the
The Rhetorical Exigence of Vietnam

We have seen that, in the aftermath of the coup against Diem and political disorders in Saigon, the military situation deteriorated throughout 1964. Additional United States aid appeared necessary. By May of 1964 the President saw the need to justify the additional support for Saigon on the basis that "increased terrorism requires increased response." The subsequent Gulf of Tonkin incident necessitated justification for the retaliatory strikes against North Vietnam and led to the call for a Congressional resolution of support. Yet, the escalations of 1964 constituted no major departure from our longstanding advisory and supplementary role. The major air and ground escalations of 1965 created a more dramatic exigence requiring a corresponding rhetorical escalation of justification.

We have observed that by early 1965 the military deterioration in Vietnam had not been arrested—the joint fortunes of Saigon and Washington plummeted more rapidly. Administration policy makers convened in several strategy sessions to discuss, debate, and dispose of assorted policy contingencies. Secretary McNamara outlined possibilities of action ranging from withdrawal to major military action, indicating his preference for the latter. Adviser George Ball expressed reservations to the most hawkish option circulating, instead, 

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6 Johnson, Vantage Point, p. 145.
a memorandum which argued that major U.S. ground forces might result in nothing more than a costly and indeterminate struggle. He opted to hold U.S. intervention to the previously agreed upon ceiling of 72,000 men, setting the stage for withdrawal. It seems clear that most policy makers shunned away from the "cut-our-losses" philosophy espoused by Fall, seeing in this plan a world-wide loss of honor and credibility. In his memoirs President Johnson writes that Ball's proposal was studied "for a long time and in great detail." Yet, the late President indicates the overwhelming fear of the wider cold war consequences of even a gradual pullout: "... Most of these men in the Cabinet Room were more worried about the results in our country and throughout the world, of our pulling out and coming home." Johnson relates the common fear of a loss of credibility whereby "the Communist world" would come to believe in our weakness. "... I could see trouble ahead in every part of the globe," Johnson wrote. "I was convinced that our retreat from this challenge would open the path to World War III." This feeling so clearly expressed by the late President reveals the triumph of the foreign policy experiences of his generation. "Like most men and women of my generation, I felt strongly that World War II might have been avoided if the United States in the 1930's had not given such an uncertain signal of its likely response to aggression in Europe and Asia." Reinforced in his beliefs by further discussions and with a meeting with

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7 *Pentagon Papers*, III, 472-73.
8 *Johnson, Vantage Point*, p. 147.
10 *Ibid.*., p. 46.
Congressmen the President, by July 17, 1965, determined to deploy the full range of ground forces then under consideration.\textsuperscript{11}

The decision to commit major combat units produced a new need to justify the increased commitment. A fitting response to this exigence dictated a major campaign to explain the circumstances of and to defend the conclusions about heightened American participation in the war. The war now assumed more significance to Americans as our warplanes streaked to the north and our armed forces ranged over the south.\textsuperscript{12} Just as the increased Vietnam spending and retaliation against the north had required defense, the dramatically heightened U.S. war policy mandated an answer to the increasing query: "why Vietnam?"\textsuperscript{13}

It was appropriate, therefore, that in his first news conference after the decision to deploy major ground combat forces the President should discuss "Why we are in Viet-Nam.\textsuperscript{14}

If, indeed, circumstances mandated a campaign to justify the heightened war, the policy makers' perceived exigence also shaped the substance of that effort. As we have observed, from the time of Truman, the war in Vietnam had been cast in the mold of resistance to communism. Throughout the period of the 1950's Washington had not taken extensive cognizance of the individuality of Southeast Asian societies. Vietnam

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Pentagon Papers}, III, 476.

\textsuperscript{12}Mueller, 363. Heightened interest is also reflected in the one hundred percent increase of information programs dealing with the war in 1965. See Carroll and Lichty, p. 3.


was, in fact, perceived and described not in terms of its particular circumstances, but, rather, as part of the wider pattern of world events. Thus, Johnson's revelation that he saw the conflict as another cold war challenge comes as no surprise and corresponds exactly with the public statements of the President and his administration. The rhetorical responses grew out of the exigence apparent to the administration. The policy makers' belief in the cold war and the twenty-year association of Vietnam with the communist conspiracy produced a rhetoric totally reflective of the perceived circumstances.

The motivating exigence of Vietnam encompasses, finally, the audience. Senator Michael Gravel argues that the record of the Pentagon Papers reveals a tendency to view the American public as a body "before whom various postures of determination, conciliation, inflexibility, and strength were portrayed."¹⁵ The Senator decries this passive role of the public in the foreign policy decision making process. While Gravel's point rings true, it must be borne in mind that a passive public role in foreign policy has been traditional even in democracies such as our own. Charles Lerche isolates four reasons why foreign policy is inherently "undemocratic," arguing basically that the public is relatively uninformed and irresponsible.¹⁶ Others suggest that the public lacks the information, training, and experience necessary to offer constructive inputs. "And how can it offer such advice?" asks Kurt

¹⁵Pentagon Papers, I, xii.
Clearly, many believe that the mass members of the body politic tend to react emotionally in an extreme fashion manifesting a potentially disastrous all-or-nothing attitude. The public's relative lack of concern for foreign policy--exemplified in regard to Vietnam by mass ignorance of events there as late as 1964--is also cause for comment.

Seemingly the public is capable of absorbing only the most general propositions concerning overseas diplomacy. In this context popularly shared beliefs about communism plus a desire to support the government comprised the major concerns of a majority of the public. Mueller's study of opinion on the Korean and Vietnam wars leads him to note the public's concern for communism and their tendency, at least initially, to rally around the flag.18 "Most important in this connection," he writes, "is the large number of citizens who are inclined to support the country's leadership no matter what it does." Howard Martin noted just this phenomenon in his study of the 1965 Michigan teach-ins on the war, reporting that in the face of widespread lack of information on Vietnam, "conviction could be based on little more than the ethos of the advocates."19 Martin suggests that, realizing the insignificance of the teach-ins the administration felt no major need to debate the professorial protesters. While it is true that the administration perceived no major opposition to its policies in 1964 and 1965--recall Johnson's comment about public and press support--the

18 Mueller, 359 and 364.
19 Martin, 248.
administration was apparently aware of a widespread lack of understanding about the war. This is evident in the campaign to justify the course of the war during those years. Further, the existence of a large body of popular confusion over the war is documented in opinion survey literature.  

The exigence perceived by Vietnam-era policy makers thus encompassed their realization of a need to persuade the public of the rightness of their policy. Policy makers were aware that the majority of their hearers shared a belief in the cold war consensus. Thus, the rhetoric of heightened Vietnam involvement took the form of efforts to inform the public of the specific details of the conflict in such a way as to connect them clearly to the general pattern of thought on conflict with communism.

The following survey of the administration case will take two forms. Although the administration argumentation remained highly consistent and coherent during the 1964-1967 period I shall first review, chronologically several major policy statements on the war during this time. This will serve to highlight changes in theme and emphasis. In another section I shall describe the case in a topical manner--reviewing characteristic arguments drawn from the total sample of spokesmen and documents studied.

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20 Mueller, 374. Mueller also reveals the surprising fact that a large number of citizens lacked a clear understanding of the reasons behind our involvement in World War II.
Heightened Concern for the War, 1964

If, as we have seen, the American people were relatively unconcerned over Vietnam in 1964, the reverse is true of their leaders. By the time of Johnson's assumption of the Presidency in November, 1963, the war had already become the major foreign crisis. Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara made what is probably the most significant statement on Vietnam of this period in a prepared address before the James Forrestal Memorial Awards Dinner on March 26, 1964. In his opening sentence the Secretary left no doubt as to the meaning of the insurgency in Vietnam. "In South Vietnam, as you well know," he said, "the independence of a nation and the freedom of its people are being threatened by Communist aggression and terrorism." Having placed the conflict in the traditional frame of freedom versus communism, the Secretary proceeded to outline the official position on the evolution of events in Vietnam. Detailing the French attempt to "buck the trend" of nationalism, McNamara described Ho Chi Minh's "power grab."

McNamara's description of the Geneva accords is interesting in that he seems to suggest that the Final Agreements established two separate governments rather than merely providing the ground for such an evolution. "The country was roughly cut in half at the 17th parallel, creating the Communist regime of Ho Chi Minh in the north and a non-communist state in the south." McNamara emphasized our unilateral

21 All quotations from the speech will be taken from the text as found in Robert S. McNamara, "United States Policy in Viet-Nam," Department of State Bulletin, L, No. 1294 (April 13, 1964), 562-70. There can be little doubt that the administration regarded the speech as a major policy statement for it was reprinted by the Department of State in the Foreign Affairs Outline series. See U.S. Department of State, "United States Policy in Viet-Nam," Foreign Affairs Outline, Far Eastern Series 125, Pubn. 7691 (May, 1964).
declaration to view with alarm any effort to alter the settlement. The Secretary then described the progress of South Vietnam in the years after the settlement, seeming to imply that such a separate development of the south was mandated by the declarations: "Under the Geneva agreements, it was hoped that South Viet-Nam would have an opportunity to build a free nation in peace. . . ." Of course, the Secretary did not distort the early history of Vietnam but in suggesting that Geneva overtly provided for an independent nation in the south he strengthened the rationale for our support for that state, doing somewhat less justice to the spirit, if not the letter of Geneva. (Recall that the accords provided only for a "provisional" division of Vietnam into two "regroupment zones.")

In the paragraphs that followed Mr. McNamara detailed index after index to illustrate the economic progress of the State of South Vietnam. And he made mention of Eisenhower's soon-to-be famous letter of October 1, 1954 in which the President offered aid to "the new government." While the Secretary marveled at the greater growth of the south—emphasizing the "vastly larger industrial plant inherited by Hanoi" he did not mention the $1 billion in U.S. aid which underwrote the "marked contrast to development in the north." Suggesting that "free Viet-Nam's very achievements" motivated the North to initiate a campaign of conquest, the Secretary of Defense outlined the "major Communist effort, meticulously planned and controlled, and relentlessly pursued by the government of Hanoi."

Having established the theme of aggression from the north, McNamara recited the interest of the United States to uphold its unilateral declaration of 1954 so as to help South Vietnam "preserve its
independence from Communist attack." He stressed the relationship of
the events in Vietnam to the wider struggle against communism, arguing
that "South Viet-Nam is a test case for the new Communist strategy."
The strategy Secretary McNamara mentioned was the war of liberation as
proclaimed by Mao Tse Tung and Khrushchev and as practiced in Malaya and
the Philippines. Emphasizing that the war in Vietnam was not a "fac­tional dispute," McNamara labeled North Vietnam as the "prime aggressor"
but spoke of Peiping's interest in the conflict as a "first step toward
eventual Chinese hegemony over the two Viet-Nams and Southeast Asia and
toward exploitation of the new strategy in other parts of the world."
With this trend of thought McNamara thus established the war as a clear
case of aggression. Further, he touched on the wider implications of
the aggression, invoking a modified version of the domino theory (and
the notion of monolithic communism) to suggest that the fall of Vietnam
would be only the first step in eventual Chinese domination of Asia.

The final section of the speech dealt with this situation and
America's policy toward it. The Secretary cited the independent con­
cclusion of the International Control Commission that Hanoi had violated
the Geneva accords and suggested that in this regard "five U.S. Presi­
dents have acted to preserve free world strategic interests in the
area." (McNamara, however, did not make reference to the fact that
the ICC in that same 1962 report found the U.S. and South Vietnam guilty
of violating Articles 16, 17 and 19 of the accords.) McNamara argued
that due to popular loss of confidence in Diem and the series of coups
after his murder the pace of the war had worsened. However, he spoke

22 See text of the Special Report to the Co-Chairmen of the
of efforts by the government of General Khanh to "rebuild the machinery of administration" and reflected on his "energy" and "comprehension." In sketching the proper U.S. response to the crisis, McNamara specifically refuted the critics' call for withdrawal and neutralization arguing that these alternatives both meant a "Communist consolidation and eventual takeover." While relating that measures against the north were considered, McNamara emphasized the agreement by all of the need to increase aid to "Prime Minister" Khanh. Peace would be the goal, he said, but "peace at any price" had been proven impractical in defending freedom.

Secretary McNamara's March, 1964, position paper on Vietnam was a carefully considered and comprehensive official assessment of the history and progress of the war. Particularly important are his interpretation of the Geneva accords and the northern origin of the insurgency. These interpretations and their relation to the suggested U.S. policy (plus the absence of opposing evidence) make it clear that the speech constitutes an argumentative case rather than any balanced and scholarly treatise.

Saigon's battlefield reversals were overshadowed in August of 1964 by the North Vietnamese attack on two U.S. ships patrolling off the coast of the North. President Johnson's message to the nation, August 4, 1964, describing those attacks and our response to them constitutes another important rhetorical document on the war. In this brief statement the President detailed the "act of aggression" and our

23 All references to the speech will be taken from the text as published in "United States Takes Measures to Repel Attack Against U.S. Forces in Southeast Asia," Department of State Bulletin, LI, No. 1313 (August 24, 1964), 259.
response to it. However, an equal portion of the speech was devoted to the wider "struggle for peace and security in Southeast Asia." The President continued accentuating the pattern of "Aggression by terror against the peaceful villagers of South Viet-Nam. . . ." Stating the American policy in forceful terms, Johnson declared that "The determination of all Americans to carry out our full commitment to the people and to the Government of South Viet-Nam will be redoubled by this outrage." Yet, although he called for a Congressional resolution of support for our policy in Southeast Asia, the President reminded the public that "we still seek no wider war" and that our mission was rooted in a desire for peace.

The President enlarged upon the dual themes of North Vietnamese aggression and U.S. commitment in a short message to Congress, August 5, 1964. After describing the success of the retaliatory air strikes against the north, the President affirmed the U.S. interest in the region. "Our commitments in that area are well known to the Congress. They were further defined in the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty approved by the Senate in February, 1955." Johnson quickly moved to connect his course of action to the policies of his predecessors, claiming that the administration's actions were "consistent and unchanged since 1954." Johnson summarized the policy in terms of "four simple propositions:"

1. America keeps her word. Here as elsewhere, we must and shall honor our commitments.

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2. The issue is the future of Southeast Asia as a whole. A threat to any nation in that region is a threat to all, and a threat to us.

3. Our purpose is peace. We have no military, political or territorial ambitions in the area.

4. This is not just a jungle war, but a struggle for freedom on every front of human activity. Our military and economic assistance to South Vietnam and Laos in particular has the purpose of helping these countries to repel aggression and strengthen their independence.

Against this background, the President enlarged upon the aggression theme, contrasting the North Vietnamese "campaign of subversion" with our policies of peace. "The North Vietnamese regime has consistently sought to take over South Vietnam and Laos," Johnson insisted. Calling for a strong Congressional endorsement of the American role in Southeast Asia he emphasized the administration's desire for a restoration of the 1954 Geneva agreements in Vietnam. "Hostile nations must understand," he concluded, "that . . . the United States will continue to protect its national interest. . . ."

On Thursday, August 6, 1964 Secretary of State Dean Rusk elaborated on the administration's policy toward Southeast Asia in his testimony to a joint session of the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees. The Secretary spoke in favor of the Congressional resolution suggested by the President, explaining the Executive Department's notion of its purpose. Although the immediate cause of the call for a resolution was the attacks of August 2 and August 4, the

25See prepared text in Statement of Secretary of State Dean Rusk, U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations and Committee on Armed Services, Southeast Asia Resolution, Joint Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Committee on Armed Services, Senate, 88th Cong., 2nd sess., August 6, 1964, pp. 2-4.
Secretary stressed that attacks were not isolated—that they were "directly related to the aggressive posture of North Vietnam and to the policy that the United States has been pursuing in assisting the free nations of Southeast Asia. . . ."

Rusk then set the context of our involvement in a portrayal of the history of American policy toward the Indochina area. Rusk’s description of the provision of the Geneva accords is more extreme even than that of his counterpart in the Pentagon: " . . . Indochina was divided and the independent states of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were created under the conditions of the Geneva Accords of 1954. . . ." This statement, while it justifies subsequent American efforts to build an anti-communist state in the south, nevertheless minimizes the provisional character of the Vietnamese partition. In this connection Rusk next cited both the 1954 Eisenhower letter containing a pledge of U.S. support to create a viable state and also the ratification of the SEATO treaty with its extension of protection to Vietnam.

Having sketched the basis of the American commitment to Vietnam the Secretary reminded the Senators of "the subsequent history of North Vietnamese efforts to subvert and conquer South Vietnam and to do the same in Laos." Speaking of the threat to the freedom of Vietnam, Rusk reiterated our efforts to aid South Vietnam and our interest in a return to the 1954 Geneva provisions. "We have repeatedly made clear that the independence and security provided for South Vietnam under those Accords was a satisfactory status for South Vietnam." He added that, "All that is needed, as I have myself often said, is for Hanoi and Peiping to leave their neighbors alone."
Underlining the need for a declaration of firm Congressional resolve Rusk said that "We cannot tell what steps may in the future be required to meet Communist aggression in Southeast Asia." But the Secretary stressed the resolution would warn would-be aggressors of our vigilance. "The world has learned over 50 years of history," he declared, "that aggression is invited if there is doubt about the response." Rusk's statement to the Senate is important for--in addition to its extreme interpretation of Geneva--it clearly sets forth the dual themes of aggression and commitment which became the keystones of the administration case.

**Justifying the Commitment in 1965: The Military and Rhetorical Escalation**

With the cession of retaliatory strikes against the north in August 1964, the visible aspects of American policy toward Vietnam returned to the former pattern of a gradual increase in assistance. However, with the major escalations of early and mid-1965 the administration again faced the need to justify its position. The premier document in the administration dossier of defense came in the form of a February, 1965, Department of State white paper: *Aggression From the North: The Record of North Viet-Nam's Campaign to Conquer South Viet-Nam.*

26 I have chosen not to evaluate any of the pure campaign speeches of 1964 separately here, although I will include several 1964 Johnson speeches in the total sample reviewed for the analysis of the administration case. The apparent dilemma posed by Johnson's stance as the so-called "peace candidate" in 1964 versus his later escalations is well handled in Connelly, "A Rhetorical Analysis," pp. 10-19, Connelly, "Some Questions," 11-20 and Johnson, *Vantage Point*, p. 68.

In the introduction, the white paper centers upon the "flagrant aggression" pursued by Hanoi, conceding, nevertheless, that the war was "poorly understood in most parts of the world." Although the covert tactics and character of the war were new, the report continued, the aim was not. "North Viet-Nam's commitment to seize control of the South is no less total than was the commitment of the regime in North Korea in 1950. The document cited evidence that the "hard core" and leadership of the insurgency were northern based. The southern National Liberation Front was, in this regard, "formed at Hanoi's order" for the purpose of creating "the false impression that the aggression in South Viet-Nam is an indigenous rebellion against the established government." The document cited the International Control Commission which "upheld the validity" of evidence of North Vietnamese infiltration in its 1962 report.

This description of aggression set the tone; in succeeding pages the white paper presented evidence that "The hard core of Communist forces attacking South Viet-Nam are men trained in North Viet-Nam." Conceding that the estimated levels of infiltration seemed "modest," it stressed that in the context of a guerilla war "the infiltration of 5,000 guerilla fighters in a given year is the equivalent of marching perhaps 50,000 regular troops across the border, in terms of the burden placed on the defenders." The process of infiltration and supply was reconstructed and placed in the context of Hanoi's repeatedly proclaimed intention to "liberate South Viet-Nam."

In the final section of the text, the post-1954 history of Vietnam was repeated as a background for detailing the North Vietnamese campaign. Unlike the 1961 white paper the official history completely
skirted the issue of reunification elections substituting, instead, a vague assertion of "South Viet-Nam's refusal to fall in with Hanoi's scheme for peaceful takeover..." However, the document did reflect the official view of the Geneva settlement which, it was said, "partitioned" the country. No mention of the temporary status of the "partition" nor reference to the reunification ideal is to be found. The progress of the 1954-1959 period was reviewed along with a description of the rise of the insurgency. The report emphasizes the gains made by the Viet Cong in the aftermath of the "removal" of Diem and the succeeding "changes in the leadership and composition of the Government of Saigon..."*

Detailing the escalation in Viet Cong operations, the report cited the increased American assistance, concluding that "the restraint of the past was not providing adequately for the defense of South Viet-Nam against Hanoi's open aggression." In a final section on conclusions the report disavowed any interest in bases or territory and pledged that our nation "will not abandon friends who want to remain free."

The white paper was buttressed with documentation based on captured equipment, documents, and prisoner interrogation. However, this entry into the public record was only one of many persuasive efforts made during the 1965 period of rapid escalation. Johnson writes that as voices in the country began to question the bombardment of North Vietnam, "I decided it was time to make another major statement on Viet-nam to the American people." This decision to enter, once again, the public forum came in the form of an address given at Johns Hopkins.

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28 Johnson, Vantage Point, p. 132.
University on April 7, 1965.  

In his opening remarks the President communicated an air of seriousness, reminding his hearers that "tonight Americans and Asians are dying for a world where each people may choose its own path to change." Citing the deaths of four hundred young men in a "dirty and brutal" war the President confronted the question: "Why must we take this painful road?" His answer came in the form of several conclusions about the meaning of the conflict. "The first reality," said the President, "is that North Viet-Nam has attacked the independent nation of South Viet-Nam." Averring that "some of the people of South Viet-Nam are participating in the attack on their own government" Johnson nevertheless chose to underscore Viet-Nam's part in a "wider pattern of aggressive purposes." "The rulers of Hanoi are urged on by Peiping," Johnson insisted.

Against this background the President maintained that our current involvement in Vietnam came, first, "because we have a promise to keep." Johnson reiterated our cumulative "national pledge" to Viet-Nam since 1954. A second rationale for increased intervention in Vietnam was put in terms of our world-wide system of defense commitments. "To leave Viet-Nam to its fate would shake the confidence of all these people in the value of an American commitment and in the value of America's word." Drawing on the "lesson of our time" that aggression feeds on weakness, Johnson developed the related argument that "to withdraw from one battlefield means only to prepare for the next." As

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I have indicated, Johnson perceived the Baltimore speech as a platform from which to explain clearly American policy in the context of rising criticism. Thus, the President's use of the tactic of refutation is not surprising.

There are those who say that all our effort there will be futile—that China's power is such that it is bound to dominate all Southeast Asia. But there is no end to that argument until all of the nations of Asia are swallowed up.

There are those who wonder why we have a responsibility there. Well, we have it there for the same reason that we have a responsibility for the defense of Europe. World War II was fought in both Europe and Asia, and when it ended we found ourselves with continued responsibility for the defense of freedom.

Having cast his opponents' claims as antithetical to the entire thrust of American foreign policy since Roosevelt, the President defended his own initiatives as consistent with that pattern of policy. "In recent months attacks on South Viet-Nam were stepped up," he said. "Thus," Johnson continued, "it became necessary for us to increase our response and to make attacks by air. This is not a change in purpose. It is a change in what we believe that purpose requires." Affirming that "we will not grow tired," Johnson emphasized, on the other hand, that "we will never be second in the search for such a peaceful settlement in Viet-Nam." Insisting that we were ready for "unconditional negotiations," the President reinforced the notion of our interest in peace by proposing a "billion-dollar American investment" in economic progress.

In the concluding paragraphs of the speech Johnson developed some of the details of the plan and visualized for his hearers the "dream of a world where all are fed and charged with hope."

In retrospect we are well aware that Johnson's speech neither satisfied his critics nor led to immediate negotiations. A little over
a month later, Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy gave further development to the administration's case in a speech—released to the press—before the Dallas Council on World Affairs on May 13, 1965. Speaking on the subject of "Reality and Myth Concerning South Vietnam" Bundy attempted, he said, not to repeat the President's Statement of April 7 and others, but rather to give an in-depth consideration to some important aspects of the situation. In so doing he hoped to expose "some of the myths that have come into circulation." 

Bundy began with the 1954 Geneva accords which, he said, divided the country "creating the Communist regime of Ho Chi Minh in the North and a non-Communist state in the South." Reconstructing the difficulties facing Diem, Assistant Secretary Bundy described the progress of South Vietnam which far outshone the north. However, Bundy described two 1959 developments which were critical to the future of the south, The first was the increasing isolation of Diem's government and its repression of political opposition. "Second," Bundy continued, "Hanoi went on the march." Emphasizing that the war was no civil conflict, he detailed Hanoi's control and supply of the southern insurgency. Bundy summarized the situation juxtaposing Hanoi's proclaimed desire to take the south with United States effort to aid "our friends in the south."

Having recited the "simple basic story" of Vietnam, Bundy moved to challenge "certain myths that have arisen concerning that story." It has been alleged, he related, that the failure to proceed with elections in 1956 "in some way justified Hanoi's actions in resorting to

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military measures..." Bundy answered this interpretation pointing to the Eisenhower Administration's full support for "the principle of free elections under international supervision, in Viet-Nam." And, he declared, "A similar position was taken by President Diem of South Viet-Nam." Bundy concluded that the refusal of the north to guarantee free elections doomed them. Bundy next confronted the argument that the Viet Cong and National Liberation Front were part of the political opposition which grew up under Diem's repressions. He denied this, arguing that few respected South Vietnamese leaders joined the Viet Cong and the NLF was a "political facade, made in Hanoi, for the Viet Cong movement." Calling the leadership of the NLF "faceless" he told his audience, "I doubt if any of you can name a single leader of the National Liberation Front."

While his readers perhaps searched their minds on that question--one might wonder how many Saigon officials they could name--Bundy reiterated our purposes in Vietnam. He invoked the "lessons of the 1930's" and of the Korean war which, he said, showed that aggression must be resisted. But, the Assistant Secretary maintained, the communists had learned from Korea as well. Having paid a high price for their invasion in 1950 they now favored wars of national liberation. These conflicts, proclaimed by Russia, China, and North Vietnam were, he explained, nothing but a refined version of the communist tactics in Greece, Malaya, and the Philippines. The tactic was refined but nevertheless remained the same: "aggression directed from outside a nation, but disguised in nationalist trappings so that it might pass as an indigenous insurrection."
Bundy's speech is significant in that it reflects the growing attention devoted to refutation of opposing viewpoints on the war. Aside from this, Bundy's presentation bore great similarity in tone and theme to other administration statements on the war. Within several weeks, however, a new condition of war required another statement of rationale. Within days of his decision to commit major United States combat forces, the President announced the plan to the press and—in view of this new exigence—spoke once again to the issue of why we were in Vietnam. 31 "I have tried to answer that question dozens of times," said Johnson. "The answer," he continued, "echoes from the painful lessons of half a century... We have learned at a terrible and a brutal cost that retreat does not bring safety and weakness does not bring peace." The President cautioned the reporters not to let the non-conventional nature of the struggle "mask the central fact that this is really war. It is guided by North Viet-Nam and it is spurred by Communist China." Connecting the conflict to the pattern of cold war in Asia Johnson added, "Its goal is to conquer the South, to defeat American power, and to extend the Asiatic dominion of communism." Against this background the President described our role as based on the commitments of three Presidents and, he affirmed, our continued role was critical not only to freedom in Vietnam but also to the stability of the world. "If we are driven from the field in Viet-Nam, then no nation can ever again have the same confidence in American promise or in American protection."

31Public Papers 1965, II, 794-803. Johnson described his feelings at that time in Vantage Point, pp. 152-53. Jess Yoder cites the news conference as a major attempt to justify the war in his study of "The Protest of the American Clergy in Opposition to the War in Vietnam."
Before the question period which followed his announcement of increased troop commitments and draft calls, the President repeated his call at Baltimore for unconditional negotiations. Reporters immediately queried the President, chiefly about the technicalities of escalation and negotiation. When questioned about opposition to his policies, Johnson indicated he hoped to talk with critics and convince them of his views.

Policy Defense During the Stalemate, 1966-1967

The administration defense of its increased material commitment to Vietnam in the years 1964 and 1965 was marked by the need to justify changing exigencies: increased aid, retaliatory strikes against the north, sustained bombing of the north and, finally, a major commitment of U.S. ground forces. Throughout the period, however, the rhetoric of policy justification was marked by a consistency of claim. Almost without exception policy makers emphasized the ten-year United States commitment to Vietnam and the continuing North Vietnamese aggression. Uniformly, the spokesmen for escalation found it necessary to connect the war in Vietnam to the wider plans of China and Asian communism. They connected this new aggressive threat to the earlier lessons of the Second World War that an ineffectual response to aggression encourages war. This consistency of argument is reflected in the 1966-1967 period during which the war slowly became a stalemate—a conflict of attrition in which there was no winner. To illustrate the continued reliance on a minimum of basic attitudes and arguments, I shall review two major addresses by the President during the 1966-1967 period.
In June of 1966 the President spoke in Omaha, Nebraska, on the subject of "Two Threats to World Peace." In his prepared remarks Johnson addressed himself to the dual threat to world cooperation posed by unchecked poverty and unchallenged force. The discussion of brute force as a danger to world development centered upon the challenge of Vietnam. Johnson's description of the importance of Vietnam to Americans rested on the claim that in three ways the war directly affected American security. First, the use of force to trample out the rights of others had implications for Americans. "If one government uses force to violate another people's rights we cannot ignore the injustice, the threat to our own rights, the danger to peace in the entire world."
The President then cited another consideration which, when applied to Vietnam, transformed the conflict from a local dispute into a true threat to the world. Reminding Nebraskans and the nation that free Asia faced a common threat from Communist China, Johnson exclaimed: "If South Vietnam were to collapse under Communist pressure from the North, the progress in the rest of Asia would be greatly endangered. And don't you forget that!" Underscoring the successful defense of freedom versus aggression in Korea, Johnson argued that our response to the new tactic of insurgency should be no less determined. A failure in Vietnam, Johnson insisted, "Will be an invitation to the would-be conqueror to keep on marching."

The justification for the specific action in Vietnam was thus expressed in terms of an overall world drama of which Vietnam was

merely the opening act. Our response was needed to arrest the growth of force, to curtail the expansion of China and to discourage the use of subversion. Johnson concluded his speech by reminding the audience of South Vietnam's progress toward democracy and our own efforts for negotiation. Reminding his hearers of the sacrifices of our forces in Vietnam, he affirmed that our persistence would be no less.

This speech in Omaha, removed in both time and place from the President's news conference of July 28, 1965, nevertheless reflects the substance of that and other earlier justifications. A year later in an address before the Tennessee State Legislature, with two-and-one-half years of escalation to defend, Johnson understandably devoted more attention to the tactical issues of bombing and negotiation; but, his rhetoric was still grounded in the increasingly familiar chorus of claims justifying our stand.33

In his statement to the legislators, the President averred that after the stormy debate on Vietnam most Americans had "reached a common understanding on the meaning and on the objectives of that struggle." Recalling the choice he faced in 1965 to act or "retreat" in Vietnam, the President reiterated the appropriateness of that decision in terms of the American tradition and our commitments to Vietnam. Acknowledging that "some voices were raised in protest," the President claimed that these criticisms ignored the "growing evidence that the defense of Vietnam held the key to the political and economic future of free Asia." Once again, calling to mind the deeper aspects of the struggle, Johnson

repeated the theme that "if we faltered, the forces of chaos would scent victory and decades of strife and aggression would stretch endlessly before us." Rather than accept such losses, the President declared, America had again chosen to fight for freedom and prove the futility of aggression.

Against the backdrop of those "broad principles on which most Americans agree," the President faced what he termed "a number of questions about our Vietnam policy." In defense of the American policy Johnson first reiterated that the war was "aggression in a new guise." Reviewing the military successes of the past year, he confronted the challenges to his policy of bombing. He defended the military utility of the air offensive and insisted that it was both consistent with our limited objectives and necessary to aid our ground soldiers. "Now as to bombing civilians," Johnson retorted, "I would simply say we are making an effort that is unprecedented in the history of warfare to be sure we do not." He contrasted our methods of moderation to the "Viet Cong policy of systematic terror." Why, he asked, do critics not heed the plight of the South Vietnamese. "It is this moral double bookkeeping which makes us get sometimes very weary of our critics."

Next Johnson confronted the question of negotiations. He reminded the legislators of his past bombing halts and of North Vietnamese rejection of negotiation except on their own terms. "It takes two to negotiate," Johnson asserted. In the absence of any progress toward a negotiated peace LBJ recapitulated the recent constitutional and commercial progress of the south and the continuing efforts of rural "pacification."
"Now this brings me to my final point," said the President, continuing, "the peaceful and just world that we seek." As in the April 7, 1965 address at Johns Hopkins University Johnson visualized for his audience a world of peace. He concluded with a description of the administration's efforts toward that noble end.

What can be said of the administration's persuasive campaign to defend its Vietnam policy? At the outset it seems safe to conclude that over a three-year period the government case remained consistent in presentation. Almost without exception the policy makers surveyed rooted their claims in the notion of a United States commitment to assist Vietnam in its resistance to aggression. Beyond this, however, spokesmen seem to have exhibited a greater effort to demonstrate that our policy was supportive of a wider resistance against communist world-wide penetration and that weakness here would mean further conflicts. Finally, our goals in the matter were the pursuit of freedom and self-determination as opposed to the enemy's terror. Our willingness to negotiate fairly and without conditions was ever contrasted to what was termed North Vietnam's total intransigence.


The very consistency in approach to Vietnam over the four-year period allows us to analyze the administration's rhetoric in terms of a coherent persuasive case. In the following pages this writer will synthesize the one hundred rhetorical documents into a single structure which might approach what Theodore White has called "The Speech." The following aggregation of arguments will set the stage for our analysis of the government's chosen rhetorical stance and selected strategies.
Consistency of Policy in our Commitment

The late President Johnson once wrote of his fears that "a divisive debate about 'who lost Vietnam' would be . . . more destructive to our national life than the argument over China had been."\(^{34}\) In retrospect it seems clear that the related controversy over "who found Vietnam" may remain with us for some time. In the aftermath of the Pentagon Papers, it remains fashionable to search out those most responsible for the long and bitter war. Thus, a recent best seller by David Halberstam argues that the very brilliance and pride of the Kennedy-Johnson policy makers led them to manipulate, coldly, their unsuspecting nation into an ever-deepening tragedy.\(^{35}\) Despite the recent orgy of fault finding, it is clear that involvement in the war came more from evolution than revolution in policy. Thus, the attempt of the Johnson Administration decision makers to vindicate their Vietnam policy by connecting it to early policy is understandable. Repeatedly, the policy makers emphasized their adherence to a goal unchanged from 1954. The most emphatic statement on this point came from the President himself. In a speech at Syracuse University in August, 1964, Johnson asserted that "For 10 years three American Presidents--President Eisenhower, President Kennedy, and your present President--and the American people have been actively concerned with threats to the peace and security . . . from the Communist government of North Viet-Nam."\(^{36}\) Questioned by reporters some months later

\(^{34}\) Johnson, *Vantage Point*, p. 152.


Johnson averred that the recent American activity in Vietnam marked "no change in the position of this country. . . ." He added that, "I frequently observe to the people of this country that our basic commit­
ment to Viet-Nam was made in a statement 10 years ago by our President, to the general effect that we would help the people of Viet-Nam help themselves."37 In a similar setting weeks later the President put the matter more firmly. While acknowledging that "changes in the situation may require from time to time changes in tactics," he declared: "Our policy in Viet-Nam is the same as it was 1 year ago, and to those of you who have inquiries on the subject, it is the same as it was 10 years ago. I have publicly stated it."38 Unfortunately for the Presi­
dent, and despite the fact that by March of 1965 he had made this declaration forty-seven times--by his count--the issue of policy consis­tency remained. And during the next two years the President con­tinued to affirm that "we pursue the same principle;" that "other Presidents have made the commitment. I have reaffirmed it; and that "we chose a course in keeping with . . . the foreign policy of at least three administrations. . . ."39

The determination of the administration to unite its actions with the practices of its predecessors was reflected in statements of


other policy leaders. Eisenhower's 1954 pledge of economic aid to sustain a separate and independent south was cited repeatedly. The relationship of SEATO to Vietnam was referred to as a part of the commitment. Secretary of State Rusk, for example, spoke of the "obligations of this nation under the Southeast Asia Treaty, which the Senate approved by a vote of 82-1." Similarly the commitment to Vietnam was traced through the Kennedy years. In William Bundy's words, "a commitment was made . . . that has guided our policy in Southeast Asia for a decade now." Bundy's colleague in the State Department, Undersecretary Katzenbach concurred, adding that "These commitments--both legal and moral--are so solidly founded that I cannot see how anyone can rightly argue that we should renege on them."

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42 Dean Rusk, "Viet-Nam: Four Steps to Peace," Department of State Bulletin, LIII, No. 1359 (July 12, 1965), 53.


45 Katzenbach, Department of State Bulletin, November 6, 1967, 603.
Escalation: Tactical Change in a Consistent Policy

Of course, the doubt about the consistency of our commitment resulted from the ever-increasing price of our promise. How could a commitment to provide economic aid (Eisenhower, 1954) be "the same" as one leading to a virtual Americanization of the war? The administration was mindful of this apparent anomaly and moved to answer it. Early in 1965 the President insisted that the increased pace of war marked no change of purpose. "Under this policy," he declared, "changes in the situation may require from time to time changes in tactics . . . ." Johnson put the matter most clearly in his Johns Hopkins Speech of April, 1965, differentiating between ends and means in policy: "In recent months attacks on South Viet-Nam were stepped up. Thus it became necessary for us to increase our response and to make attacks by air. This is not a change of purpose. It is a change in what we believe that purpose requires." Officials in State and Defense seconded this viewpoint, putting the onus of escalation on the enemy. None of these steps, William Bundy reiterated, were taken until "after the tide of aggression had progressively mounted." Secretary McNamara made the same point on two separate occasions in August, 1965, arguing on nationwide television that "The number of men we have there [Vietnam] is a direct function of the level of aggression carried on by

45. Katzenbach, Department of State Bulletin, November 6, 1967, 603.
46. Public Papers 1965, I, 301.
47. L. B. Johnson, Department of State Bulletin, April 26, 1965, 607.
North Viet-Nam." McNamara repeated this theme before the Senate Sub-committee on Appropriations, explaining that "although our tactics have changed, our objective remains the same."\(^{49}\)

The theme that increased North Vietnamese aggression necessitated certain tactical changes became a familiar one in the summer of '65. However, as the public came to accept the fact of escalation, relatively little effort was expended in drawing this ends-means distinction in the 1966-1967 period.

Our Dedication to a Policy of Peaceful Progress

If, then, an ever-increasing use of force was but part of an unaltered adherence to unchanging principle, what was the stated goal in Vietnam? It may well be that the foreign policy of all nations is stated in terms of adherence to broad moral purposes. Certainly moral blandishments have characterized the foreign policy publicity of this nation. Thus, it was only natural that our goal be put as the attainment of progress in an atmosphere of peace.

Administration policy makers gave this tone to our policy throughout the 1964-1967 period. In remarks before the American Bar Association, August 12, 1964, Johnson described the root of our strength in Vietnam. We had acted, the President said, partly, "for a reason that is hard for others to understand. We have done it because it is right that we should." He continued, "Of course, our security and welfare shape our policies;" but, he reminded the lawyers, "much of the

energy of our efforts has come from moral purposes." This attempt to paint our policy in moral rather than military colors is reflected in the President's use of the figure of negation. "Our object in Viet-Nam is not war but peace," said Johnson in December, 1965. In June of the next year, he repeated, "Our objective in Vietnam is not war. Our objective is peace." Without reference to the post-World War II stream of foreign policy thought the invocation of peace to justify war might appear to hearers as an Orwellian inversion of language reshaped to suit totalitarian leadership. However, the connection is highly consistent with the post-war belief that real peace was not possible in a world of aggression. Thus, by defeating aggression our aims were eminently pacific. Thus, spoke the President: "Our policy remains the same: to strive for peace but not to yield to aggression. . . ." Or as Secretary McNamara added: "... our goal is peace and stability, both in Viet-Nam and in Southeast Asia. But we have learned that 'peace at any price' is not practical in the long run. . . ." Three years later Secretary Rusk had only to say: "The first essential in organizing a reliable peace is to make it clear

52 Public Papers 1966, I, 683.
54 McNamara, Department of State Bulletin, April 13, 1964, 569-70.
beyond further question that there is no future in aggression..."  
Precluding aggression was, then, the initial step—a necessary but, of course, not sufficient one—in obtaining a full measure of peace.

**Progress in Peace**

In furtherance of the claim of peace Johnson told of the non-military aspects of our policy. "But to stop aggression is only the beginning, not the end of our policy. We face a second fundamental fact that people have other enemies in the world: hunger, disease, ignorance, poverty." To give substance to this vision he and his cohorts frequently cited the pledge of an Asian development program enunciated by Johnson at Johns Hopkins University. We were builders, not destroyers, maintained Rusk. "A billion dollar bank is in the making for the development of Southeast Asia." "... Men ask if we rely on guns alone. Still again the answer is 'no,'" said Johnson: "The pledge of Baltimore stands open—to help the men of the North when they have the wisdom to be ready."

**No Wider War**

The real appropriateness of escalation within a posture of peace was capsulized by the President in what came to be somewhat of a personal slogan. Although upon occasion others echoed the President's

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alliterative declaration that "we seek no wider war," there is no doubt that this construction became a catchphrase particular to the President's speaking.

August 4, 1964: We still seek no wider war.  
February 7, 1965: As the U.S. Government has frequently stated, we seek no wider war.  
March 8, 1965: We seek no domination. We seek no wider war.  
March 25, 1965: The United States still seeks no wider war.  
April 1, 1965: We seek no wider war, as I have stated many times....

Notice that the "wider war" references predominate in the period of rapid escalation, 1964-1965. The slogan does not seem to reappear significantly after 1965--I found no instances of its appearance, although the phrase must have been uttered publicly at some point. Thus, this catchphrase is yet another indication of attempts at refutation.

60 L. B. Johnson, Department of State Bulletin, August 24, 1964, 259.
61 "United States and South Vietnamese Forces Launch Retaliatory Attacks Against North Viet-Nam," Department of State Bulletin, LII, No. 1339 (February 22, 1965), 239. Text is a statement by the White House.
64 The President's News Conference of April 1, 1965, Public Papers 1965, I, 368.
dictated by a specific exigence--i.e., the need to refute the argument that escalation was warlike and marked a change in policy.

Leave Your Neighbors Alone

Inherent in our claims of a peaceful policy was the aforementioned claim that our escalation was only a reaction to increases in North Vietnamese aggression. Hence, the cause of increased war was the enemy--we were a relatively passive bystander who intervened only when provoked. This passive tone to the United States position was conveyed by the claim that, according to the Secretary of State: "All that is needed is for the Communists to stop their aggressions. . . . When they stop their aggressions and the freedom of mainland Southeast Asia is assured, there will be no further need for any American military presence." This conception of our passive posture was seconded by the Vice President--"Today peace in Southeast Asia can be obtained if the violators will cease their aggression"--and was reinforced in the Department of State white paper's claim that we would continue only "until the regime in Hanoi decides to halt its intervention in the South. . . ." The paper concluded that--in keeping with our goal of peace--we did not initiate changes in force levels; rather, such were forced upon us. Hence, the burden to end the conflict rested solely with Hanoi and not with us. Since we refused to abandon our friends, "The choice now between peace and continued and increasingly

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66 See, respectively, Humphrey, Department of State Bulletin, March 8, 1965, 331 and Aggression from the North, p. 29.
destructive conflict is one for the authorities in Hanoi to make.  

As the passive tone of American policy assumed a familiar role in the rhetoric of escalation, the truth of this mood was confirmed by another slogan—"leave your neighbors alone." This catchphrase persuasively conveyed the message that the enemy was wholly in the wrong and that our policy was a sort of extension of the Golden Rule (that is, "defend thy neighbor as thyself"). Although the Secretary of State was not the only spokesman to employ this construction, the refrain became as typical of Secretary Rusk as the "wider war" slogan was of the President. Witness these statements by Dean Rusk:

April 20, 1964:  . . . If those in Hanoi and Peiping would leave their neighbors to the South alone, there would be peace and there would be no need for an American military presence in that area.  

May 22, 1964:  All that is needed is for the Communists to stop their aggressions, to go home, to leave their neighbors alone.  

August 6, 1964:  All that is needed, as I have myself often said, is for Hanoi and Peiping to leave their neighbors alone.

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67 Aggression from the North, p. 29.
70 Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, June 8, 1964, 891.
71 Rusk, Southeast Asia Resolution, Hearings, p. 5.
October 8, 1964: The question of whether Hanoi and Peiping will leave their southern neighbors alone is a major issue.\(^72\)

December 23, 1964: In other words, until there is a determination in Peiping to leave their neighbors alone and not to press militarily their notions of world revolution, then we are going to have this problem.\(^73\)

January 3, 1965: . . . Hanoi and Peiping have not yet decided to leave these neighbors alone . . . So that if they reach the point where they are prepared to leave their neighbors alone, then there are all sorts of political possibilities that open up to register that fact and to bring the situation to a peaceful conclusion.\(^74\)

February 25, 1965: Now, it has been stated over and over again that the key to peace in Southeast Asia is the readiness of all those in that area to live at peace and to leave their neighbors alone.\(^75\)

August 9, 1965: If these people in South Viet-Nam were left alone in peace, these problems you are concerned about, and we are concerned about could be worked out by normal peaceful means.\(^76\)

This ever-repeated slogan that the cause of all ill lay in the communist will to interfere served to dignify and delimit the American intervention in Southeast Asia. In viewing the situation in so simple and stark

\(^72\)"Secretary Rusk's News Conference of October 8," Department of State Bulletin, LI, No. 1322 (October 26, 1964), 576.


\(^74\)Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, January 18, 1965, 65.


\(^76\)Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, August 30, 1965, 344.
a fashion, there could be little question but that our entry into and escalation of the conflict was entirely proper.

We Will Not Tire in Pursuit of Peace

Throughout the period of escalation and stalemate, policy makers strove to communicate the notion that our policy was limited. When critics suggested that the President had lost sight of his objectives and had lost control of his course, Johnson responded. "The answer is 'no.' Our purpose in Viet-Nam is to prevent the success of aggression. . . . We are using that force and only that force that is necessary to stop this aggression." Yet, as our self-ascribed goal was the elimination of a totally unjustified aggression, our pursuit of this principle required an unlimited commitment of purpose. Thus, while the President reiterated our modified means he trumpeted our unfailing dedication to the goal of peace. Year after year, throughout the country the President made persistence a major theme in his public defense of policy. At Johns Hopkins Johnson held out the olive branch of Asian redevelopment but he declared, "We will not be defeated. We will not grow tired." In speech after speech the President invoked our strong will to stay:

March 17, 1964: It will remain the policy of the United States to furnish assistance and support to South Viet-Nam for as long as it is required to bring Communist aggression and terrorism under control.  

77 Public Papers 1966, I, 211.
April 20, 1964: So let no one doubt that we are in this battle as long as South Viet-Nam wants our support and needs our assistance to protect its freedom.80

June 30, 1966: Until they [North Viet-Nam] decide to end this aggression and to make an honorable peace, I can assure you that we, speaking for the United States of America, intend to carry on.81

The force of Johnson's statements of determination do not, therefore, diminish over time. He affirmed time after time that the United States would persevere "whatever the risk," "whether we make friends or lose friends," until the job was done. 82 "And let this be clear," the President declared, "Until that independence is guaranteed there is no human power capable of forcing us from Viet-Nam."83 It would be difficult to outdo the President in his stated stance of determination and, seemingly, his cabinet-level assistants did not attempt to do so: My reading of the literature reveals few similar statements from subordinate spokesmen.

The Attempt to Negotiate

If, indeed, the administration was not to be surpassed in war, neither was it to be outdone in calling for negotiation. As forces from North Vietnam and the United States began to dominate the conflict, it became obvious to most that, barring a sudden victory for one side, the


81 Public Papers 1966, I, 683.


83 Public Papers 1965, I, 429.
issue could be resolved ultimately only by negotiation. Throughout
the 1965-1967 period, the administration spared no rhetorical expense
to stress its eagerness for unconditional negotiations. Thus, William
Bundy told a gathering in Dallas, Texas, of our readiness for "uncondi-
tional discussions." Indeed, said Bundy, we were ready for a
parley but Hanoi was not. The theme of Hanoi's intransigence was
repeated throughout the period. Thus, in 1966, Undersecretary Ball
argued that Hanoi refused to talk except under unacceptable condi-
tions. A year later the U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam affirmed
the continued lack of "indication of Hanoi's readiness yet to come to
negotiations."

Of course, the continued rumors of communist "peace feelers"
led many in the United States to believe that the government was drag-
ging its feet on serious talks in hopes of scoring a decisive military
solution. Thus, Hubert Humphrey answered those charges in early 1966.
"Reports of 'peace feelers,'" he said, "have to do with initiatives by

84 W. Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, June 7, 1965, 895. See also, W. Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, June 21, 1965, 1004. In this regard critics have alleged that the administration never ser-
iously pursued negotiations during the period, preferring to attempt a
military victory. Indeed, the record shows that before Johnson's
April 7, 1965 speech at Baltimore there were few administration calls
for negotiation. In fact, Secretary Rusk seemed to rule out negoti-
ations as proper--since North Vietnam was totally in the wrong and
needed only to comply with earlier agreements. "So I do not see the
basis for a negotiation," said Rusk in April of 1964. See Rusk, Depart-
ment of State Bulletin, May 4, 1964, 696. Thus it is clear that so far
as public statements are concerned the administration became apparently
very eager for a settlement only after early 1965.


86 "Secretary Rusk and Ambassador Bunker Discuss Viet-Nam in TV-
Radio Interviews," Department of State Bulletin, LVII, No. 1475 (Octo-
ber 2, 1967), 418.
third parties. Hanoi has denied that it has ever made any 'peace feelers.'" More than a year later Undersecretary Katzenbach reiterated that "we have urgently and ceaselessly sought every opening and followed every lead no matter how threadbare, that could bring North Viet-Nam to the conference table."

During this time of fruitless attempts at negotiation the administration made continued capital from its bombing halts. What more could anyone want as a sign of our determination to seek the conference table? On two occasions in 1966 the President singled out the communists' alleged failure to respond to the earlier thirty-seven day bombing halt. And, much like the Pharisee who asked Jesus "how many times must I forgive my neighbor?" the administration protestations of sincerity seemed only to become an exercise in quantification for its own sake. Thus, the President spoke of the fifty times he had called for negotiations; his Ambassador to Germany repeated the figures; Johnson spoke of two hundred private contacts and forty public efforts to bring Hanoi to the conference table.

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87 "Vice President Humphrey Returns from Far East Mission," Department of State Bulletin, LIV, No. 1387 (January 24, 1966), 115.
88 Katzenbach, Department of State Bulletin, November 6, 1967, 602.
Self Determination, Not Domination

If the overpowering presence of the United States in Vietnam and our massive program of military construction raised any question of our ultimate aims—which they did—the administration moved to answer them. We seek nothing except the defeat of aggression, asserted the President. Nor was our program of construction any more ominous as the Secretary of State disavowed any intention to remain permanently in the country. "We have never sought and we do not desire today any base or other military position in South Viet-Nam—or Laos or Cambodia." Echoing his superior, Rusk added, "Our forces in Southeast Asia are there solely in response to the threat and reality of aggression from the north." In the four-year period encompassing 1964 through 1967, spokesmen specifically denied that we sought any of the following: Territory, political control, position, bases, rights, resources, privileges, presence, alliance, domination, spheres or conquest. "We

92 Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, June 8, 1964, 891.
don't seek to establish military bases," said Ambassador Arthur Goldberg. No, echoed the Vice President, "We do not seek to dominate or to conquer. Our objectives are best served by one result in Asia: the emergence of nations dedicated to their own national independence. . . ." The antithesis of conquest and control was, of course, freedom and self-determination. And administration spokesmen rooted our ultimate intentions in such lofty propositions. We fought to keep others from dominating their fellowmen and this task, said the President, was "commended to us by the moral values of our civilization. . . ." The invocation of a higher law to defend freedom permeated the rhetoric of Vietnam involvement. Perhaps no single term appeared more frequently than "freedom." Freedom, said Secretary of State Rusk, required an end to aggression, and our object, argued General Harold Johnson, was to "defend freedom" in Vietnam. The Vice President took a broader perspective and saw in our policies the effort to assure self-determination for all Asia.

94"Viet-Nam: Winning the Peace," Department of State Bulletin, LIII, No. 1368 (September 13, 1965), 436.


The issue of goals in Vietnam, as we have seen, became an integral part of the justification for our involvement there. Clearly, our stated goals were not directed toward national self-interest but, rather, were put in terms of certain eternal truths. Peace, self-determination and freedom were our goals, not any hope of national gain. Of course, stated in such broad terms the case for our policy took on a rather pedantic and self-glorifying visage. Further, the creation of simplistic dichotomies--freedom v. domination, peace v. aggression--did little, critics said, to elucidate the rationale for specific means to achieve the objectives. Yet, as we review further claims in the administration case the goal-oriented tone of the argumentation will remain clear.

South Vietnam: A Peaceful and Democratic Country

It is sometimes said that just before his untimely death, President Harding remarked of his scandal-ridden administration: "my enemies I can stand, if I could just save myself from my damn friends." This attribution, probably apocryphal, might nevertheless be a fitting commentary to South Vietnam's somewhat parasitic relationship to this nation. The record of the Pentagon Papers reveals a consistent inability to move the Vietnamese in directions of reform suggested by Washington. Throughout the period, however, policy makers seemingly found it impossible to say anything bad about our South Vietnamese ally. Even if conditions were somber official spokesmen enthused that they were not as bad as before or were improving. South Vietnam's place within the 1964-1967 argumentative case followed this pattern;
government descriptions of the country and its leaders bordered on eulogy when juxtaposed to the reality of the situation.

I have already commented on the central position of the "Diem Miracle" in the official history of Vietnam. Fond reminiscences of the comparatively tranquil 1954-1960 period are not difficult to find. Thus, the Deputy Ambassador to South Vietnam reflected, in 1965, over the great progress Vietnam had made--when she was left alone. Calling the period a "success story" the spokesmen contrasted this to the failure of communism in the north. This dichotomy was not mere rhetorical flourish as many spokesmen attributed the North Vietnamese aggression to a realization that the economic progress of the South interfered with Hanoi's designs for domination. This vivid passage is illustrative of the point. "The decision [by North Vietnam] to intensify the assault," hypothesized Secretary Rusk, "may well have been influenced by the remarkable economic and social progress of South Viet-Nam, which cast into a dark shadow the Communist 'paradise' in North Viet-Nam." "Certainly," he added, "progress in the south had dashed Communist hopes of taking over that country from within."

In the aftermath of the murder of Diem and succeeding signs of governmental instability, U.S. officials conceded that progress in winning the war had been stymied. However, hopes were high as in 1964 the official word in Washington came to be that the government of

100 W. Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, February 8, 1965, 172.
101 Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, June 8, 1964, 890.
General Khanh wasn't so bad after all. If, indeed, the general had not come to power in a democratic fashion he was, at least, "energetic," "able," and "an impressive man" who provided "vigorous leadership." Supporting a string of military dictators was somewhat anomalous given our self-imposed standards of freedom and self-determination. Thus, when at our urging, steps were taken to erect a structure of constitutional government this development made verbal headlines.

Throughout the entire time of "democratic development" after elections were promised, the administration made frequent mention of this progress. While cautioning that "we cannot impose impossible standards for a young nation at war," spokesmen marveled at the "move to a constitutional basis of government. . . ." Like a proud parent watching his offspring's first steps, William Bundy intoned: "There is a tremendous aspiration for constitutional and democratically elected government in that country."

North Vietnam: Our Evil and Unsuccessful Adversary

If, then, we had almost nothing negative to say about the south, our descriptions of the northern half of the country more than compensated for it. In the official view, North Vietnam more than satisfied


104 "Mr. Bundy Discusses Viet-Nam on 'Meet the Press,'" Department of State Bulletin, LVII, No. 1473 (September 18, 1967), 354.
the seeming need of democracies to fight only totally malevolent regimes. At the root of the problem, it was said, lay the immediate effort of the North Vietnamese leaders to create a police state after the 1954 partition. "They did this," a report of the Department of State related, "to establish iron control over their own population and to insure a secure base for subversion in South Viet-Nam and Laos." 105 As a result of the communist takeover in the north, officials frequently made mention of the large number of refugees (estimates varied: 900,000, "almost a million" and "more than a million") who fled to the south. 106

Conveying the image of an inherently uncooperative north, spokesmen sought to place the onus of blame on Hanoi for the failure to hold elections in 1956. "... Communist North Viet-Nam was not prepared to allow elections that would permit free expression..." "There was no chance of free elections in North Viet-Nam in 1956," went the refrain. 107 "Thus," concluded a State Department lawyer, "it cannot be said that there was any breach of agreement by South Viet-Nam when it declined to proceed toward elections that could not possibly

105 United States Policy in Viet-Nam, p. 5.
have been meaningful." However, these gentlemen failed to inform their audiences of the fact that Diem refused even to discuss the matter with the north. Thus, while neither Vietnam has been hailed as a model of free and fair elections, we will never know what might have come about through consultations. Further, I should observe that the western representatives at Geneva favored elections only after ten years end of hostilities and were finally forced to accept the two year proviso.

Thwarted in its opportunity to violate the Geneva provision for "free" elections, the government of the north, allegedly violated the accords wherever else possible. Secretary Rusk condemned Hanoi: "They have treated those agreements with contempt." Successive spokesmen over the entire four-year period surveyed made much mention of the 1962 International Control Commission report which "found Hanoi guilty of violating the Geneva Accords." 110

Certainly the strongest bill of particulars against the North Vietnamese-supported Viet Cong was (and is) its use of violent terror tactics against civilian populations. This claim became a mainstay of administration argumentation. "Brutal attacks" and "evil murders" were


charged and the President contrasted our air attacks to the Viet Cong civilian atrocities. "Our attacks have all been aimed at strictly military targets—not hotels, and movie theaters, and embassy buildings."\textsuperscript{111}

The War as Aggression from the North

In the foregoing discussion of the administration view of goals and the two Vietnams, the aggression theme has been ever present. This single term permeates the administration rationale for intervention. Perhaps on the theory that a point of view oft repeated becomes fact, policy makers invoked the aggression thesis in every speech dealing with the war. Hanoi's plot is usually described as having been begun overtly in 1959.\textsuperscript{112} "Beyond question," argued the Secretary of State, "this aggression was initiated and is directed by Hanoi."\textsuperscript{113} The argument changed remarkably little in character over four years.

1964: In South Viet-Nam, as you well know, the independence of a nation and the freedom of its people are being threatened by Communist aggression and terrorism.\textsuperscript{114}

1965: But however new the technique of aggression, however great the distance from any one of us, and however thick the smokescreen of propaganda—the hard facts and


\textsuperscript{112} See, for example, W. Bundy, \textit{Department of State Bulletin,} February 8, 1965, 172 and "Secretary Rusk Discusses Viet-Nam Situation on 'Face the Nation' Program," \textit{Department of State Bulletin, LII, No.} 1344 (March 29, 1965), 443.

\textsuperscript{113} Rusk, \textit{Department of State Bulletin,} June 8, 1964, 890.

\textsuperscript{114} McNamara, \textit{Department of State Bulletin,} April 13, 1964, 562.
irrefutable evidence, visible to anyone who is willing to see, lead to one inescapable conclusion: The Republic of Viet-Nam is the object of aggression unleashed by its neighbor to the north.\textsuperscript{115}

1966: These facts, it seems to us, make it clear beyond question that the war in South Viet-Nam has few of the attributes of an indigenous revolt. It is a cynical and systematic aggression by the North Vietnamese regime against the people of South Viet-Nam.\textsuperscript{116}

1967: But the fact that it is Vietnamese who have attacked Vietnamese does not make armed aggression any more acceptable.\textsuperscript{117}

These assertions that the war fit the mold of aggression better than any other were grounded in certain subsidiary arguments about the course of the war and its history. Let us consider several of these below.

\textbf{South Vietnam as an Independent State}

We have observed several times already that the official interpretation of the Geneva accords held that this document divided the Franco-Vietnamese war by partition--creating separate southern and northern entities. Frankly, my reading--and the opinion of several others--does not lend support to this claim, although it is undeniable that the temporary partition of the undecided war made separate northern and southern development almost inevitable. Observe how provisions for a "military demarcation line" deemed "provisional"--separating combatants into two "regroupment zones"--became a virtual declaration of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{116} Ball, \textit{Department of State Bulletin}, February 14, 1966, 242.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Katzenbach, \textit{Department of State Bulletin}, November 6, 1967, 602.
\end{itemize}
independence for the south (as well as the north). The following references indicate the extent to which this interpretation held forth (in all cases emphasis has been supplied by this author):

The country was cut roughly in half at the 17th parallel, creating the Communist regime of Ho Chi Minh in the north and a non-Communist state in the south.\footnote{United States Policy in Viet-Nam, 1-2. William Bundy repeats this phrase verbatim in W. Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, June 7, 1965, 891.}

When Indochina was divided and the independent states of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were created under the conditions of the Geneva Accords of 1954, it was at once clear that in the face of the North Vietnamese threat South Vietnam and Laos could not maintain their independence without outside assistance.\footnote{Rusk, Southeast Asia Resolution, Hearings, p. 4.}

In 1954 the Geneva accords were ratified, guaranteeing the independent status of South Viet-Nam.\footnote{Humphrey, Department of State Bulletin, March 8, 1965, 331.}

If in isolating these statements, and commenting upon them, I appear overcritical, let me emphasize that no one (except the North Vietnamese, and, occasionally in the past, the South Vietnamese) today denies that North Vietnam and South Vietnam are divided; but the attempt to claim that this status derived (or was "guaranteed") from Geneva misses the mark. It is true that after 1954 Vietnam "was divided," but the division came via efforts by Hanoi, Saigon, and Washington to secure their respective bastions in the north and south.

Why the administration took the position that the Geneva accords sanctioned the separation of Vietnam into northern and southern states is a mystery to me. A far more persuasive case is made for the implications of de facto independence by Undersecretary Nicholas Katzenbach:
"Certainly it is no more acceptable for the North Vietnamese to attempt to unite Viet-Nam by force than it would be for one part of divided Germany, or China, or Korea to unite those countries by force."  

The Insurgency as Controlled by Hanoi

At the heart of the "aggression thesis" was the claim that the southern insurgency was initiated, organized, controlled, and supplied by the North Vietnamese. Given that South Vietnam was independent, these two propositions would constitute prima facie evidence of aggressive intent. Thus, the administration spared no opportunity to cite evidence of northern control. In rapid succession it was argued that the aggression was originated, supplied, and controlled by Hanoi. Possibly the most succinct statement to this effect was given by the President in a speech in Indianapolis in 1965. "The evidence is clear," spoke Johnson: "The guerilla war in South Vietnam was inspired by Hanoi; It was organized in Hanoi; It is directed in Hanoi; And it is today being supplied from Hanoi."  

In this scheme the southern-based National Liberation Front was termed "a facade fabricated by the Hanoi regime to confuse the issue and elaborate the myth of an indigenous revolt."  

The argument of northern control was connected to and reinforced by another claim: But for support from the north, the southern

121Katzenbach, Department of State Bulletin, November 6, 1967, 602.

122Public Papers 1966, II, 761.

insurgency would be impossible. Johnson called Hanoi's support the "heartbeat" of the war, claiming that "without the flow of men and equipment from the North, the war would soon end."\textsuperscript{124}

The Conflict: Not a Civil War

The issue of "rhetoric" versus "reality" is but another manifestation of the old dichotomy between "appearance" and "reality." In defending the aggression thesis, administration spokesmen were aware that the Vietnam war contained aspects usually associated with a civil war. To expose this appearance as unreality policy makers confronted the issue directly. Denying that the war was "an indigenous rebellion" or that it was "a spontaneous and local rebellion against the established government," administration spokesmen attacked certain claims about the insurgent movement.\textsuperscript{125} One argument was phrased as a question: were not the soldiers of the north and south all Vietnamese? (This challenge was aptly put in a bumper sticker popular around 1968: "How many Vietnamese fought in the American Civil War?") No, said Secretary Rusk. Although the native combatants were all Vietnamese, the presence of North Vietnamese men and materiel below the seventeenth parallel was "aggression contrary to established agreements." Debunking another "myth," William Bundy denied "that the Viet Cong movement has any relationship to the political opposition to President Diam."\textsuperscript{126}

Conceding the presence of "dissident minorities" in South Vietnam


\textsuperscript{125} Meeker, Department of State Bulletin, January 9, 1967, 57 and Aggression from the North, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{126} Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, June 7, 1965, 893.
as in "all countries evolving as rapidly as that one" Secretary McNamara argued that they could be "properly controlled" and "properly assimilated" without "this aggression from the North."\(^{127}\)

The South Vietnamese Oppose Domination from Hanoi

Part of the administration persuasive campaign to win "the hearts and minds" of the American people was to suggest that the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese lay with the government of the south. The President expressed, on several occasions, his firm belief that the South Vietnamese people were determined to save their country and that the citizens of the south did not want "to have an ideology pushed down their throats and imposed upon them."\(^{128}\) Only a minority of people, it was said, supported the enemy--most of these only by coercion.\(^{129}\) On two occasions Secretary Rusk related the U.S. government's inability to find evidence of popular support for the National Liberation Front.\(^{130}\)

Rhetorically juxtaposed to the absence of affection for the Viet Cong was the related argument that the people supported their government. After all, did not the Army of the Republic of Vietnam absorb heavy casualties? This argument was repeated again and again. No one can doubt the determination of the South Vietnamese people, Johnson


\(^{129}\) See United States Policy in Viet-Nam, 6 and Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, March 22, 1965, 401.

insisted, "They have lost more than 12,000 of their men since I became your President a little over a year ago."  

A further index of popular support for the Saigon government was seen in the indicated movement of refugees from the contested countryside into areas secured by the government. Unable to express their opinion in any other fashion these men and women "voted with their feet" for the government.

The Enemy Has Said So

If any additional support for the aggression thesis were deemed necessary it came, finally, from the camp of the enemy. On the theory that actions speak loudest when backed by words, Washington policy makers quoted, chapter and verse, the bellicose statements recorded from Hanoi. The most frequently cited language was a plank from the North Vietnamese Communist Party declaration of 1960 to the effect that the party would "liberate the South from the atrocious rule of the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen." Before a committee of the United Nations, U.S. Representative Francis T. P. Plimpton revived six such declarations, reminding the delegates that the authors were "the official voices of the Communist Party, the ruling party in North Viet-Nam, and its leaders." Speaking to the Washington, Missouri, chamber of commerce, Assistant Secretary Bundy declared that these and other North

131L. B. Johnson, Viet-Nam: The Third Face of the War, p. 11.

132Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, June 12, 1965, 1004.


Vietnamese statements revealed the "true nature of the struggle."\textsuperscript{135}

The War as Part of a Wider Communist Threat

If the North Vietnamese "aggression" amounted to the "heartbeat" of the war, the "aggression thesis" and its attendant argumentation was, likewise, the foundation of the case for American involvement in Vietnam. The thesis served to establish guilt and, when coupled with our moral opposition to imperialism, provided a reason to intervene in the conflict. But clearly, the case for commitment went far beyond the local impact of the war on the Vietnamese people. The war was seen as part of a wider pattern of conflict, and our involvement in it came to be justified in terms of the pursuit of more general policy principles. Arguments based on the deeper meaning of Vietnam as a cold war conflict wedded the war more closely to our traditional national interests and, thus, became part of a stronger rationale for commitment.

The Communist World Revolution

Theologians have long debated the existence and the form of both the Creator and His counterpart, the devil. In this connection it is interesting to note parallel trends to bury the former (e.g., "God is dead") and resurrect his antithesis—witness, for example the current interest in exorcism. All of this may only go to prove that, while men feel able to take goodness for granted, they have a need to personify their fears and hates. So it is with our thirty-year battle with communism. Militant anti-communism has served, since the administration

\textsuperscript{135}Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, February 8, 1965, 172.
of Harry Truman, as a barometer of American foreign policy. In these years the success or failure of any policy could be measured simply as to whether it furthered or foiled the communist conspiracy. Vietnam, thus, became but another bench mark in the struggle against this threat.

Secretary Brezhnev's recent declaration that the cold war is over should stand as ample proof that the conflict was well in progress ten years ago. This speculation is well proven in the rhetoric of the Vietnam war. Repeatedly, our leadership invoked the cold war and connected our Vietnam policy to it. Thus, Johnson spoke of efforts to "bring about a Communist-dominated world." Secretary Rusk held forth on the communist ideology of revolution, reminding students of Valparaiso University of the communist commitment to take over Southeast Asia. Rusk continued, pointing out that the Sino-Soviet dispute was, in part, a question of means not ends. American policy in Vietnam was, thus, grounded in a deep concern for communism.

Our general fears of the Marxist world were only multiplied when relations with Communist China came in question. China in the early and mid-1960's was something quite like a nightmare for American policy makers. The predominant theme was to focus on Chinese declarations of intent. Repeatedly, officials conjured visions of Chinese efforts to dominate Asia, if not the world. Particular attention was paid to the famous Lin Piao article in which the Chinese marshal spoke of consolidating control of underdeveloped areas so as to surround and finally

136 Public Papers 1963-1964, I, 495.
subvert the highly developed western world. William Bundy termed the article "a clear and comprehensive indication" that the Communist Chinese has not moderated their "virulent revolutionary policy" of aggression. With such clear declarations of policy, Secretary Rusk explained that "one doesn't require a 'domino' theory to get at this. Peiping has announced the doctrine." Assistant Secretary of State Douglas MacArthur II interpreted the declarations as a "warning of Hanoi's and Peking's intentions just as Hitler gave us fair warning in Mein Kampf before World War II." And the long arm of China was seen as part of the problem in Southeast Asia. Consistently, the war in Vietnam was described as an integral part of the Chinese blueprint for domination. The famous statements on revolution by Khrushchev and Lin Piao on revolutionary war were applied to Vietnam.

China is Urging On North Vietnam

Further support to the claim that the Vietnam war was a part of the world communist conspiracy was seen in the close association of the

140 Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, January 18, 1965, 64.
141 See MacArthur, Department of State Bulletin, November 14, 1966, 749.
Chinese and North Vietnamese communists. Future scholarship may well prove that preoccupation with the communist monolith was on the wane in the mid-1960's. However, the tendency to identify China as one of the enemies in Vietnam seems to indicate a continuance of the cold war tendency to see a deeper danger in each case of conflict. Similar to the process by which the Viet Cong were viewed as connected to Hanoi, Chinese designs were read into efforts of the north. At issue was China's role as a supplier to the north. Hanoi, it was said, was "backed by Communist China;" the effort in the south was "supported and incited" by Peking.\footnote{McNamara, \textit{Department of State Bulletin}, August 30, 1965, 343 and McNamara, \textit{Department of State Bulletin}, August 30, 1965, 370.} In statements by the Secretary of State, Chinese intentions were connected to those of the North Vietnamese as the phrase "Hanoi and Peiping" punctuated his speeches.\footnote{"Secretary Rusk's News Conference of December 9," \textit{Department of State Bulletin}, LIII, No. 1383 (December 27, 1965), 1011, Rusk, \textit{Department of State Bulletin}, May 4, 1964, 695, Rusk, \textit{Department of State Bulletin}, June 8, 1964, 890, Rusk, \textit{Department of State Bulletin}, October 26, 1964, 576 and Rusk, \textit{Department of State Bulletin}, July 12, 1965, 51.} A State Department document based on an address by the Secretary of Defense capsulized China's part in the Vietnam war: "For Peiping, however, Hanoi's victory would be only a first step toward eventual Chinese hegemony over the two Viet-Nams and Southeast Asia and toward exploitation of the new strategy in other parts of the world."\footnote{United States Policy in Viet-Nam, p. 4.}

The Tactical Shift from Aggression to Subversion

In the official rhetoric of commitment to Vietnam the United States was not the only nation seen capable of learning from history.
As we had adjusted our diplomatic and military tactics to meet communist aggression, so, too, had the communists shifted their attacks to compensate for these preparations. In this view, our vigilance in Korea had taught aggressors not to engage in a direct invasion. The Vietnam war was regarded as a manifestation of a tactical shift toward covert subversion. Realizing the consequences of North Korea's invasion of the south, the North Vietnamese "tried desperately to conceal their hand." 146 "Korea proved to the Communists," added Assistant Secretary Bundy, "that they had to find a more effective strategy of conquest." 147

The "more effective strategy" Bundy cited was said to be the communist-proclaimed "wars of national liberation." Indeed, defined (by Bundy) as "aggression from outside a nation . . . disguised in nationalist trappings," the national liberation strategy seemed to fit the case of Vietnam. Thus, President Johnson termed the struggle "aggression in a new guise" and others in the administration followed suit. 148

Vietnam as a Test Case

Like Korea, in the past, Vietnam apparently represented the blueprint for the future. As part of the continuing world conflict, Vietnam was doubly serious--for if the new strategy worked, what hope could there be for the future as such insurgent aggressions spread

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147 Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, June 7, 1965, 894.
across the globe? Thus, the "test case" thesis became a new theoretical refinement of the old domino theory. Whereas the domino theory lacked a description of cause (i.e., why the fall of one nation meant the demise of its neighbors), the "test case" conception supplied it. Like the Spanish Civil War where fascist and Nazi forces tested their weapons, the war in Vietnam was to be a proving ground for the newly refined war of national liberation.

Policy makers did not have to look far for proof of this theory. Again, communist leaders were quoted as to their plans. Secretary McNamara cited Khrushchev, saying that the chairman had "referred specifically to Viet-Nam."\(^\text{149}\) Another official listed claims by North Vietnamese General Giap that the war would be a communist model for the future.\(^\text{150}\) The notion that the communists had chosen Vietnam to prove their power and our impotence echoes throughout the administration literature on Vietnam. Vietnam was "a major test," "a crucial test," a critical test," "a decisive test"--it was, most importantly, "the testing of an issue vital to all of Asia and indeed the world. Can independent, non-Communist states not only survive but grow and flourish in face of Communist pressure?"\(^\text{151}\)

The implications of the test case thesis were clear to most policy makers as they enjoined Americans to redouble their dedication to

\(^{149}\) McNamara, Department of State Bulletin, April 13, 1964, 565.

\(^{150}\) MacArthur, Department of State Bulletin, November 16, 1966, 749.

stopping communism—not merely for the sake of Vietnam but for the world. "We are fighting," declared the President, not merely for the 14 million in Vietnam but "for a hundred nations' freedom and liberty. . . ." 152 This notion of the universality of our aims in Vietnam was furthered by the claim that if the test case succeeded in Vietnam then more such insurgencies would go forth. The war was meant to be "the opening salvo in a series of bombardments," and if it succeeded other aggressors would move forward—particularly Peking. 153 That the test thesis was merely old wine in a new bottle is well illustrated in this remark by Johnson, so reminiscent of the domino principle: "The leaders of free Asian nations know this better than anyone. If South Vietnam falls, then they are the next targets." 154

Vietnam and the Lessons of World War II

The connection between Vietnam and the cold war against communism was only one such effort to discern deeper meaning in the murky circumstances there. A second strain of thought related the war to the continuing thirty-year American lesson in the need to resist aggression. The "lessons" of the period before and after the Second World War were, it seemed, indelibly inscribed in the world view of Johnson Administration policy makers. In this view, the failure to stop aggressors in the thirties led to World War II just as our prompt resistance to


aggression in the two succeeding decades had prevented World War III.
The lesson of World War II became a consistent theme in the administration case. "And surely, if we have learned anything in the last 30 or 35 years," commented Secretary Rusk, "we have learned that a course of aggression which is allowed to proceed unchecked merely leads to a greater catastrophe. . . ."\textsuperscript{155} Said the President: "The world remembers--the world must never forget--that aggression unchallenged is aggression unleashed."\textsuperscript{156}

The implications of history for the Vietnam situation were clear. Secretary Rusk put our purpose as a response to these bitter lessons. "And we are fighting in Viet-Nam because we are resolved not to repeat the blunders which led to the Second World War."\textsuperscript{157} U. N. Ambassador Goldberg expressed similar sentiments, explaining to an audience of printing executives that, "Americans are fighting and dying in South Vietnam tonight because the United States has learned that awesome lesson of history."\textsuperscript{158}

Keeping a Commitment

Having learned the folly of isolation, the United States assumed an interventionist posture after the Second World War. Our victory in that conflict, explained Vice President Humphrey gave us a responsibility

\textsuperscript{155}Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, March 29, 1965, 445.
\textsuperscript{156}Public Papers 1966, II, 921.
\textsuperscript{157}Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, November 27, 1967, 703.
\textsuperscript{158}Arthur Goldberg, "The Quest for Peace in Viet-Nam," Department of State Bulletin, LIV, No. 1389 (February 7, 1966), 199.
to stabilize the world. President Johnson saw in our world role the same spirit of sacrifice exemplified by Valley Forge—only on a larger scale. "There is no one else who can do the job," he said. Our assumption of world responsibilities, however, required the maintenance of credibility—for if aggressors believed we would not act, then history would repeat itself. Douglas MacArthur II recalled for an audience in Brussels, the western democracies failure to act. When Hitler entered Poland, said MacArthur, "he did so convinced that the western democracies would not react." The commitments to Poland became but pieces of paper. MacArthur concluded, "The commitments were not credible because earlier commitments had not been honored."

This historically based chain of reasoning was lifted from its European setting and applied to Asia—only the names and places were changed to convict the guilty. "If our commitment were not fulfilled in Vietnam," asked the President, "who can trust it in the heart of Europe?" Indeed the President emphasized, "There are many nations, large and small, whose security depends on the reliability of the word and the reliability of the power of the United States." In connection with Vietnam, officials emphasized that the people of Asia looked with hope to the future because of our stand. The Asians apparently feared we

159 Humphrey, Department of State Bulletin, July 4, 1966, 4.
would leave. Extending this analogy to the world at large, Secretary Rusk maintained, "I believe that the integrity of the American commitment is the principal structure of peace throughout the world." The result of a failure to abide by our word in Vietnam would, therefore, diminish the viability of our alliances throughout the world. If we ignored the commitment, Johnson declared, "we might as well tear up all the treaties we are party to." Similarly, Rusk felt that "if those who would be our enemies should come to think that the defensive commitments of the United States . . . are just bluffs, we would be on the slippery slope to general war. . . ."

United States Security at Stake

As aggression anywhere could signal a new era of war, policy makers emphasized that although we were far stronger than any nation, our security was bound up with the ability of others to remain free. "Our national interest in security and peace is global." Viewed in such terms and against such a background, our defense of Vietnam benefited not only Asians but was integral to our own defense. Thus, argued Secretary McNamara:

. . . the stakes in South Viet-Nam are far greater than the loss of one small country to communism. Its loss would be a most serious setback to the cause of freedom and would greatly complicate the

163 Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, May 11, 1964, 737 and Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, June 20, 1966, 966.
164 Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, August 30, 1965, 343.
165 Public Papers 1965, I, 368.
166 Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, November 27, 1967, 703.
167 Rusk, "The University Campus and Foreign Policy," Department of State Bulletin, LV, No. 1434 (December 19, 1966), 917.
task of preventing the further spread of militant Asian communism. And if that spread is not halted, our strategic position in the world will be weakened and our national security directly endangered.\textsuperscript{168}

It was just this chain of thought which provided support to Johnson's exclamation in Alaska upon returning from his seventeen-day Asian trip; "... I would rather have that aggression take place out 10,000 miles from here than take place here in Anchorage.\textsuperscript{169}

If aggression anywhere cast a threatening shadow on our shores, then the converse was held to be true. "Our own security is strengthened by the determination of others to remain free," the Secretary of Defense affirmed.\textsuperscript{170} Speaking in the same vein, President Johnson claimed, "But we have also learned ... that our own freedom depends upon the freedom of others, that our own protection requires that we help protect others. ..."\textsuperscript{171}

The Administration Case: The Summary of a Synthesis

As the foregoing review of the administration case for commitment to Vietnam has been somewhat lengthy it might be well, at this point, to abstract the argumentation in outline form. Such a summary should breathe a greater spirit of reality into the argumentation and provide a more coherent image of how the arguments interrelated and how each furthered the persuasive purpose. Inasmuch as the administration rhetoric of justification was consistent over the four-year period, I

\textsuperscript{168} McNamara, \textit{Department of State Bulletin}, August 30, 1965, 371.


\textsuperscript{170} McNamara, \textit{Department of State Bulletin}, April 13, 1964, 564.

\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Public Papers 1964-1965}, I, 494.
have prepared the outline in the form of what could be considered a sort of prototype speech justifying intervention. If, as White says, Presidential candidates employ a consistent litany of arguments and phrases throughout a campaign—"The Speech"—then the following outline best exemplifies "the speech" for commitment to and involvement in Vietnam. It is expressed in seven contentions.

I. Our present policy in Vietnam is consistent with our past policy there.

A. Over a twenty year period this nation has made consistent and firm commitments to the people of Vietnam.

1. President Eisenhower pledged our aid to South Vietnam in 1954.

2. The Senate ratified the SEATO treaty in 1955. That treaty extended its protection to Vietnam in an attached protocol.

3. President Kennedy, when requested, increased our aid to the south.

B. The recent escalation of the war has not marked any change in purpose or in policy. Rather, the level of United States assistance has increased in response to the rising campaign of communist insurgency.

II. Our policy toward Vietnam remains directed toward the goals of peace, self-determination and progress.

A. We seek no wider war.

B. We would gladly withdraw our forces if the aggression ceased. The situation only calls for nations to leave their neighbors alone.

C. But, if the aggression continues, so will our aid.

1. America will keep its promise with all the resources necessary.

2. We will supply our assistance for as long as the threat remains.
D. Nevertheless, though we will not tire in waging war, neither will we falter in pursuit of an honorable settlement.

1. We have long called for a return to provisions of the Geneva settlement.

2. We have made and will continue to make every effort to bring about negotiations.

3. We will go anywhere, and will talk to anyone.

4. We impose no preconditions.

E. But, let not our adversary interpret our wish for peace as weakness of spirit. We are pledged to the defense of South Vietnam's freedom and self-determination.

F. Nor should the world mistake our aims.

1. We seek no bases or other privileges in Vietnam.

2. We seek no alliances or territory.

3. We do not threaten the regime in North Vietnam.

4. Rather, we seek only the restoration of peace throughout Indochina.

III. Our commitment in Vietnam is to a peaceful and democratic people.

A. Vietnam made rapid economic, political and social progress in the 1954-1960 period--when left alone.

B. Today, although Vietnam is a young and wartorn nation, she has made considerable progress toward democracy.

IV. On the other hand, free Vietnam's neighbor to the north has not had the same peaceful intent.

A. Beginning in 1954 Ho Chi Minh established a police state in the north.

B. Almost a million refugees fled the terror in the north to seek sanctuary in the south.

C. From the first Hanoi concentrated its resources into a powerful army.

D. Unable to compete with the economic progress of the south, the communists decided to conquer it.
E. The International Control Commission has found Hanoi guilty of violating the Geneva accords.

V. The insurgency in South Vietnam is confusing to many people around the world. Yet, none should doubt that the war is, first and foremost, aggression from the north.

A. Hanoi attempts to upset the legitimate government of an independent country. South Vietnam's independence was established by the 1954 Geneva accords which divided Vietnam into two States: a communist government in the north and a non-communist state in the south.

B. The insurgency was initiated and is controlled, directed and supplied by the north.

1. The so-called National Liberation Front is nothing more than a facade created by Hanoi to obscure the fact of its aggression.

2. The insurgency would soon collapse if the aggression by Hanoi was ended.

C. In no sense can the conflict be called a civil war.

1. The Viet Cong rebels bear no relationship to the political opposition to Diem and later regimes.

2. The fact that all combatants are Vietnamese does not justify the effort to unify the country by aggression.

D. Nor should anyone suppose that the people of Vietnam support this invasion of their land.

1. The high casualty rates sustained by the Vietnamese army is a sign of their determination to be free.

2. Evidence reveals little support for the Viet Cong. Viet Cong recruitment is largely through coercion.

E. Any lingering doubts as to the true nature of the aggression are dispelled by the enemy himself. The North Vietnamese have publicly proclaimed their resolve to subject the south.

VI. The Vietnamese war, serious in itself, is yet part of a wider pattern of aggression.

A. The communist world adheres to a program of world conquest. Communist China's dedication to revolution in Asia is particularly serious.

B. China is urging on the North Vietnamese in their attacks upon the south.
C. The Korean war proved to the communists that a direct invasion would bring a United States response.

D. Now the communists attempt "wars of national liberation." Designed to appear as indigenous uprisings, these attacks are aggression in a new form.

E. Vietnam has been marked as the test case of the new strategy of insurgency.

1. If the communists were to succeed in Vietnam such aggressive efforts would multiply throughout the world.

2. Thus, we must again prove in Vietnam that aggression--in any form--will not succeed.

VII. Further, our policy in Vietnam stems from principles long established as sound.

A. We have learned that to ignore aggression is to encourage it.

1. Our failure to check German, Italian and Japanese aggression encouraged the dictators and led to World War II.

2. On the other hand, our prompt response in Korea saved that nation from aggression and prevented World War III.

B. As the strongest free world power we have a responsibility to aid nations in their efforts to remain free.

C. If we were to abandon Vietnam then no nation could believe in a United States commitment. The weakening of our alliances would bring the world closer to war.

D. However, the maintenance of strong, credible commitments is important to our own national security.

1. The fall of Vietnam or the success of any other aggression would weaken our world position and lessen our security.

2. Our security is strongest in a world of free peoples determined to resist aggression.

The case for commitment to Vietnam and escalation of the war is, even in outline form, a large body of argumentative content. In the chapters that follow we will examine that content against a battery of
critical standards so as to better understand the strategies in and assumptions of the rationale for commitment.
Chapter V

ARGUMENTATION IN THE CASE FOR VIETNAM INVOLVEMENT

Even by official reckoning the Vietnam war was a costly commitment in American manpower and money. It is doubtful that a sacrifice of over 50,000 lives, many more casualties, and one hundred billion dollars would have been undertaken lightly or without thought. As the war wound on without a decisive outcome, popular support withered. Yet, at no time did a majority of the American people ever actively oppose the policies of the Johnson--or Nixon--Administration. Our study of the administration case for commitment must, therefore, be tempered with the realization that the government's handling of the war was at least satisfactory for most citizens.

One Johnson Administration claim about the war is, in retrospect, true: We desired no tangible reward for our intervention. Truly we received none. In view of the costs involved in our Vietnam adventure no body of arguments in modern times has demanded so much of a nation. If, indeed, the whole history of the last ten years had been dominated by the Vietnam debate then it is fitting that we carefully scrutinize the rationale for that involvement.

Vietnam and American Culture

I have several times claimed that much of the argumentation justifying Vietnam involvement was a logical (even necessary) outgrowth of the language, thought, and rhetoric of the cold war. With the case
for commitment now entered into the record let me now develop this notion further. Two research questions set forth at the outset of this study are relevant at this point. Questions three and four dealt with the relationship of the administration argumentation to the rhetoric of the cold war and to American diplomacy in the post-World War II period. It is clear beyond reasonable doubt that the rationale for involvement was an outgrowth of earlier language, argument, and action. The very fact that Vietnam was seen as a test case of a new direction in the cold war serves to illustrate the degree to which thinking about Vietnam was bound up with an existing world view.

In a short introduction to the principles of sociology, Peter Berger makes reference to what he terms "the meaning system." This concept is another way of expressing Boulding's notion of the image system. Berger writes that an individual's mode of organizing cognitions "provides him with an interpretation of his existence and the world. . . ." Clearly the ideology of the cold war constituted such a focus of orientation. In chapter II of this dissertation I established a cold war intellectual construct in terms of six commonly accepted propositions about the world and America's role in global affairs. Examination of the government's justification of its Vietnam policy demonstrates that this argumentation was but a refinement of the previously established perspective.

Cold war thinking was grounded in a profound regard for the lessons of history. The failure to stop aggression in the 1930's (leading

\footnote{Peter L. Berger, \textit{Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective}, Anchor Books (Garden City; N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1963), pp. 49-53.}
to World War II) and the success in stopping later communist encroachments established a framework for policy. Seemingly motivated by George Santayana's dictum that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it," American policy makers resolved not to let aggression go unpunished. Speaking to "Some Fundamentals of American Foreign Policy," Secretary Rusk was emphatic in his concern for history. "Can those of us in this room forget the lesson that . . . it was only 10 years from the seizure of Manchuria to Pearl Harbor; about 2 years from the seizure of Czechoslovakia to the outbreak of World War II in Western Europe?" No one could allege that President Johnson had not gained from the experience as he modified this "inescapable teaching" into an absolute precept, universally applied. "... For we know," said Johnson, "that surrender anywhere threatens defeat everywhere." These references, taken from policy statements on Vietnam, reveal that the teachings of history—which were at the heart of the cold war perspective—also served as a basis for our 1964-1967 commitment to Saigon.

A second postulate of the post-World War II confrontation era was the belief that the conflict was a battle of right versus wrong. This conception was a crucial element in the official rhetoric on Vietnam. North Vietnam was a fitting adversary. Unsuccessful in its economic development this police state had, from the first, plotted to violate the Geneva agreements and wrest control of the south from the legitimate government. The north was, then, totally malevolent in

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3 Public Papers 1963-1964, I, 494. (emphasis added)
intention and action. All that was necessary for peace was for Hanoi to comply with the agreements and cease the aggression. Of course, the evil intent of Hanoi became even more obvious when contrasted to the motives and policies of Saigon and Washington. The government of the south was peaceful and had won for its people progress and democracy. The United States sought only to remove the aggression and guarantee self-determination for the people of the south. We sought no privileges or resources and, even though Hanoi had begun the war, we wished not to widen it, preferring negotiations.

The cold war ideology was characterized by a tendency to view local events as part of the world-wide struggle with communism. Thus, each incident was seen as a probe against our defenses which, if successful, would lead to more. The rhetoric of Vietnam involvement is also prone to view the particular threat to Vietnam as but the visible tip of an iceberg of greater evil to come. Communist world revolutionary aims were seen lurking behind the Viet Cong movement. China's hand was seen in the fight. The whole communist world, it was said, awaited eagerly the outcome of this test case of the new weapon of subversive aggression.

As the threat represented by the war was unlimited, so, too, was our response. This reaction was exactly that prescribed by the fourth postulate of the cold war consensus. The administration repeatedly declared that we would not falter, or weary; that we would use all necessary means to back our commitment.

A fifth element in the cold war ideology was the perceived value of collective security. While our support to Vietnam was essentially unilateral we, nevertheless, trumpeted the contributions of other allies.
Estimates of the number varied (five to thirty) but, consistently spokesmen reminded the American people of the contributions of our several co-combatants. Furthermore, because we proved the strength of our commitment by fighting for Vietnam, the war strengthened collective security in the free world. Vietnam was the proof of the assumption that our strength increased with the determination of others to be free. The earlier calls for unity at home as well as abroad were likewise present in the argumentation associated with Vietnam; the Johnson Administration position on collective security and unity was but an echo of an earlier call to arms.

The implied purpose of containment was to discourage aggression by proving that such activity would fail when counterforce was applied. This hope, which underlay the philosophy of confrontation with communism, was an explicit part of the case for involvement in Vietnam. If abandoning the people of the south meant a further spate of wars, then our forceful defense of freedom proved to the communists that their new tactic was futile, even counterproductive. Our prompt response to aggression helped assure that the frontier of freedom would not soon be breached again.

The close correspondence between the post-World War II policy belief system and the Johnson Administration case for Vietnam involvement is clear. As before, we may summarize the relationship of the administration case to its cold war precursor.

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### Postulates of the Cold War

#### Ideology

1. The lessons of the 1930's and 1940's teach that aggression must be resisted.

2. Our aims and those of our communist adversary are antithetical:
   - A. The enemy is evil.
   - B. We are well-intentioned.

3. The evil is a total threat.

#### Arguments in the Case for Vietnam Involvement

"The world remembers--the world must not forget--that aggression unchallenged is aggression unleashed."\(^5\)

"South Viet-Nam is fighting for its life against a brutal campaign of terror and armed attack inspired, directed, supplied, and controlled by the Communist regime in Hanoi."\(^6\)

"We saw that the South Vietnam Government, assisted by our nation and others, is improving the lives of its people."\(^7\)

"In simple terms, a victory for the Communists in South Viet-Nam would inevitably make the neighboring states more susceptible to Communist pressure and more vulnerable to intensified subversion by military pressures."\(^8\)

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\(^{5}\) Public Papers 1963-1964, II, 928.

\(^{6}\) Aggression from the North, p. 1. F. Michael Smith argues that the Johnson Administration shifted argumentative ground in 1965 when it argued that the war was aggression from the north. Formerly, Smith finds, the administration regarded the war as an insurgency. See F. Michael Smith, "Rhetorical Implications of the 'Aggression' Thesis in the Johnson Administration's Vietnam Argumentation," Central States Speech Journal, XXIII, No. 4 (Winter, 1972), 217-24. My reading of the history of Vietnam and of the cold war since 1940 indicates that his impression is a mistaken one.

\(^{7}\) Public Papers 1966, II, 1272.

\(^{8}\) W. Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, February 8, 1965, 171.
Postulates of the Cold War

4. United States interest in
world affairs must be
unlimited.

5. Collective security is
necessary.

6. If we stop aggression,
maybe aggression will
cease.

Arguments in the Case for
Vietnam Involvement

"We have lived so long with
Crisis and danger that we
accept, almost without divi-
sions, the premise of American
concern for threats to order."9

"Our own security is strength-
ened by the determination of
others to remain free, and by
our commitment to assist them."10

"They [American people] have
learned the great lesson of this
generation: wherever we have
stood firm aggression has been
halted, peace restored and
liberty maintained."11

If, then, the ideology of the cold war underlies the administration case,
the history of our diplomacy in Southeast Asia reveals the process by
which this "meaning system" became associated with Vietnam. Documents
of American foreign policy reveal that as early as 1946 policy toward
French Indochina was made on the basis that Ho Chi Minh was a communist.
When the fall of China and the Korean war convinced American decision
makers that the French colonial war was really a part of containment,
the thinking of the cold war became integral to our perceptions of
events there. The rhetoric of the Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy
Administrations reveals that the Vietnam war was treated as another
example of communist aggression rather than a local insurgency with a
specialized history. Policy makers of the Eisenhower and Kennedy eras


10 McNamara, Department of State Bulletin, April 13, 1964, 564.

11 Public Papers 1965, I, 497.
privately expressed fears of a communist victory in that Southeast Asian country. By 1964 the mark of containment had been indelibly etched in our immovable policy of assistance to Saigon. Johnson Administration decision makers, thus, necessarily reached into the reservoir of confrontation era rhetoric to frame justifications for their policy. In many respects the rhetoric of Vietnam involvement was written long before it appeared in connection with the Vietnam policy of 1964-1967.

**Language in the Administration Rationale**

In chapter II, I stressed the importance of language in the rhetoric of the cold war. Particularly significant was the persuasive effect of the figure of antithesis. Rhetorical juxtapositions such as freedom versus slavery were repeated to great effect and pictured our defense of a divided world. The rhetoric of the cold war was thus characterized and furthered by a distinctive costume of words. This use of symbols to cast the struggle as right versus wrong was persuasive, for if audiences accepted the language of the cold war, they were, perforce, given to accept the policy of confrontation. Once the picture of a black/white dichotomy of intentions and actions was accepted, that image prescribed efforts to oppose the adversary at every point. Similarly, cold war spokesmen picked apart the communist costume of words arguing that their use of the term "liberation" amounted to a distortion of meaning. The use of language in the Vietnam debate was similar in function and form to these symbolic traditions of the 1940's and 1950's. In this section I will examine the role of symbols and language in both characterizing and furthering the case of the administration.
The process by which symbols affect cognition and behavior was a concern of the late Hugh D. Duncan. In his *Symbols in Society*, Duncan established an "Axiomatic Proposition" that "Symbols affect social motives by determining the form in which the contents of relationships can be specified." In this view motive is supplied by the world view conveyed through symbolic meaning. Symbols as expressed in language are, in Duncan's scheme, inherently persuasive. As in the old adage, "a problem realized is a problem half solved," the way in which we perceive a situation determines our behavior toward it. Like Boulding who rejects the distinction between "image" and "reality," Duncan's view of language holds that symbols constitute man's only knowable reality. In the administration case the use of language characterizes the situation and, therefore, persuasively furthers the policy maker's suggested courses of action.

"Communism" as an Agent

Central to the case for commitment is the idea that the war was but part of a larger movement which threatened the nation. The test case thesis held that success in Vietnam would lead to more communist wars of liberation. The argument that China urged on North Vietnam was employed to suggest that a northern conquest of the south would open the door to a Chinese hegemony over Southeast Asia. It may well be true that the administration realized the cracks in the facade of the communist front. However, these arguments assume--to a degree--a cohesion within Communism and this notion was reflected in and furthered by administration language use.

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\(^{12}\) Duncan, p. 48.
Baseball (or now, perhaps, football) may be the nation's sport, but for the past two decades, anti-communism has been the national pastime. References to "communism" had (and have) a persuasive impact by virtue of the socially-approved distaste for anything associated with the term. This observation is supported by John Mueller's work on Korean war opinion polls. Contrasting the results of survey research, Mueller found that when respondents were asked whether they favored opposition to communism a higher percentage supported the Korean war than when the question of our involvement was phrased in terms of merely defending South Korea.

Clearly, the added reference to the "Communist invasion" was an important cue to the respondents, for the NORC question generally found a 15 to 20 percentage point increase in "support" over that indicated by the AIPO-SRC version and a noticeable drop in the percentage without opinion. The words "Communist invasion" seem to have sounded more of a clarion call than did the words "defend south Korea."¹³

The very term "communism" is, like "capitalism" or "democracy," but an all-inclusive abstraction. Underlying all "communist threats" is a specific act by a specific agent (individual or nation). Thus, while one might characterize the Vietnam war as "communist aggression" it would be less abstract to refer to the war as an aggression by North Vietnam or the Viet Cong. And while one might speak of a communist threat to Asia, it would be more precise to talk in terms of the Chinese communist danger--so as to signify that one was not referring to North Korea or the Soviet Union. Use of the term "communism" or "communist" as a perpetrator of action is, then, always somewhat more obtuse than specifying the particular agent.

¹³Mueller, 359.
A survey of the official side of the Vietnam debate reveals the proclivity to sacrifice precision by citing "communism" as an operative in varying situations. In selecting this term—which had symbolic implications—the administration furthered its argumentative position. Use of the term in preference to another immediately called forth the culturally sanctioned responses associated with it. Thus, wherever "communism" is employed in preference to another more specific operative sign, clarity suffers while the administration attempt to argue the wider cold war implications of the Vietnam war is reinforced. The effect would be similar to that reported by Mueller in connection with the Korean war. "To generate a sort of war fever, one merely had to toss the words, "Communist invasion" into the discussion."\textsuperscript{14}

Administration spokesmen frequently used this sort of "argumentative shorthand" and subordinated precision to persuasion. Several examples will illustrate the tendency. Often "communism" was specified as an agent replacing North Vietnam or Viet Cong.

In South Viet-Nam, as you well know, the independence of a nation and the freedom of its people are being threatened by Communist aggression and terrorism.\textsuperscript{15}

If the Communists were to succeed in their assault on South Viet-Nam, the consequences to us, and to the free world as a whole, would be very serious.\textsuperscript{16}

No negotiated settlement in Viet-Nam is possible, as long as the Communists hope to achieve victory by force.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} McNamara, \textit{Department of State Bulletin}, April 13, 1964, 562.

\textsuperscript{16} Rusk, \textit{Department of State Bulletin}, May 11, 1964, 733.

\textsuperscript{17} Public Papers 1963-1964, I, 498.
In Viet-Nam communism seeks to impose its will by force of arms.\(^{18}\)

The Communists expect us to lose heart. The Communists expect to wear us down. The Communists expect to divide this nation. The Communists are not happy about the military defeat they are taking in South Vietnam.\(^{19}\)

In other cases communism is said to threaten Asia. Here, the assumed agent is probably Communist China.

The Communists are eager to take over Southeast Asia.\(^{20}\)

... the free nations of the world must say to the militant disciples of Asian communism: This far and no further.\(^{21}\)

The argument that Vietnam was part of a common blueprint of conquest was reinforced by linguistically unifying various dangers under the single rubric of "communism." Separate incidents could be associated by specifying communism as their common causal element. Thus, President Johnson spoke of the "Communist attack in Korea" and the "Communist attack of the 1960's," leading to the conclusion, "If they get away with this in South Vietnam, they will try it somewhere else--anywhere in the world."\(^{22}\) (emphasis added) William Bundy took a similar approach, arguing that "The Korean War had an important message for the Communists ... they had to find a more effective strategy of conquest."\(^{23}\)

In these examples, and others, specifying "communism" as the agent

\(^{18}\) L. B. Johnson, Vietnam: The Third Face of the War, p. 4.

\(^{19}\) Public Papers 1966, I, 684.

\(^{20}\) Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, May 11, 1964, 733.

\(^{21}\) Public Papers 1966, II, 1271.

\(^{22}\) Public Papers 1966, II, 762.

\(^{23}\) W. Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, June 7, 1965, 894.
directly reinforced and furthered the argument that the war in Vietnam was part of a wider strategy.

The Passive Dimension of Expression

Another linguistic complement to administration argumentation was the attempt to describe the war and our involvement with it in almost passive terms. Seemingly, we were almost a bystander, initiating nothing, who took necessary action only when provoked by others. Thus, our policy was described in terms of "actions . . . forced upon us by the other side. . . ." We spent for war "not because we want war, but because the aggressors have made them necessary." Terrorism, said the President required a "response." These descriptions of our policy seemed to deny the reality that we were an active initiator of policy in Indochina--and, of course, did not allow that the Viet Cong escalated their activity in 1961, 1963, and 1964 in response to our actions. The record seems to show that we had been an active mover of events in Indochina since the Truman Administration. For example, our aid to Saigon after 1954 was designed to create a separate regime there and alter the likely outcome of a communist-controlled reunification. However, the passive tone did lend subtle support to the claim that the war was initiated by the enemy and that our side was entirely in the right--acting only when pressed.

After the escalations of 1964 and 1965, policy makers continued to put our policy solely in passive terms. (Interestingly, Nixon-era bombing efforts were termed "protective reaction strikes.") Peace, Johnson said, "is in the hands of others besides ourselves;" "No one knows how long it will take. Only Hanoi can be the judge of that;" "Today, as then, Hanoi has the opportunity to end the increasing toll the war is taking on those under its command." And, Johnson continued, in view of the enemy escalation and our readiness for peace, "the ball is in the other court." Such descriptions of the situation add persuasive force to the U.S. claim that the responsibility for the wrongdoing lay entirely on the other side. If as the Secretary of State said, "others write the scenario" then we were blameless for the escalation in destruction and for the failure to come to negotiations.

Dissociation and Antithesis

The Belgian philosophers Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts Tyteca speak of the process of dissociation in their New Rhetoric. Dissociation is understood to mean the specifying of a lack of connection between two elements. In this view the distinction made between appearance and reality is the "prototype of all conceptual dissociation because of its widespread use and its basic importance in philosophy. Calling such a differentiation a "philosophical pair," Perelman and Tyteca argue that dissociation is accomplished by connecting two concepts to the opposite

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poles of the pair. As, for example, one may differentiate two opinions:

\[
\text{appearance} \quad \text{as opposed to} \quad \text{reality}
\]

\[
\text{opponents opinion} \quad \text{as opposed to} \quad \text{one's own opinion}
\]

Oftentimes (as in the example above) the role of dissociation in argumentation will be to "make good use of dissociations already admitted by the audience, sometimes to introduce dissociations created \textit{ad hoc}, sometimes to present to an audience dissociations admitted by other audiences, sometimes to recall a dissociation that the audience is presumed to have forgotten."\textsuperscript{29} This sort of transformation is evident in the example cited above wherein a commonly-accepted distinction (appearance versus reality) is used to further an argument--i.e., that the opinion of one's opponent is false although it \textit{appears} to contain an element of truth. Philosophical pairs of opposition, when combined with the aforementioned cold war rhetorical proclivity to polarize, set the groundwork for a further analysis of administration language use.

The appearance-reality pair is common in government defense of the Vietnam policy. The effort is made to contrast the illusory, hazy thinking of critics and doubters with the facts and reality presented by official spokesmen. Reference to the "realities" of foreign policy are frequent in official speeches and statements. Of course, the term "reality" is understood to denote the administration position. For example, in his Johns Hopkins speech, Johnson established two "realities": (1) that the war was clearly aggression from the north and (2) that the conflict was part of the wider threat to Asia posed by Communist China.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., p. 427.

Frequently, however, such realities are juxtaposed to appearances in order to refute an opposing view. This approach is manifest in William Bundy's speech on "Reality and Myth Concerning South Viet-Nam." Bundy told his hearers that he would "speak then, first, to the reality of what has happened in South Viet-Nam since 1954, dealing in the process with some of the myths that have arisen about that story." This took place as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appearance (Myth)</th>
<th>Reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First, there is the question of the attitude [alleged opposition] of the South Vietnamese Government and ourselves toward the reunification of Viet-Nam through free elections.</td>
<td>There was no chance of free elections in North Viet-Nam in 1956.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second, there is the myth that the Viet Cong movement has any significant relationship to the political opposition to President Diem.</td>
<td>The men who led the opposition [to Diem] are not today in the Viet Cong.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Secretary McNamara similarly disposes of the argument for neutralization of South Vietnam.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appearance</th>
<th>Reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Other critics have called for a second and similar option--a "neutralization" of Viet-Nam. | Under the shadow of Communist power, neutralization would in reality be an interim device to permit Communist consolidation and eventual takeover. 

Using the appearance-reality dichotomy, State Department lawyer Leonard Meeker reinforced the administration's aggression thesis. Explaining that "The law, if it is to be a living and working force, must concern itself with the substance and the reality of what is going on.

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on," Meeker argued that "The answer to a question of law cannot properly
turn on the mere form or appearance that a protagonist may give to its
action." (emphasis added) Confronting the argument that "Viet-Nam
does not present a situation of 'armed attack' because invading armies
were not massed at a border," Meeker set up a philosophical pair.

Appearance

The judgment whether North Viet-Nam has engaged in "armed
attack" against the South cannot depend on the form or appearance
of its conduct.

Thus, the Reality

The crucial consideration is that North Viet-Nam has marshaled
the resources of the state and has sent the instrumentalities of
the state . . . to subject the South to its rule.

The reality of enemy aggression versus our intention solely to defend
peace is reinforced, further, by another transformation. Administration
spokesmen made much of the fact that Hanoi's aggression had been
corroborated by the impartial International Control Commission which
"found Hanoi guilty of violating the Geneva accords." Of course, as
I indicated earlier, in the same report the Commission "found us guilty"
of violations as well. Leonard Meeker, using the appearance-reality
pair, dissociated our actions from the claim that we were, therefore,
at fault just as were the North Vietnamese at fault for violations. The
appearance of fault was contrasted to the reality that "these actions
were taken by South Viet-Nam as part of its effort to defend itself
against aggression and subversion from the North."  

34United States Policy in Viet-Nam, p. 5.
35Meeker, Department of State Bulletin, January 9, 1967, 58.
A final example of dissociation by appearance-reality comes in President Johnson's argument that his dovish critics were not true (i.e., real) peacemakers—although they appeared to be so by calling for withdrawal. "The true peacekeepers in the world tonight," said the President, "are not those who urge us to retire from the field in Viet-Nam—-who tell us to try to find the quickest, cheapest exit from that tormented land, no matter what the consequences to us may be."^36

In addition to the appearance-reality pair the administration case is characterized by other such polar terms. These terms convey a perspective on the situation and also specify action by making one alternative appear unacceptable. Thus, America's goal of freedom is opposed to the communist attempt to enslave.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freedom</th>
<th>Slavery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is why the United States is in Viet-Nam—to defend freedom. ^37</td>
<td>Why do the Vietnamese fight on? Because they are not going to let others enslave them or rule their future. ^38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not only does the freedom-slavery dichotomy characterize the war, but it also lends support to the commitment—for to allow the enslavement of people would be, presumably, an unacceptable alternative.

Another set of opposites strengthened the claim that the administration position of increased aid to Vietnam was the only viable alternative. Our policy of support was contrasted to the alternatives proposed by critics. The alternative to fighting in Vietnam was

^36 Public Papers 1967, II, 880.
^38 Remarks of Welcome to Vietnamese Leaders Upon Arriving at Honolulu International Airport, February 6, 1966, Public Papers 1966, I, 150.
usually termed "retreat," but was also called "surrender," "abandonment," "appeasement," and "running out." Thus, the President spoke of "special pleaders who counsel retreat in Vietnam," maintaining that "we are not going to run out on South Vietnam." Others emphasized that we would not "abandon" South Vietnam; Vice President Humphrey put it this way: "In other words we have put everything into the basket of peace except the surrender of South Viet Nam."

In my earlier treatment of the rhetoric of the cold war in chapter II, I emphasized the importance of antithesis in reinforcing the image of the struggle with communism as the triumph of right over wrong. Although the rhetoric of Vietnam involvement grew from this cold war framework, the figure of antithesis does not appear in so dramatic or frequent a form. However, throughout the years 1964-1967 the vocabulary of antithesis remains strong as our ends and means are contrasted to those of our opponents. We are the free world, they are totalitarian communists; we seek peace and freedom, they seek conquest and domination; we defend and they engage in aggression.

In the Vietnam debate the role of language as symbolic reality directly reinforces the arguments for intervention. Use of the all-embracing and emotive term "communism" helped to create the perspective of Vietnam as a test case in a continuing struggle. Descriptions of our role as a passive responder to enemy initiatives solidified the

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40 See Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, June 8, 1964, 891, Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, November 6, 1967, 600, Katzenbach, Department of State Bulletin, November 6, 1967, 602, Aggression from the North, p. 29 and Humphrey, Department of State Bulletin, January 24, 1966, 117.
impression of total enemy guilt. Further, by means of philosophical pairs the administration refuted challenges to its policy and dichotomized the situation as one of right versus wrong. The cold war costume of words, thus, directly contributed to the strength of the administration case.

Argumentative Strategies

When Mark Anthony acknowledged that "I am no orator as Brutus is," he spoke in an old rhetorical tradition. Since classical times the would-be persuader has been advised to minimize his own training in eloquence so as to increase his appearance of sincerity and spontaneity. In this connection we must remember that although the literature of administration argumentation contains a substructure of suasive strategy, this should not imply any conscious effort to employ certain persuasive techniques. Rather, we should view this analysis of argumentative structure as an aid to our understanding of its construction and potential persuasive effect.

Argument from Analogy

If any one type of justification may be said to typify administration reasoning it would have to be argument from analogy. The

41 See Quintilian, Institutio Oratoria XI. 1, 15. Quintilian wrote that, "it is an error for an orator to praise his own eloquence, and further, not merely wearies, but in the majority of cases disgusts the audience." The reference to Mark Anthony may be found in Julius Caesar, Act III, scene 2.
The "democracies'" failure to confront "the dictators" was seen in other prewar crises. Thus, Secretary Rusk expressed the determination that the Southeast Asian countries would not "become one of those victims of aggression, like Manchuria, like Ethiopia, like Austria, Czechoslovakia before World War II, whose fate encouraged the aggressor to continue on a course that could only lead to a larger war." The Korean war only reinforced this seeming historical truth as William Bundy spoke of the three lessons of Korea.

In retrospect, our action in Korea reflected three elements:

--a recognition that aggression of any sort must be met early and head-on or it will have to be met later and in tougher circumstances. We had relearned the lessons of the 1930's--Manchuria, Ethiopia, the Rhineland, Czechoslovakia.

--a recognition that a defense line in Asia, stated in terms of an island perimeter, did not adequately define our vital interests, that those vital interests could be affected by action on the mainland of Asia.

--an understanding that, for the future, a power vacuum was an invitation to aggression, that there must be local political, economic, and military strength in being to make aggression unprofitable, but also that there must be a demonstrated willingness of major external power both to assist and to intervene if required.

President Johnson and Secretary Rusk shared this interpretation of the Korean experience, feeling that if we had not stood firm then further losses would have resulted.

The lesson of the 1930-1950 period was applied to Vietnam through a process of a four term relation. Munich (et al.) was to past increases

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45 Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, January 18, 1965, 63.
in aggression as Vietnam was to future increases in aggression:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Munich} & \quad = \quad \text{Vietnam} \\
\text{past aggression} & \quad = \quad \text{future aggression}
\end{align*}
\]

Or, put another way: prewar war appeasement was to World War II as appeasement in South Vietnam would be to World War III:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{appeasement at Munich} & \quad = \quad \text{appeasement in Vietnam} \\
\text{World War II} & \quad = \quad \text{World War III}
\end{align*}
\]

Secretary Rusk stated this expressly in late 1967 arguing that, "we are fighting in Viet-Nam because we are resolved not to repeat the blunders which led to the Second World War."\(^48\) He added that, "we shall not have a chance to draw the lessons from World War III--there would not be enough left."

Analogy has long been recognized as a significant form of reasoning. David Hume wrote that "all our reasonings concerning matters of fact are founded on a species of Analogy, which leads us to expect from any cause the same events, which we have observed to result from similar causes."\(^49\) Analogy was a form of reasoning related to experience in George Campbell's system of moral reasoning. "The evidence of analogy ... is but a more indirect experience founded on some remote similitude."\(^50\) Founded as it is on experience, the strength of the analogy has long been seen to rest on the uniformity of the experience and the degrees of resemblance between cases cited for analogic

\(^{48}\text{Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, November 27, 1967, 703.}\)


comparison. In this context I should reiterate the importance of the consensus on the cold war in strengthening the Munich and related comparisons.

Our entry into World War II seemingly confirmed Roosevelt's warnings that fascist aggression threatened the western hemisphere directly. After the war, as a Nazi-like menace was seen in Soviet activity throughout Europe and the Mediterranean, beliefs associated with Nazi Germany were transferred to Soviet Russia. A set of analogies grew up through which Russia took on the wartime image of Germany. Once again, let me cite the conclusions of historians Adler and Paterson on this subject.

Americans both before and after the Second World War casually and deliberately articulated distorted similarities between Nazi and Communist ideologies, German and Soviet foreign policies, authoritarian controls, and trade practices, and Hitler and Stalin. This popular analogy was a potent and pervasive notion that significantly shaped American perception of world events in the cold war.51

They add that the Nazi-Soviet analogy was employed to justify the conclusion that "Russian 'aggression' had to be halted or America would face another world war." From this perspective we can see that the cold war ideology reinforced the Munich analogy by creating the perception that communist (used as a single agent) foreign aims and tactics were like those of Hitler. Thus, in the 1960's the Munich analogy was seen as persuasive because the circumstances surrounding Munich and Vietnam were viewed as similar.

A further element in the overall Nazi-communist analogy was supplied in the form of comparisons drawn between Hitler's Mein Kampf

51 Adler and Paterson, 1046.
and communist declarations of aggressive intent. I have already described the importance ascribed to the Khrushchev speech on wars of national liberation and the Lin Piao speech on revolutionary war. Implicitly and explicitly these were likened to the Nazi declarations embodied in *Mein Kampf*. "Today," said Douglas MacArthur II, "the world has been given fair warning of Hanoi's and Peking's intentions just as Hitler gave us fair warning before World War II." Secretary Rusk drew a similar parallel. Commenting on those who belittled the importance of the communist declarations, Rusk recalled those in the 1930's who argued that Hitler would not carry out his *Kampf*.

"Don't worry about what he says, he doesn't really mean it."

We heard it in the thirties and it cost tens of millions of lives—including the millions exterminated in Nazi gas chambers on the basis of an appalling doctrine announced in "Mein Kampf!"

These statements reveal another analogy underlying the Munich comparison:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{the Lin Piao declaration} & \quad = \quad \text{Hitler's Mein Kampf} \\
\text{Chinese aggression} & \quad \quad = \quad \text{Nazi aggression}
\end{align*}
\]

We may construct the entire supporting structure and context of the Munich analogy as a chain of relationships leading to the Third World War.

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52See, for example, McNamara, *Department of State Bulletin*, April 13, 1964, 564 and *Public Papers 1966*, II, 936.


The Munich analogy was, therefore, a complex argument which derived its strength from a set of parallels drawn between the fascist aggressors and the communist aggressors. In the above chain of analysis the belief in a de facto communist monolith is critical since the Munich parallel required that Vietnam be threatened by a major power akin to Nazi Germany. Linguistically, the notion of a monolith is satisfied by the constant use of "communist" as the perceived perpetrator, rather than the Viet Cong, or North Vietnam, or Communist China. I should note, parenthetically, that during World War II the three Axis powers were perceived as a monolith; thus, another analogy results: fascist unity is to fascist aggression as communist unity is to communist aggression.

As the argumentation from analogy may best be refuted by specifying dissimilarity in the cases cited for comparison it is not surprising that scholars have attacked Munich's applicability to the situation in South Vietnam. The claim that "surrender" (i.e., anything less than total support for Saigon) in Vietnam would have consequences similar to those of the 1938 Munich conference is highly debatable. In chapter VI, I will specify some of the weaknesses of this argument as developed by critics of the administration.
Argument from Direction

Another of Perelman and Tyteca's insights into the process of argumentation is their description of the argument from direction.\(^{55}\) Argument which stresses the future consequences of a present act aims, in their words, "at making a stage and later development interdependent." This philosophy of justification seeks to convey the image that "there can be no stopping on the way." Thus, they characterize the argument as contrary to the idea that events can be divided into separate and independent stages.

The argument of direction consists, essentially, in guarding against the use of the device of stages: if you give in this time, you will have to give in a little more next time, and heaven knows where you will stop. This argument is used frequently in negotiations between states and between representatives of management and workers when a party does not want to seem to yield to force, threats, or blackmail.\(^{56}\)

Related to the discussion of argument from analogy, it is clear that the cold war atmosphere of the Vietnam debate made argument from direction a key element in the case that Vietnam was not an isolated, brushfire war. Rather it represented a direct threat to the United States.

When President Johnson told an audience in Anchorage that he preferred to fight the enemy in Asia rather than Alaska, the President engaged in argument based on direction.\(^{57}\) That part of the administration case which characterized Vietnam as part of a wider strategy is a pure example of this type of reasoning. While I will not contend that

\(^{55}\) Perelman and Tyteca, pp. 281-87.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., p. 282.

\(^{57}\) Public Papers 1966, II, 1300.
the argument from direction is one hundred percent distinct from analogical reasoning, some distinction between the two may be seen in Ehninger and Brockriede's attempt to differentiate analogy and parallel case. Whereas analogy relates two cases to something else (e.g., Germany and Russia as aggressive states) parallel case refers to the "direct similarity between two cases..." Thus, direction would flow from the fact that one case would lead directly to a succession of similar occurrences.

As the Munich example is the prime instance of analogy so is the domino theory the embodiment of the Johnsonian regard for direction. Once again, therefore, Johnson era justifications are tied, intimately to their cold war antecedents. The cold war consensus postulated that the evil represented by communism was a total threat and that each instance of conflict was but a local and current manifestation of a deeper danger. Thus, to fail to respond to one case of communist aggression was to set the stage for more of the same.

Statements that Vietnam was but a test case of the new communist subversive strategy (the Johnson administration version of the domino theory) were instances of argument from direction. Administration spokesmen stressed that Vietnam was not an isolated instance. As Under-secretary Ball commented: "We can properly understand the struggle in

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59 The practical differentiation between analogy and argument from direction I make in terms of the distinction between contention six and seven of the administration case. I interpret contention six--the Vietnam war is part of a wider pattern of aggression--to be representative of argument from direction and contention seven--our policy in Vietnam stems from principles long established as sound: resist aggression--to exemplify argument from analogy.
Viet-Nam only if we recognize it for what it is--part of a vast and continuing struggle in which we have been engaged for more than two decades. Spokesmen painted a gloomy picture that defeat in Vietnam would be a total blow to our foreign policy, to our security and that of the free world.

Let no one think for a moment that retreat from Viet-Nam would bring an end to conflict. The battle would be renewed in one country and then another.

Defeat in South Viet-Nam would deliver a friendly nation to terror and repression. It would encourage and spur on those who seek to conquer all free nations that are within their reach.

If we allow the communists to win in Vietnam, it will become easier and more appetizing for them to take over other countries in other parts of the world. We will have to fight again someplace else—at a cost no one knows. And that is why it is vitally important to every American that we stop the communists in South Vietnam.

The contention that Vietnam was only the present stage in an unfolding scenario of war was a key notion in the justification of our massive involvement there. Since Vietnam seemed so small, so unimportant and so far away, policy makers could justify such an expenditure only by increasing the importance of the conflict. Such was the intent of the argument from direction.

Argument from Sacrifice and Waste

One of the most difficult distinctions in the New Rhetoric is that made between what Perelman and Tytgeca term argument of sacrifice

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60 Ball, Department of State Bulletin, February 14, 1966, 240.
63 Public Papers 1966, I, 150.
and argument of waste. In the former, the value of an end is measured by the sacrifice one is willing to make to attain it. On the other hand, in arguing from waste, "One increases the desirability of the end, so that its importance exceeds the sacrifice." The argument from waste seeks to prove that "as one has already begun a task and made sacrifices which would be wasted if the enterprise were given up, one should continue in the same direction."

President Johnson's speaking on the Vietnam war is characterized by argument from sacrifice and waste. Increasingly after 1965 appeals of these two types distinguished the President's persuasive attempts from those of his cabinet-level officials. It may well be that the appeal to the bravery of the American soldiers and the Vietnamese complemented the folksy, almost sentimental style of President Johnson, whereas such appeals did not suit the personality of other spokesmen. In any case Johnson spoke frequently of the losses which we sustained through pursuit of the Vietnam war (sacrifice) and he called for perseverance so that the sacrifices might not be in vain (waste).

Already by late 1964 Lyndon Johnson was emphasizing the great sacrifice made by those who served in Vietnam--a sacrifice which was a measure of the value of our stand in Vietnam. In 1965 and 1966 this

64 Perelman and Tytceca, pp. 250-51.

65 Ibid., p. 279.

66 Although speeches and statements by the President accounted for only one-half the sample studied (47 out of 100), only two out of the thirty-four examples of argument from sacrifice I compiled were by spokesmen other than Johnson. Support for the idea that such argumentation fit the particular style of the late President is supplied in William Gorden and Robert Bunker, "The Sentimental Side of Mr. Johnson," Southern Speech Journal, XXXII, No. 1 (Fall, 1966), 58-66.

theme became more frequent. The President spoke of the dignity of those who died for a world where men could choose their way of life. He mourned losses which could not be replaced; but, he said, our nation would not shrink from such sacrifices. "They are out there dying in order to save freedom," declared Johnson, emphasizing that the American people would support their brave men.

Central to Johnson's invocation of the sacrifices of American manpower was his contention that those sacrifices should not be made in vain. Because the goal was freedom we could do no less. Thus, recalling the loss of life during the Second World War, Johnson hoped that, "Surely this generation will not lightly yield to new aggressors what the last generation paid for in blood and towering sacrifice." At a ceremony held in Arlington National Cemetery the President recalled men who had lost their lives for peace since World War II and praised those in Vietnam as present-day defenders of peace. He continued, "So I pledge to those who have died there, and to those who have been wounded there--to those who are now fighting there, and to those who may yet fight there, that we shall help the people of South Vietnam see this through." In a speech to the American people five months

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71 Public Papers 1965, I, 496.

72 Public Papers 1966, I, 562-64.
later Johnson affirmed that the work done at the Manila conference "will make it impossible for those men and their allies to sacrifice in vain." Although the President emphasized the need not to waste the bravery of America's soldiers he also spoke of the Vietnamese people whose efforts "would have all been in vain if the Communists conquer the South."  

The Argument of Unlimited Development

Johnson's defense of his Vietnam policy was built around the notion that our goals of peace and freedom necessitated the use of all necessary force. But, he held out the hope that our unlimited commitment would lead to a better world situation—a world safer from aggression. Argumentation of this type is termed reasoning from unlimited development by Perelman and Tyteca.

Although the President insisted his policies toward the war were limited (i.e., he sought not to conquer the north), he and his administration put the commitment in decidedly unlimited terms. He pledged our aid to South Vietnam "for as long as it is required," "whether we make or lose friends," "whatever the risk and whatever the cost." Others reiterated our resolve not to abandon Vietnam.

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73 Ibid., II, 1272.
74 Ibid., 761. See also Public Papers 1965, II, 795.
75 Perelman and Tyteca, pp. 287-92.
77 See Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, June 8, 1964, 891, Humphrey, Department of State Bulletin, January 24, 1966, 117, Katzenbach, Department of State Bulletin, November 6, 1967, 602 and Aggression from the North, p. 27.
have previously described the passive tone of the administration case which suggested that others were responsible for the war and our response to their aggression. Consistent with this position, the only end of our policy was seen in victory or negotiations. "However long it takes," said Johnson, "we will persist until the Communists end the fighting or until we negotiate an honorable peace." Thus, our unlimited aims were seen as resulting in the attainment of a desired situation of peace and freedom.

The rhetoric of Vietnam and the cold war both looked forward to a time when communist aggression would be a thing of the past. This eventual state of peace was the end point of our unlimited commitment to stop communist penetration. In this way only continued resistance against the adversary would bring about fruition of our desires. The unlimited commitment to the defeat of aggression in the world--as in Vietnam--was seen as the necessary means of attaining the desired end. Thus, the President reminded Congress that when aggression was confronted, peace resulted. He stated this firmly in a news conference in 1966:

Wherever we have stood firm, aggression has been halted, peace has been restored and liberty has been maintained. This was true under President Truman, under President Eisenhower, under President Kennedy, and it will be true again in Southeast Asia.

The Tactic of Refutation

Well-known opposition to one's position has always required a persuader to confront his critics. Since classical times this treatment

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78 *Public Papers 1966*, II, 762.

79 *Public Papers 1965*, I, 497.

80 *Public Papers 1965*, I, 449.
of opponents' arguments within a speech of advocacy has been termed refutation.\(^1\) Fred M. Connelly finds that only in his speech to the Tennessee State Legislature on March 15, 1967, did refutation predominate in the President's speaking.\(^2\) Although the tactic never dominated official utterances on Vietnam, refutation appeared consistently and frequently.

Several elements of the administration case are devoted solely toward refutation of charges made against the policy makers. The argument that escalation of the war marked no policy change was, thus, an effort at rebutting one possible interpretation of the increased assistance for Vietnam. William Bundy refuted a related claim—that our actions unilaterally escalated the war and that Hanoi only responded in kind. "Multiple and conclusive evidence which became available from the spring of 1965 onward seems to me to refute these contentions," Bundy said.\(^3\) He cited intelligence data on North Vietnamese infiltration to prove that Hanoi had infiltrated one regiment by December, 1964, and by early 1965 had plans for further such action. "From the standpoint of the basis for U.S. decisions, this evidence simply reinforces the February picture that Hanoi was moving for the kill."

Further evidence of concern for refutation came in the form of claims that we sought no wider war and the repeated reminders that we

\(^1\) For example, refutation was part of Cicero's six step suggested organization of a speech. Cicero, De Inventione, I, 14, 19.

\(^2\) Connelly, "A Rhetorical Analysis," p. 294. I disagree with this claim, however. In a speech on February 23, 1966, Johnson devoted the bulk of his text to answering ten questions being asked about the war. See Public Papers 1966, I, 208-14.

\(^3\) W. Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, September 4, 1967, 283.
actively looked for negotiations. I cited evidence previously to show that President Johnson intended his April 7, 1965, speech at Johns Hopkins as an attack on critics who demanded an end to bombing. In the speech Johnson emphasized our desires for peace, negotiations and Asian economic development. In another major effort at rebuttal, February 23, 1966, Johnson reiterated his government's policy on the war. "First, some ask if this is a war for unlimited objectives." Johnson refuted the interpretation maintaining that, "our purpose in Viet-Nam is to prevent the success of aggression. It is not conquest; it is not empire; it is not foreign bases; it is not domination." Johnson continued, answering a total of ten questions which he said were still being asked about the war. In successive arguments he rejected several notions: that his policy was blind escalation, that our men were ill-equipped, that we were the only nation aiding south Vietnam, that "Red China" would enter the war, that we relied solely on military means, that we were imposing a government on South Vietnam, that we neglected negotiation, and that the war was not worth the price.

In 1967 the President devoted considerable attention to rebuttal in two major speeches. Before the Tennessee State Legislature, the President justified his policy of bombing and, citing then-recent "peace feelers," he reminded the legislators of his desire for unconditional negotiation saying that "It takes two to negotiate at a peace table and Hanoi has just simply refused to consider coming to a peace table." 

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84 For information on the President's motivation, see Johnson, Vantage Point, p. 132.

85 Public Papers 1966, I, 211.

Six months later Johnson told a conference of state legislators of the reasons for our commitment to Vietnam, specifically dealing with the question "why not negotiate?"

Far more important than refutation to clarify the purity of our war aims were efforts to answer opposing views on the nature of the Vietnam war and to expose the weaknesses of alternative policy options. Consider, first, administration defense of its interpretation of the nature of the conflict. Careful attention was devoted to refuting the growing claim by critics that we were intruding into what was, essentially, a civil war. Thus, spokesmen answered the charge that we and the South Vietnamese had deliberately blocked the scheduled Geneva elections and, therefore, Hanoi was justified in resuming the war. "This argument has no merit," affirmed State Department lawyer Leonard Meeker. He answered that the evidence showed North Vietnam would not have tolerated free elections. Refutation of this "myth" was also a part of William Bundy's speech to the Dallas Council on World Affairs. In this presentation Bundy further denied that the insurgents were legitimate political opponents of the Saigon regime.

Specific attention was given to invalidating the civil war interpretation. Minimizing the internal dissent in the south, spokesmen maintained:

That campaign is sometimes referred to as a civil war. But let us not delude ourselves . . . the whole campaign would never have been possible without . . . total support coming from Hanoi. . . .

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88 W. Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, June 7, 1965, 893.
89 Ibid., 892.
There are some who complain that the United States has become involved in a civil war in Viet-Nam. In Viet-Nam one part of a divided country is indeed fighting another. But the fact that it is Vietnamese who have attacked Vietnamese does not make armed aggression any more acceptable.90

It is not a civil war. It is a war of aggression by an outside power seeking to subvert the established political institutions, and they say that.91

I have heard and read arguments by some that Viet-Nam does not present a situation of "armed attack" . . . The crucial consideration is that North Viet-Nam has marshaled the resources of the state . . . to subject the South to its rule.92

The fact that the demarcation line between North and South Viet-Nam was intended to be temporary does not make the assault on South Viet-Nam any less of an aggression.93

Let there be no doubt about it: Those who say this is merely a South Vietnamese "civil war" could not be more wrong. The warfare was started by the Government of North Vietnam in 1959.94

Contravention of the civil war argument took two forms, therefore:

(1) denial that the all-Vietnamese nature of the war meant it was a civil conflict, and (2) denial that the southern insurgency was initiated and led by southerners.

Other minor instances of refutation of counter claims on the nature of the war involved denying that the South Vietnamese had no will to fight, rebuttal of the claim that policy makers were preoccupied with the image of a single communist monolith, and of the argument that the

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90Katzenbach, Department of State Bulletin, November 6, 1967, 602.

91McNamara, Department of State Bulletin, August 30, 1965, 347.


94Public Papers 1966, I, 682.
American armed forces were unsuccessful. 95 Often these invalidations of the opposing view stated that opposing position in the weakest and most easily refuted manner. Thus, Secretary Rusk commented that the arguments of critics--"It's too far away," "Give him another bite, and maybe he'll be satisfied," etc.--had been discredited in the past. 96 Other instances of relating the opponent's argument in the weakest possible fashion are not difficult to find. For example, Undersecretary Ball argued that some "maintain that the West should not undertake to defend the integrity of all lines of demarcation even though they may be underwritten by formal treaties." "They claim," Ball added, "that Southeast Asia lies within the Chinese sphere of influence and that we should let the Chinese redraw the lines of demarcation to suit themselves without regard to the wishes of the Southeast Asian people." 97 Finally, in this regard, consider how President Johnson described his opponents' sincerity before the Tennessee Legislature. Citing criticism of his bombing policy, Johnson averred: "Yet, the deeds of the Viet Cong go largely unnoticed in the public debate. It is this moral double bookkeeping which makes us get sometimes very weary of our critics." 98

In addition to controversion of claims against administration war aims and the nature of the war, a significant effort was made to


96 Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, November 27, 1967, 704.

97 Ball, Department of State Bulletin, February 14, 1966, 244.

98 Public Papers 1967, I, 349 and 351.
refute opposing policy options put forward by critics. At the outset of this discussion I will cite observations about the Vietnam debate made by Stephen A. Garrett. In general Garrett finds that "the individual debaters generally fail to address themselves specifically to the assumptions and proposals of their opponents." The result, he continues, is "an arena filled with orators all orating at the same time, delivering fixed ideas to unhearing opponents." Finding that the disputants rarely gave an extended consideration to the reasoning and assumptions of their opponents' positions, Garrett isolates two aspects of the problem.

First, opposing arguments are not given accurate treatment, in the sense that they are either misstated or deliberately warped in order to serve the hortative function of the analyst. The building of strawmen is of course an old intellectual device, but it appears to be particularly characteristic of the present discussion over Vietnam. Secondly, even when opposing arguments are rendered with some degree of accuracy, they are inevitably only bits and pieces of the opponent's total position. Thus, it is a common feature of the Vietnam debate that its participants select certain items from the opposition which they deem to be particularly vulnerable and then consider these as if they represented the opposition's entire case.

This description of the strategy of ignoring assumptions, malrepresentation, and confronting isolated weak points is an apt characterization of administration efforts to refute the policy options of its detractors.

Basic to the government's rebuttal was the claim that opponents failed or refused to see the stakes involved in the war. Johnson, thus, described the complaints of his critics as a modern-day version of the weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. "As our commitment to Vietnam

99 Garrett, p. 12.
100 Ibid., pp. 12-13.
required more men and more equipment," said the President, "some voices were raised in opposition. The administration was urged to disengage, to find an excuse to abandon the effort." Johnson now took the offensive. "These cries came despite growing evidence that the defense of Vietnam held the key to the political and economic future of free Asia."\textsuperscript{101} The fact that critics rejected the "growing evidence" and that they based this rejection on differing assumptions about the war was not mentioned. The Vice President similarly lectured: "Yet I frequently hear the statement from those who should know better that 'America has no business in Asia.'\textsuperscript{102} To represent opposition to administration foreign policy as a demand for total non-involvement is an extreme interpretation--but one facilitating easy refutation. Such efforts to discredit the contrary position were typical of the case, but there were exceptions to this pattern. For example, at the Faculty Forum at Berkeley, William Bundy patiently reviewed objections to the official scenario without engaging in rhetorical card stacking.\textsuperscript{103} Obviously, the nature of the audience may have influenced this decision.

Generally, the administration stressed refutation of the demand for a complete withdrawal from Vietnam. Emphasizing that withdrawal would lead to a communist victory, Secretary McNamara said that the United States totally rejected that option.\textsuperscript{104} "Some say we should withdraw," said the President, "but the United States cannot and must

\textsuperscript{101}Public Papers 1967, I, 349.
\textsuperscript{102}Humphrey, Department of State Bulletin, July 4, 1966, 4.
\textsuperscript{103}W. Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, June 21, 1965, 1002-1004.
\textsuperscript{104}McNamara, Department of State Bulletin, April 13, 1964, 568.
and will not turn aside and allow the freedom of a brave people to be handed over to Communist tyranny. This alternative is strategically unwise, we think, and it is morally unthinkable. ¹⁰⁵ To be sure, critics probably rejected the freedom-tyranny dilemma and built their case for withdrawal on arguments which the President did not confront. And total withdrawal was only one of many—and the most extreme—alternatives to escalation. In this regard Johnson also refuted what he called the suggested "reckless actions" of certain hawks though not specifically confronting either their assumptions or arguments. In a speech in November of 1966 LBJ again dichotomized opponents into those who would "pull out, run out" and those wishing to "run in further," maintaining he was glad that most Americans supported the administration's chosen course. ¹⁰⁶

Though on several occasions, such as above, the administration attacked those favoring wider escalation, for the most part they singled out war opponents for attack. Thus, the President cited those "special pleaders who counsel retreat in Vietnam." He continued, suggesting that they had been wrong before and were wrong now.

They belong to a group that has always been blind to experience and has been deaf to hope. We cannot accept their logic that tyranny 10,000 miles away is not tyranny to concern us, or that subjugation by an armed minority in Asia is different from subjugation by an armed minority in Europe. Were we to follow their course, how many nations might fall before the aggressor? Where would our treaties be respected, our word honored, and our commitments believed?¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Public Papers 1966, I, 535.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 150.
This statement again reveals a refusal to come to grips with the critics rejection of the freedom-tyranny dichotomy. Thus, advocacy of withdrawal did not necessarily mean that critics were willing to sacrifice South Vietnam to tyranny. Further, many of those opposing the administration had not been "blind to experience" in the past for they had supported earlier military involvements. Many supporters of our policy in World War II and the Korean conflict rejected Vietnam on its own merits—or lack of them. Finally, Johnson does not confront the fact that critics tended to disregard the strict domino theory and did not accept his gloomy prophesy of a world-wide loss of U.S. credibility. Rather, as we shall see in chapter VI, critics looked to other data which suggested, for example, that the war actually cost us credibility and world trust.

Yet, casting the opposition in an extremely unfavorable light was a common feature of the administration style of refutation. As the President emphasized, he "rejected the voice of the appeaser." Again in May of 1965, the President seemed to associate his opponents on Vietnam with those who had spoken against firm resistance to past aggression. "At every turning point in the last thirty years," he said, "there have been those who opposed a firm stand against aggression. They have always been wrong." Thus, it was that Undersecretary of State Katzenbach professed an inability to understand "why so many

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108 See Yoder, 56.


110 Public Papers 1965, I, 496-97.
liberals who supported President Truman in a policy of limited war in Korea now oppose a parallel policy in Viet-Nam. The answer was (and is) a simple one: critics rejected this parallelism; they did not accept the policy assumptions of the administration and, hence, came to oppose a policy based on these predispositions. A statement by Senator Wayne Morse during the Vietnam hearings bears this out. Following a statement by Secretary Rusk, Morse, a persistent critic of the war, interjected: "I disagree with practically every major premise not only contained in the prepared statement but in his discussion in the last few minutes." Certainly Morse realized that an argument is nearly worthless when deprived of its assumptive support.

Administration efforts to refute the claims of opponents, thus, never attained the status of true intellectual dialogue. As Garrett foretold, the rhetoric of the Vietnam debate consisted of the repetition of preconceived positions with little effort to define--much less confront--the issues in dispute.

The Search for Scapegoats

The Biblical expiation of sin via a scapegoat has a modern meaning in the analysis of propaganda--the projection of guilt or hate onto others. The premier example of the modern use of scapegoating was the Nazi persecution of Jews as the source of Germany's ill. However,

111 Katzenbach, Department of State Bulletin, November 6, 1967, 603.
113 See Alfred M. Lee, How to Understand Propaganda (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1952), pp. 220-22. The usual biblical reference to scapegoating is to be found in Leviticus 4-10.
any attempt to place the blame for one's own troubles on the shoulders of others is a foray into the strategy of scapegoating.

It was, perhaps, natural for the Johnson Administration to seek an explanation of our difficulties in the actions of previous years. Truly the inherited quagmire had been manufactured by a series of earlier judgments over a twenty-year period. Nevertheless, the administration was generally supportive of the policy judgments and actions of their predecessors—for, after all, the validity of the present commitment depended on the legitimacy of previous interpretations and decisions. Yet, if we but recall the history of the conflict and our former praise for both the French and Diem, it is interesting to find the failures of the 1960's blamed on these formerly blameless agents. Truly, "The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones. . . ."\textsuperscript{114}

Generally, we may isolate two major instances of the attempt to explain present difficulties by pointing to failures of our friends and allies: (1) the failure of the French to grant real independence, 1946-1954, and (2) the failure of Diem to tolerate political opposition 1954-1963. This attempt at expiation was consistent with the overall U.S. position on the war—for, if the Viet Cong had no popular support, then any insurgent successes must be resultant from failures on our side (or, of course, to the North Vietnamese, but I treated this theme earlier).

Against the background of Truman and Eisenhower Administration assertions that the Vietnamese attained freedom and independence under

\textsuperscript{114}Julius Caesar, Act III, scene 2.
the auspices of the French, it is almost amusing to find them blamed by members of the Johnson Administration for failure to do what they were said to have done. Contrary to the previous view of the French war as anti-communism, policy makers now described it for what it really was: an effort at colonial reconquest. Secretary McNamara, thus, spoke of Paris' attempt to "buck the trend toward independence." Indeed, argued Leonard Meeker, "France sought instead to restore and reinforce its colonial administration in Indochina." In several speeches touching on the origins of the war William Bundy emphasized insufficient French concessions to native nationalism. The transition from a colonial administration was "too leisurely," the French did not "yield gradually" and failed to set a timetable for independence which might have strengthened non-communist nationalism. Two other charges were laid upon the French: they failed to develop native leadership (which, like the above failure, was true) and they somehow infected Vietnam with the fractionalism of French politics (a curious argument).

The successor to France as our ally in Vietnam also had retrospective failings. Opinion differed as to exactly when and where Diem went wrong but the consensus held that, by 1963, Diem and his regime

115 McNamara, Department of State Bulletin, April 13, 1964, 563.
had "aroused widespread popular opposition" and, thereby, Diem "lost the confidence and loyalty of his people." Diem's sins were resurrected: He narrowed his political base and refused to heed advice for reform, he pursued "unfortunate policies," he was an "old fashioned mandarin," he favored the Catholics and allowed them privileges, he drove many into exile. The result of these omissions and commissions was a weakened political system upon which the Viet Cong were able to capitalize. The insurgents made further gains in the wake of political chaos which followed Diem's murder. I should note in passing that continuing U.S. embarrassment over military control and weak democratic institutions in South Vietnam (such reflected badly on the freedom-tyranny dichotomy) was partly relieved by underscoring that the "democratic progress" of the post-Diem era was "remarkable" in view of the ongoing war.

Circumstance and Definition: The Interaction and Confusion of Goals

This overview of the rhetorical strategies of the Johnson

119 See, respectively, W. Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, February 8, 1965, 173 and McNamara, Department of State Bulletin, April 13, 1964, 567.


121 W. Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, June 21, 1965, 1004.


123 See, for example, Public Papers 1967, II, 780-81, 878, W. Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, February 8, 1965, 174 and Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, September 13, 1965, 440.
Administration reveals, at once, the simplicity and complexity of the government's case. The rhetorical efforts are easily understood in that they flowed logically from the cold war atmosphere surrounding Vietnam and certain related beliefs and values of policy makers. The case for involvement was complex in that its strength relied on a mixture of commonly-held assumptions about the world--reinforced by language and complemented by a variety of argumentative strategies and approaches. Richard Weaver's typology of argument from circumstance and definition thus affords us an opportunity to deal with the essential direction and meaning of the administration case as a whole.

The dismal fact of our seemingly endless war in Vietnam exerts a subtle pressure on an analyst to condemn the Johnson Administration justifications as somehow mere expediency. Indeed, the observation that academe afforded the administration less support than did other sectors of the population must approach the status of a truism. However, as we have observed, the rationale for commitment is a curious mixture of American idealism and world power politics--what Richard Weaver might call "definition" and "circumstance." Dean Rusk underscored this very point in 1965, explaining that "American foreign policy is at once principled and pragmatic." An argument from principle is a contention based on the essential nature of things--the existence of a definable class and proper responses toward it (for example, aggression is evil so it must be resisted). This description is the crux of Weaver's argument from definition: "arguments from the nature of the thing." A pragmatic approach, on the other hand, postulates that the

United States act in its own interests to meet circumstances threatening or unpleasant--i.e., Weaver's argument from circumstance.  

Dennis Bormann's rebuttal of Weaver's typology--as applied to Edmund Burke--may well serve to prove that one man's definition is another man's circumstance. Weaver cites Burke as a man who characteristically reasoned from the urgency of the moment rather than the overriding questions of right and justice. Thus, Burke allowed particular needs dictate the decision. Bormann rejects this interpretation, making a case that Burke did, in fact, argue frequently from principle. While Bormann's central focus is to contradict Weaver's assumption that argument from definition is inherently superior to that of definition, I will take the related position that the practical matter of differentiating definition from circumstance is not at all simple. I will illustrate this contention in reference to the administration position on Vietnam.

At the outset I should observe that the administration case really comprises three analytic aspects: (1) beliefs of the policy makers, (2) policy and (3) rhetoric. The survey of the cold war consensus and the secret papers on Vietnam should, I think, support one overriding observation: policy makers held a consistent set of beliefs about America's necessary role in global policy. Specific policy (circumstance) was subordinated to the attainment of overriding principles (definition): increases in world freedom security of the nation,

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125 Weaver, pp. 57 and 86.

and curtailment of communism. Each of these ends was determined to be valuable, as Weaver would say, "from the nature of the thing."

The rhetoric of Vietnam was likewise grounded on a regard for the need to act in accordance with definitional principles. Thus, policy makers argued (1) from the nature of government: Vietnam was part of our defense and "All governments have a fundamental duty of self-preservation" (to quote Weaver), (2) from the nature of the situation: The Vietnam war was a case of aggression, (3) from the nature of our values: we seek peace, freedom and self-determination, all universal principles, and, finally, (4) from the nature of communism: it was an inherent evil. Our policy resolve was similarly stated in terms of principle rather than expediency: we would endure all hardships until freedom was won through victory or negotiation. Expediency would dictate a compromise if the costs became too great.

Seemingly, then, our rhetoric of Vietnam involvement fit Weaver's description of argument from genus or definition. However, a case can be made that our policy and rhetoric were circumstantial. In practice, although we professed our concern for self-determination, the United States supported any non-communist force in Indochina. Our support of the French was, then, described in terms of meeting the goals of freedom and self-determination; but, in practice, as policy makers later admitted, we supported an effort to restore colonialism because it suited our needs of the moment. Similarly, throughout the Diem period the United States touted his government when, in fact, it was authoritarian and repressive—a fact admitted only after his death. Effusive praise for and support of a succession of Saigon strongmen similarly reinforces the notion that we supported the man of the moment—
because it conformed to our needs, rather than because the government represented freedom and self-determination for South Vietnam.

Similarly, our stated effort to resist North Vietnamese aggression, because aggression was evil, belies the fact that the aggression thesis was only an interpretation—one which was challenged. It might be argued that our reliance on the aggression thesis fit our own needs more than the actual truth of the situation in Vietnam. Further, although our policy was defended in terms of preventing tyranny and guarding freedom, the freedom-tyranny dichotomy was not at all clear. That both Saigon and Hanoi were essentially totalitarian governments was (and is) argued. Thus, again, our invocation of the dilemma may well have done more justice to our needs than to the facts of the situation.

In sum, we may say that our rhetoric was both definitional and circumstantial. It was definitional in that policy makers appealed to principles which were desirable goals because of their nature. The rhetoric was circumstantial in that we bent the facts of the Vietnam situation to fit our definitions—i.e., our definitions did not fit the circumstances clearly, if at all.

Some of the confusion over definitional and circumstantial argument may be clarified by reference to Perelman and Tyteca's concept of the various audiences for argumentation. In their view, the audience may consist of oneself, a single hearer, a particular group, or a universal aggregation of all reasonable or relevant men. Argument addressed to the universal audience "must convince the reader [or hearer] that the reasons adduced are of a compelling character, that they are self-evident, and possess an absolute and timeless validity, independent of local or
historical contingencies." The rhetoric of Vietnam involvement is intended for the universal audience of all rational men. We defend our policies in terms of freedom, defeating aggression, winning peace, protecting self-determination. However, the support for our universal claims was not itself acceptable to the universal audience. Many rejected the notion that defending the Saigon government protected the best interests of the Vietnamese people. Some disputed whether the war was a case of aggression. Others questioned our real desire for peace as manifested in our escalation. Even the inherent evil of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong was rejected by some commentators. This seeming dichotomy—the universal nature of our claims but the particular and controvertable nature of our supporting arguments may help to explain a 1965-1966 phenomenon: great support for President Johnson's policy at home (which atrophied progressively) and, at the same time, great foreign dissatisfaction.

This analysis of the definitional-circumstantial, universal-particular aspects of the administration case for commitment is a fitting stopping point in the analysis of the argumentation. This writer has described the case and has probed the structure underlying it—the matrix of cold war culture, language, argumentative strategies, and philosophical purpose which gave life and breath to the defense of our Vietnam policy. In chapter VI, I will assume the role of a rhetorical critic to scrutinize the administration's rhetorical stance and the accuracy of claims made in defense of official policy.

127 Perelman and Tyteca, p. 32.
Chapter VI

A RHETORICAL CRITIC LOOKS AT VIETNAM

In his seminal work on *Rhetorical Criticism* Edwin Black extends his treatment of the critic's method into what he terms the genre of argumentation.\(^1\) Black underscores that the analyst must remember his focus is only fragmentary—that the argumentation he studies is only one part of the persuasive process. At this point it is well to widen our focus to include the argumentation of opposition. In so doing we may gain a further perspective on the quality of the administration's Vietnam policy justification. While I have inserted occasional notes of caution about the accuracy of the official case on Vietnam, I will now systematically scrutinize the case in terms of the opposition position on Vietnam. In so doing I will first examine the rhetorical stance of the administration and the way in which that stance affected the government's response to its detractors.

**Rhetorical Stance: A Choice of Right and Wrong**

The concept of rhetorical stance has come to signify the relationship existing among the persuader, his message and the intended audience.\(^2\) Care for balance among these foci implies that to isolate

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and emphasize one is to somehow debase it. Thus, when politicians become overly concerned with audience effectiveness their stance becomes that of an advertiser. The critical storm precipitated by The Selling of the President, 1968 gives stark witness to people's innate concern for a balance in communication. If men wish not to be ignored, neither do they desire to be patronized or manipulated.

The rhetorical posture of the administration position on Vietnam is revealed in the tendency to overemphasize the message presented. The policy makers evidenced little effort to adjust their message to the counter claims of their critics. Indeed, so tenaciously did the government cling to its interpretation of the facts that it refused to consider the possibility that the war was less than a contest of good versus evil. If, as I have earlier commented, the simplistic black-white dichotomies in the case gave a pedantic air to the argumentation then truly Wayne Booth's term "the pedant's stance" is an appropriate description of the Vietnam policy makers' overemphasis on their message.

Claims without Reservations

Even a cursory reading of the official literature on the war would reveal a proneness to avoid modification of claims. Such a failure to admit the possibility of another interpretation would bother the English logician Stephen Toulmin. Toulmin's system of argumentation specifies that a particular claim may be analyzed in terms of the supporting structure of data and warrant. His concern for probability

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3Ibid., p. 3. Golden examines several aspects of stance, citing, for example, Wayne Booth's typology of the pedant's, entertainer's and advertiser's stance.

4See Toulmin, pp. 94-145 especially.
as a measure of the validity of any claim leads him to specify that every claim must be qualified and that reservations, or exceptions, to the argumentative support must be supplied. Consider, then, the following illustration of an argument structured in the Toulmin mode. Beginning with data (D) an arguer seeks to establish the merits of a claim (C). In so doing, he must supply an authorizing statement—warrant (W)—to justify the movement from data to claim. In specifying the warrant and its support—backing (B)—the persuader indicates exceptions to the warrant, or reservations (R), and thereby signifies the degree to which the claim must be qualified (Q). The following diagram illustrates the process:

(D) France is a nation of Western Europe

Since (W)

Western European nations

Unless, (R) France recently suffered a depression, etc.

Because (B)

Per capita income measures and Gross National Product indices reveal this to be true.

So, (Q) presumably (C) Its people enjoy a high standard of living.

In this scheme the reservation (R) is an infrequent (i.e., unlikely) occurrence and, thus, the qualifier (Q) "presumably" indicates that the claim (C) is very likely true. The qualifier, then, is a measure of the degree of certainty (validity) conferred on the claim by the supporting structure of the argument. If a warrant had many exceptions (i.e., a great number of frequent reservations) then the qualifier should reflect this fact. One might employ the term "possibly" or
"there is a slight chance" to indicate the lessened probability that the claim is valid. In this view qualifiers might vary from strong to weak as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weak</th>
<th>Strong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>possibly------</td>
<td>probably-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>presumably----</td>
<td>certainly---</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Against this background how may we characterize the claims of the administration? Are reservations supplied? Are claims moderated? Simply stated, the rhetoric of Vietnam involvement reveals a proneness not to include reservations and exhibits a preference for strong qualifiers.

One measure of the inclination to avoid reservations is the virtual absence of any admissions of fault or error by official spokesmen. Occasionally, the President admitted that "there have unquestionably been setbacks," or "sometimes we make mistakes;" but, any close reading of the record would reveal that such moments of candor are rare.5 Nor is the penchant to self-criticism any stronger among other policy makers. As I indicated in chapter V, many of the admissions of fault were efforts to blame the French, Diem, or the Viet Cong for admitted difficulties. Even the totally disastrous strategic hamlet program of the Diem era was described as "basically sound."6 And while the Secretary of State confided that "there have been some problems in the Government in Saigon," and while his deputy cited the difficulty in "Finding enough sound [army] leadership," such disclaimers do not


sufficiently detract from the proclivity to eulogize South Vietnam. In this context William Bundy's description of General Nguyen Khanh's assumption of power in 1964 as a "very crude physical coup" becomes grotesque in view of our earlier suggestions that Khanh was "able" and "an impressive man." Only one of the one hundred documents surveyed exhibits any real proneness to assess our own fault. However, all of the cited instances of U.S. failure took place in the 1949-1963 period and the one disclaimer about the South Vietnamese government was confined to criticisms of Diem and the succeeding generals who, by that time, had all been overthrown. By this 1967 account there were no errors of judgment by Saigon or Washington after early 1964.

The predilection toward strongly stated claims which characterized the administration argumentation flowed logically from the description of the war as a struggle of right versus wrong. The basic claim that the war constituted aggression was most emphatically stated (in all cases emphasis has been supplied):

Beyond question this aggression was initiated and is directed by Hanoi.

... the hard facts and irrefutable evidence ... lead to one inescapable conclusion: The Republic of Viet-Nam is the object of aggression unleashed by its neighbor to the north.

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7 See, respectively, Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, August 30, 1965, 344 and Katzenbach, Department of State Bulletin, November 6, 1967, 603.

8 W. Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, June 20, 1966, 968.

9 See W. Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, September 4, 1967, 276-82. This speech was prepared for delivery to the National Student Association.

10 Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, June 8, 1964, 890.

The record is conclusive. It establishes beyond question that North Viet-Nam is carrying out a carefully conceived plan of aggression against the South.  

Statements refuting the notion that the war was a civil conflict ring equally strong.

There is no evidence that the Viet Cong has any significant popular following in South Viet-Nam.

Well, the Viet Cong, we must remember in the first place, is controlled by Hanoi. There is no question about that, I think.

These facts make it clear beyond question that the war in South Viet-Nam has few of the attributes of an indigenous revolt.

The central claim that the war was aggression from the north, then, was accompanied by strongly positive qualifiers, with reservations either unstated or expressly refuted. In Toulmin's scheme the aggression thesis would be diagrammed as follows:

(D) North Vietnam is directing hostilities against South Vietnam.  
So, (Q) certainly (C) South Vietnam is the victim of aggression.

Since
(W)
Aggression means the — Unless, (R) The war is a civil conflict within the south; or South Vietnam and North Vietnam are really one country, etc.

Because
(B)
This is the common definition and is supported by other examples, Manchuria, etc.

12 Aggression from the North, p. 29.
In this example the reservation is expressly refuted by the administration so that the qualifier is a strongly positive one.

Other claims in the case are stated in an equally emphatic manner. For example, an official dismissed the argument that the south was responsible for precluding the 1956 elections with the comment, "This argument has no merit." The claim that the U.S. was committed to Vietnam was also seen as incontrovertible (emphasis added):

The United States has a clear and direct commitment to the security of South Viet-Nam against external attack.17

These commitments--both legal and moral--are so solidly founded that I cannot see how anyone can rightly argue that we should renege on them.18

The qualifiers of the claim of our commitment--"clearly" and "solidly"--are strongly affirmative. Further, the claim is buttressed by two separate data-warrant connections, neither of which has a specified reservation as presented:

(D) In 1954 Eisenhower wrote Diem to pledge our support of the south. → So, (Q) certainly (C) The United States is committed to defend South Vietnam.

Since (W)

An offer of aid implies — Unless (R) The offer was a commitment to a government.

tentative or limited to non-military aid, etc.

and;

17 Humphrey, Department of State Bulletin, January 24, 1966, 115.
18 Katzenbach, Department of State Bulletin, November 6, 1967, 603.
The SEATO treaty included protection for South Vietnam. So, the United States is committed to defend South Vietnam.

Since (W)

A treaty to protect confers — Unless (R) The treaty did not specify unilateral aid, or South Vietnam did not ask for SEATO aid, or the SEATO treaty allows an escape clause, etc.

As before, because such reservations as above are not specified the claims become almost definitive.

Consider a final example of the proclivity to avoid including reservations. William Bundy made this presentation of the domino theory strongly affirmative and without exception.

In simple terms, a victory for the Communists in South Viet-Nam would inevitably make the neighboring states more susceptible to Communist pressure and more vulnerable to intensified subversion supported by military pressures.19

The claim that the fall of Vietnam would set in motion further losses is qualified as being "inevitable." The argument would be diagrammed as follows:

19W. Bundy, Department of State Bulletin, February 8, 1965, 171.
(D) If South Vietnam were to fall to the communists, then (Q) inevitably (C) its neighbors would be more likely to fall to the communists.

Since

(W)

The fall of one nation—unless (R) local and specific conditions caused Vietnam to fall; the communists would not press Vietnam's neighbors; local conditions make Vietnam's neighbors able to contain their communist elements, etc.

Because

(B)

This is supported by the statements of U.S. officials and past examples.

Here is the typical construction of the domino theory. Note that the reservations to the theory specified here are never present in the administration argumentation. Thus, again, the absence of reservations—or their rejection—leads to strongly reinforced claims.

I should note in passing one occasion when the President did reduce the strength of the domino claim. Speaking to a group of state legislators, Johnson argued, "So your American President cannot tell you—with certainty—that a Southeast Asia dominated by Communist power would bring a third world war much closer to terrible reality... But all that we have learned in this tragic century strongly suggests to me that it would be so."\(^{20}\) In this example Johnson specifically substituted the qualifier "strongly suggests" for that of "certainly." However, the claim is yet strongly stated and no reservations are specified.

\(^{20}\) Public Papers 1967, II, 878.
It may well be that the failure to include reservations and modify claims was ultimately detrimental to the argumentative case of the government. Arthur Schlesinger complained of the administration's effort to "pass its own ignorance on to the American people and to the world as certitude." Roger Hilsman hypothesized that the effect was detrimental. "The need for wide support," he explains, "sometimes leads to overselling a policy proposal in the sense of claiming too much for it. . . . For President Johnson's policy of escalation in Vietnam, it was devastating." 21

The Critics: Uninformed, Malintentioned and Dangerous

The concept of dissent in a democracy has always been sanctified. However, when the abstraction is made real and practiced against some specific object, the democratic ideal becomes somewhat compromised. Such describes well the circumstances of the debate over Vietnam. If the administration believed its argumentation to be beyond doubt, then how was criticism possible? It is clear that the administration professed great tolerance of criticism. Early in the process of escalation Johnson underscored his support for free discussion of his policies. Questioned at a news conference the President stated:

Q. Mr. President, do you think any of the participants in the national discussion on Viet-Nam could appropriately be likened to the appeasers of 25 or 30 years ago?

The President. I don't believe in characterizing people with labels. I think you do a great disservice when you engage in name calling. We want honest forthright discussion in this

21Schlesinger, p. 75.

22Hilsman, p. 126.
This statement accorded well with Johnson's claim the week before that "I understand the feelings of those who regret that we must undertake air attacks." Even after the criticism mounted, President Johnson averred: "There are many sincere and patriotic Americans who harbor doubts...." and his Secretary of State acknowledged that in regard to Vietnam, "I think it is impossible in our society to say that debate should not go on."25

While these comments supporting the concept of dissent on Vietnam are indicators of tolerance for opposition, it is clear that in many more cases the administration evinced some disdain for its opponents. One basic criticism of criticism was to suggest that detractors were uninformed or not acquainted with the true facts. The State Department's 1965 white paper alluded to great misunderstanding about Vietnam; and it is fair to hypothesize that this reference did not pertain to government misunderstanding. This impression is reinforced by a statement of the President in which he spoke of supporters of his policies as being those who had "cast aside the illusions;" opponents were those who ignored the evidence.27 Indeed, passages in Johnson's

23 Public Papers 1965, I, 452.
24 Ibid., 428.
25 See, respectively, Public Papers 1967, II, 876 and Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, March 29, 1965, 446.
26 Aggression from the North, p. 1.
27 Public Papers 1967, I, 349.
memoirs seem to indicate that he never totally understood the motives of his antagonists, nor fully recognized that they could operate on assumptions other than his own. He felt critics were quitters, that they were not realistic or fair, that they shifted ground frequently. Lyndon Johnson seemingly could not avoid the conclusion that his opponents on the war were weak in spirit and intention.

Others in the administration shared Johnson's suspicion that critics were naive. Thus, said Rusk, "To revert to Viet-Nam: I continue to hear and see nonsense about the nature of the struggle there." At other times policy makers spoke of those who had been "confused" by Hanoi, and who had "not faced the fact" of aggression. In addition to being uninformed, skeptics were seen as malintentioned. Thus, Johnson asked many times why critics concerned themselves over our air attacks and ignored Viet Cong atrocities. At other times he referred to detractors as "special pleaders" who were either callous or timid in disregarding the plight of South Vietnam.

Finally, spokesmen charged that war criticism was counterproductive to the war effort and, thus, the notion that dissent is dangerous came into vogue. Much like the World War II slogan that "a

28 Johnson, Vantage Point, pp. 50, 65, 233 and 247.


32 Public Papers 1966, I, 150.
loose word can sink a ship," the doctrine emerged that criticism encouraged the enemy. Cautioning critics to "remember that the world is their audience" Johnson spoke of his determination "that no foe anywhere should ever mistake our arguments for indecision, nor our debates for weakness." This theme was repeated frequently in the succeeding three years.

But sometimes they [the communists] do get encouraged, as they said this week, about the dissension in the United States of America. They believe that the political disagreements in Washington, the confusion and doubt in the United States, will hand them a victory on a silver platter in Southeast Asia.

First, we must not mislead the enemy. Let him not think that debate and dissent will produce wavering and withdrawal. For I can assure you they won't. Let him not think that protests will produce surrender. Because they won't. Let him not think that he will wait us out. For he won't.

But it is quite true that Hanoi lives on expressions of dissent here within our own society. I think the repeated demonstration of unity in this country is very important in persuading Hanoi that they cannot rely upon differences at home to cause us to pull away from our commitment to South Viet-Nam.

While the theory of dissent was supported, it seems that the administration disapproved of strong criticism and grew weary of it. President Johnson commented that constant questions about Vietnam from his friends caused him "almost to develop a stomach ulcer myself, just listening to them." Secretary Rusk spoke of "the limitations of

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34 Public Papers 1966, I, 684.
35 Public Papers 1967, II, 880.
36 Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, August 30, 1965, 354.
37 Public Papers 1966, I, 684.
debate in settling these matters." The preference for unity frequently expressed by the decision makers further indicates the barely concealed disdain for debate.

Arthur Schlesinger was disturbed over the government's pronoess to disparage criticism. He saw something ominous in what he termed the "doctrine that no one should criticize American policy in Vietnam lest such criticism encourage the enemy. . . ." Yet, clearly, all leadership has the tendency to confuse its goals and policies with those of the nation. Two hundred years ago John Dickenson described the British Ministry's similar efforts, in a protest against the Stamp Act.

The British nation is wise and generous. They can distinguish between a disgust to government and to the administration of it; a distinction which bad ministers are continually striving to confound. They set up their passions for the interests of their king and country, and whoever is offended with their conduct, is convicted by a very plain deduction of ministerial logic, of being an enemy to his king and country.

True, the Johnson Administration did not brand its antagonists as traitors. But the government clearly contributed to an atmosphere in which dissent was deemed less than patriotic. It was left for others, less scrupulous, to apply the epithets.

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38 Rusk, Department of State Bulletin, September 13, 1965, 441.

39 See, for example, Public Papers 1965, I, 319 and Remarks at the Presentation of the Medal of Honor to Capt. Roger H. C. Donlon, USA, December 5, 1964, Public Papers 1963-1964, II, 1640.

40 Schlesinger, p. 28.

Reservations to the Case for Vietnam Commitment

Two thousand years ago Protagoras--the "father of debate"--found himself criticized for espousing the notion that there existed two sides to every question. While the observation that truth might not be absolute offended the ancient Greeks, the problem of discovering reality remains today. Seemingly the official rationale for commitment to Vietnam accepted no controversy: The claims were held as certainty and both the intelligence and motive of the opposition were held in suspicion. This right-versus-wrong stance makes close scrutiny of the administration case only natural. It is not my endeavor--in applying a sort of accuracy standard to the administration case--to suggest that the government was "wrong," or that it "lied" or "distorted" the message. Rather, I wish to consider criticisms made against several of the claims in the official position on Vietnam. To be sure, opponents of the war had their own biases. Certainly, I do not mean to suggest that policy detractors had any special insight into the truth of the situation. I shall turn to critical commentary as a source of discrepant data and opinion which, when juxtaposed to the case for Vietnam involvement, will illustrate several potential reservations to administration claims. The presence of strongly argued reservations to key arguments in the case for involvement may suggest that the tone of certainty in government argumentation marks a tendency toward exaggeration.

Claim: The Geneva Accords Divided
Vietnam into Two Separate States

The contention that the division of Vietnam was sanctioned by
the Geneva accords was a central tenet of the case for our defense of
a separate south. This claim underlay the argument that South Vietnam
was an independent state and that, as a result, the presence of North
Vietnamese forces in the south constituted aggression by one state
against another. Further, our stated desire for a return to the Geneva
settlement rested on the assumption that the settlement provided for a
sovereign South Vietnam.

Generally, the literature of criticism rejected the foregoing
interpretation of the Geneva settlement. Passages of the Final Settle­
ment were quoted to support the counter argument that the division of
Vietnam was intended only to be a temporary one. The first article of
the agreements, which discussed the "provisional military demarcation
line," was interpreted to mean that the seventeenth parallel was no
international frontier.\footnote{See text of Geneva Agreements and Final Declaration of the
conference in Kahin and Lewis, pp. 348-76.} Article Fourteen of the settlement was
frequently quoted to prove that the political division contemplated
was, in fact, transitional.

Political and administrative measures in the two regrouping
zones, on either side of the provisional military demarcation
lines:

(a) Pending the general elections which will bring about the
unification of Viet Nam, the conduct of civil administra­
tion in each regrouping zone shall be in the hands of the
party whose forces are to be regrouped there in virtue
of the present Agreement.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 352-53.}
Reference to this article was buttressed by citations of the sixth article of the Final Declaration at Geneva which specified that "the essential purpose of the agreement relating to Viet Nam is to settle military questions with a view to ending hostilities and that the military demarcation line is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary."45

Administration adversaries, thus, invariably supplied this reservation to the official interpretation of the Geneva accords: the 1954 document divided Vietnam; but the division was military, not political, and the separation was intended to be temporary.

Claim: North Vietnam Prevented the 1956 Vietnam Elections

It is generally agreed that the Geneva settlement provided for a nationwide election to determine the leadership of post-war Vietnam. There is far less concurrence on the reasons for the failure to hold the scheduled plebiscite. As we have seen, the official position of the United States government holds North Vietnam to blame for the breakdown of the electoral process—alleging that the North Vietnamese refused to guarantee free elections.

Skeptics challenge the government's argument on several grounds:
(1) western nations were hesitant to agree to elections in Vietnam,
(2) Ho Chi Minh and the communist Viet Minh party had less to fear from an election than the western-supported non-communist nationalists, and
(3) the immediate cause of the electoral breakdown was the refusal of

45 Article 6, Final Declaration in Ibid., p. 368.
Ngo Dinh Diem to consult with Hanoi on the elections as required by the Geneva settlement.

In establishing the case that the western side contributed to the failure of elections, critics point, first, to western diplomatic maneuvers at the 1954 conference. They cite evidence that the United States was deeply reluctant to accept a settlement providing for elections—preferring a continuation of the war.46 B. S. N. Murti, Deputy Secretary General of the International Control Commission, reflected on the western powers' demand for a ten-year time limit for elections, wondering if the west ever really planned to abide by any provision for a national polling.47 Skeptics conclude from the western position on elections that the U.S. and others were aware of the relatively greater popularity of the communist forces. Almost invariably they point to President Eisenhower's statement that Ho Chi Minh would probably have garnered 80% of the vote had elections been held in 1954.48

Certainly, the most important conclusion of administration detractors is that the immediate event leading to the breakdown in plans for the 1956 voting was Diem's refusal to abide by the provision for electoral consultations.49 Critics cite Saigon's unwillingness to

46See, for example, conclusions in Pentagon Papers, I, 96, 440, 448-50, 461 and 479.


48See Eisenhower, Mandate, p. 372.

recognize the legitimacy of the Geneva accords and Hanoi's efforts to arrange for consultations as provided in the document. The support of a rival interpretation of the circumstances of electoral breakdown constitutes another reservation which, adversaries argue, further reduces the validity of the administration case.

Claim: North Vietnam has Consistently Violated the Geneva Accords

Related to the contention that the North Vietnamese had subverted the 1956 elections was the argument that the north had consistently contravened the accords since 1954. Administration antagonists did not usually seek to deny the northern violations. Rather, the rebuttal to this claim came in the form of an argument that both sides had ignored the Geneva document when it interfered with their needs. Often they turned to documentation such as a 1957 report of the International Control Commission in which that body reported greater difficulty in its dealings with Saigon than with Hanoi. Similarly, a 1962 commission report was cited to show that the North Vietnamese possessed no monopoly in recorded violations. This report indicated that South Vietnam and the United States had transgressed articles 16, 17 and 19 of the accords.


See Kahin and Lewis, p. 99 and Fall, Viet-Nam Reader, pp. 90-91.

See excerpts from this report in Viet-Nam Reader, p. 274.
The administration defended our conduct vis-a-vis the 1954 settlement, arguing that American violations of the settlement were purely defensive and that such measures were rendered necessary only by prior enemy violations. Secretary of State Rusk made this point explicit in a December, 1961 news conference.

Q. Mr. Secretary, you said quite pointedly that North Viet-Nam had violated the Geneva Accord. While we are not a signatory of the accord, we did have an arrangement with the ICC and South Viet-Nam about the number of military personnel we would have in South Viet-Nam. We have also observed the type of material we sent in there. Do we now feel bound by these prior arrangements?

A. I think that puts the question the wrong way around. There is no question that the North Vietnamese have been systematically violating the 1954 Geneva Accords. . . .

Now, actions are being taken by the other side to breach the accords. It is not a violation of an agreement of this sort to take steps to protect oneself against the other party's breach, even though in the absence of such a breach those steps might not be considered normal.52

Detractors tended to reject this defense as a sort of futile effort to resolve the old riddle "which came first, the chicken or the egg?" In this vein, Senator Wayne Morse likened the official position on the accords to a demand that some portions of the 1954 settlement be enforced while others be ignored.53 Antagonists employed this argument to allege that there existed a contradiction in the official position on Vietnam: U.S. officials were said to desire to enforce some provisions of the Geneva accords while rejecting others; further, it was said, we

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52 "Secretary Rusk's News Conference of December 8," Department of State Bulletin, XLV, No. 1174 (December 25, 1961), 1058.

trumpeted enemy transgressions while we similarly ignored sections of the settlement.

Claim: The War was Simply an Aggression from the North

The aggression thesis was central to the United States case for participation in the Vietnam war. Our support for Saigon was ever put in terms of the need to assist a friendly state in stemming a foreign-led insurgency. War critics similarly devoted considerable attention to the origins and conduct of the conflict--attempting to demonstrate that the United States had intruded into what was essentially a civil war.

At issue in the Vietnam debate was the very origin of the war in Indochina. Was it part of the communist strategy of aggression, or did the conflict materialize from local and particular circumstances? Vietnam policy detractors took the latter position, contending that the war arose from the French desire to reestablish the pre-war colonial hegemony. Similarly, as the onus of the first Indochina War (1946-1954) was placed on France, the second Indochina war (1956 to the present) was said to have resulted from certain actions by South Vietnam and the United States. If the United States felt justified in contravening the 1954 acts because the enemy had done so, it was said to be possible that the Viet Minh took the same position and resumed the fighting in response to Saigon's rejection of elections.54

Other critics found, in the origins of the second Indochina war, a more complex history. Many of these non-government sources argued

that the roots of the insurgency lay in Diem's repressive measures, not in an effort by Hanoi to reunify the country by force. The analysis of the Pentagon Papers on this matter is particularly interesting. The author or authors of the section on the "Origins of the Insurgency in South Vietnam, 1954-1960," offer the interpretation that the war was somewhat more than "aggression from the north."

Three interpretations of the available evidence are possible:

**Option A**--That the DRV [North Vietnam] intervened in the South in reaction to U.S. escalation, particularly that of President Kennedy in early 1961. Those who advance this argument rest their case principally on open sources to establish the reprehensible character of the Diem regime, on examples of forceful resistance to Diem independent of Hanoi, and upon the formation of the National Liberation Front (NLF) alleged to have come into being in South Vietnam in early 1960. These also rely heavily upon DRV official statements of 1960-61 indicating that the DRV only then proposed to support the NLF.

**Option B**--The DRV manipulated the entire war. This is the official U.S. position, and can be supported. Nonetheless, the case is not wholly compelling, especially for the years 1955-1959.

**Option C**--The DRV seized an opportunity to enter an ongoing internal war in 1959 prior to, and independent of, U.S. excalation. This interpretation is more tenable than the previous; still, much of the evidence is circumstantial.

The judgment offered here is that the truth lies somewhere between Option B and C. That is, there was some form of DRV apparatus functioning in the South throughout the years, but it can only be inferred that this apparatus originated and controlled the insurgency which by 1959 posed a serious challenge to the Diem government. Moreover, up until 1959, neither the DRV domestic situation nor its international support was conducive to foreign adventure; by 1959, its prospects were bright in both respects, and it is possible to demonstrate its moving forcefully abroad thereafter.55

Bernard Fall, a frequent critic of American policy in Indochina takes a position similar to that expressed in the analysis section of the Pentagon Papers. Fall attempts to document Diem's repressive measures, 56

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55. *Pentagon Papers*, I, 243.

and concludes that "But the historical record will show that, unfortun-
ately, the single offender most responsible for precipitating the Second
Indochina War was the Ngo Dinh Diem regime itself." Support for the
opinion of Diem's repressive tendencies is easy to find and many critics
suggest that, in persecuting all opposition, Diem did, in fact, help to
create the insurgent movement.

If, as some argue, the war originated in the south, when did the
North Vietnamese move to aid the subversion, and why? Former U. N.
Secretary General U Thant has commented that evidence shows little or no
North Vietnamese weapons support to the Viet Cong in 1954-1955. Bernard Fall lays most of the blame on Diem for persecuting the ex-Viet
Minh cadres in the south. After Saigon's "witch hunts" had stirred up
trouble, he concludes, North Vietnam began to support this on-going
operation "rather late and at a relatively slow pace." Fall specifi-
cally attacks the State Department interpretation which, he says, cannot
really account for the 1956-1960 insurgency and which, at best, proves
nothing more than that the North Vietnamese escalated their efforts as
did the United States in the early 1960's. Fall and others expressly

57 Fall, Two Viet-Nams, p. 336.
58 See Pentagon Papers, I, 245, 253, 256-57 and 260, Kahin and
Lewis, p. 99-107, Schlesinger, pp. 35-36, Steele, p. 153, Bernard B.
Fall, "Vietnam: The New Korea," Current History, L, No. 294 (February,
59 U Thant, "Press Conference on Southeast Asia and Related
60 Fall, Two Viet-Nams, p. 357-59.
reject the government's pure aggression thesis that the war was Hanoi's plot and that the National Liberation Front was its puppet.62

In challenging the government's view of the war, opponents seem to suggest that the aggression thesis be tempered with the reservation that the murkey details of the long Indochinese conflict render alternative hypotheses possible. Thus, in selecting a qualifier for the official description of the war it may well be wise to heed the admonition of the respected analyst Klaus Knorr when he observes: "Nobody has ever been able to draw a clear cut, unmistakable line between military aggression and non-aggression."63

Claim: The Johnson Administration Policy was Consistent with our Past Commitments

Critical to the Johnson Administration version of the war was the claim that the government pursued a policy totally consistent with that of the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations. The major evidence of our commitment was said to be the 1954 Eisenhower letter and the 1955 ratification of the SEATO treaty. In chapter III, I indicated that the 1954 letter of the President to Diem, although it did pledge the U.S. to help sustain a separate south, offered only economic assistance—and even made such aid conditional upon reform. Thus, it is not surprising that the Senate Republican Policy Committee "white paper" objected to the use of this letter as part of a pretext justifying Americanization


of the war. In a monograph sponsored by the Rule of Law Research Center, Don R. and Arthur Larson similarly find in the Eisenhower missive a very hesitant "pledge." "Where in this tentative, highly conditional opening of negotiations and statements of hope is the 'commitment,' the 'obligation,' the pledging of our word?" Likewise, the Larsons find less than a binding commitment to our policy in the SEATO treaty. They observe that it committed us only to "meet the common danger" in accordance with our "constitutional processes," by consulting with the other powers to "agree on the measures which should be taken for the common defense." When similarly queried by critics about the letter of the SEATO treaty, antagonists compelled Secretary Rusk to acknowledge that, "I am not now saying if we had decided we would not lift a finger about Southeast Asia we could be sued in court and be convicted of breaking a treaty."

Speaking to the nature of our commitment to Vietnam, in the aftermath of several changes of government in Saigon, George Kahin wondered, aloud, "Is our pledge of support completely unqualified? Does it not demand a minimum degree of performance and cooperation from

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67 See Rusk, Vietnam Hearings, p. 36.
Saigon--political as well as military? Is our pledge automatically to any military or civilian group which happens to control Saigon?  

Arthur Schlesinger expressed similar sentiments when he observed that the Johnson policy makers cited the letter of 1954 and SEATO as not merely justifying but actually requiring our military intervention. "In short," he concluded, "the Secretary of State's position that SEATO commits the United States to a military intervention can only be regarded as an exercise in historical and legal distortion."

The substance of such adverse commentary was to suggest that the invocation of the Eisenhower letter and the SEATO treaty was not a conclusive proof of policy consistency. Opponents, thus, contended that our 1964-1967 policy went far beyond any legal obligations undertaken by previous administrations.

Claim: The War was a Conflict of Freedom Versus Tyranny

Though not always expressed in such terms, the clear import of the administration case, nevertheless, described our aims and actions as antithetical to those of the enemy. Critics suggested that the Diem government's oppressive measures made such a contrast unjustifiable. Diem's regime was said to be narrowly based, prone to police state tactics and reluctant to promote significant economic and social reform.

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68 Kahin, Viet-Nam Reader, pp. 292-93.

69 Schlesinger, p. 30.

In the years after the fall of Diem, our support for Saigon was said to tie us to similar narrowly based strongmen whose dedication to reform was less than inspiring. Thus, it was that the late Bernard Fall wrote of that troubled land soon before his death in 1966:

South Viet-Nam today seems to resemble a diseased body previously weakened from other illnesses; it has become incapable of spontaneously producing the antitoxins necessary to combat the onslaught of new bacilli. In other words, there is simply not yet enough of a difference between the two regimes [North and South Vietnam], in their relations between themselves and their citizens--and the North has the more efficient politico-military apparatus--to make the citizens of the South rally to its defense. That is why there can be no genuine comparison between the Berlin Wall and the 17th parallel: In Berlin, the barrier separates a total dictatorship from a true working democracy; in Viet-Nam, it separates two systems practicing virtually the same rituals but invoking different deities.\(^1\)

Another reservation to the "we're right, they're wrong" view of the Vietnam war comes in the form of an observation about the Vietnamese people--a large number of people, it is argued, support the Viet Cong insurgents. The consensus of rival opinion holds that the communists had captured the nationalist feelings of Vietnam before 1954 and that, after this time, Diem became progressively more unpopular. The argument that the Viet Cong had popular support is an outgrowth of these claims, coupled with the thesis that the second Indochina war began as a reaction to Diem's repressions.

Bernard Fall's study of The Two Viet-Nams contains perhaps the most credible case that the southern insurgents had won a measure of popular support. Fall expressly refutes Walt Rostow's theory that guerilla fighters can exist as a terrorist movement without popular roots (Rostow was a Special Assistant to President's Kennedy and Johnson).

\(^{71}\)Fall, Two Viet-Nams, p. 398.
Fall claims that no insurgency can survive without support. Emphasizing that "civilian support is the essential element of a successful guerilla operation," Fall surveyed insurgent warfare on three continents. He attributes the success of British anti-insurgent operations in Kenya and Malaya to the fact that the insurgents behaved as terrorists and lacked domestic roots. However, when a large segment of the populace favored the insurgents—as in Cyprus and Palestine—the same British methods failed. Citing many other such instances, Fall insists that the insurgent must be a builder; once he attains popular allegiance, half the battle is won.72 Developing—in another section of the book—the inability of Saigon to achieve as successful a land reform program as the Viet Minh, Fall concludes that the Viet Cong insurgency did, in fact, rest on a basis of support.73

A final reservation to the placement of all war guilt on Hanoi focused on the destructive effect of our military maneuvers. The most obvious of these was, of course, the immense physical destruction we wreaked upon the south and north. "Already our bombers roam over the hapless country," wrote Arthur Schlesinger, "dumping more tonnage of explosives each month than we were dropping per month on all Europe and Africa during the Second World War..."74 He bemoaned the vast expending of artillery shells and destructive missions. Howard Zinn introduced his case for withdrawal with several anecdotes highlighting

72 Ibid., pp. 344-50.
73 Ibid., pp. 206-207 and 359-61.
74 Schlesinger, p. 59.
the human suffering caused by our use of force. Bernard Fall expressed the opinion that our massive and destructive intrusion into Vietnam set a precedent for world lawlessness. Commenting on the civilian casualties "generated" by the U.S. presence, Herman and DuBoff wondered whether we were not guilty of genocide.

An interesting commentary on the issue of our destructiveness is raised by the administration claim that the Vietnamese refugees fleeing the countryside sought areas secured by the government so as to escape Viet Cong terror. Critics, however, contended that the refugees actually sought escape from U.S. ground and air destruction and fled to government secured territory which was the only area not regularly devastated. Bernard Fall juxtaposed a claim by Hubert Humphrey that the refugees fled the Viet Cong with testimony by former Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern affairs Roger Hilsman to the effect that "the only security from bombardment lay in towns held by the Government, since the Viet Cong have no airpower." Fall claimed, as a result, that the Vietnam war involved atrocities on both sides.

75 Zinn, pp. 1-3.
76 Fall, Two Viet-Nams, p. 346.
77 Herman and DuBoff, pp. 114-123.
80 See Fall, Two Viet-Nams, pp. 350-51.
81 Ibid., p. 372.
Critics therefore suggested three basic reservations to the tone of righteousness in the administration case: (1) the Saigon regime was as oppressive as the communist alternative we opposed, (2) the Viet Cong movement rested on a significant basis of popular support, and (3) our policies resulted in an escalation of destruction which brought further hardship to the people of Vietnam.

Claim: Our Stand in Vietnam
Deterred Further Aggression

Claims that our defense of Vietnam contributed to world-wide security against aggression were often embodied in one of two characteristic arguments: the Munich analogy and the domino theory. Both these supporting principles were assailed in non-government sources.

Since President Eisenhower described the states of Indochina as dominos on an international game board the "domino theory"—and its "test case" corollary—have been controversial. The theory rested somewhat on the assumption that China was a hidden enemy in Vietnam—and this postulate was attacked. Several sources outside the government pointed out that the Vietnam war and the Viet Minh movement began long before Communist China ever existed. Further, China was portrayed as relatively cautious in her foreign policy—certainly in her assistance to "wars of national liberation." In this context Schlesinger cited and supported the opinion that the Lin Piao document was hardly a

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Chinese version of Mein Kampf.\textsuperscript{84} It was argued that passages in the Lin document stressed the need for revolutionaries to fight their own battles without Chinese assistance.

To make a revolution and to fight a people's war and be victorious, it is imperative to adhere to the policy of self-reliance, rely on the strength of the masses in one's own country, and prepare to carry on the fight independently even when all material aid from outside is cut off. If one does not operate by one's own efforts, does not independently ponder and solve the problems of the revolution in one's own country, and does not rely on the strength of the masses but leans wholly on foreign aid--even though this aid be from socialist countries who persist in revolution--no victory can be won, or consolidated even if it is won.\textsuperscript{85}

The Lin Piao document was, therefore, termed a rather parsimonious call to arms in that it reminded the revolutionaries of the world that they must fight their own battles to succeed.

If, then, the notion of the Chinese threat was debunked, it was logical for Vietnam critics to challenge the domino theory. The theory was termed "a military myth" based more on "rhetorical extravagance" than fact.\textsuperscript{86} The Burmese Secretary General of the United Nations, U Thant, pointed to the fact that Burma--which shared a 1000-mile border with China--had somehow been able to resist its communist rebels without U.S. troops or major aid.\textsuperscript{87} Calling the theory "simplistic" George Kahin insisted that Southeast Asian nations would not "automatically collapse if the Communists were to control all of Viet-Nam." He continued, affirming that, "So long as Southeast Asian governments are in harmony

\textsuperscript{84}Schlesinger, p. 82. See similar conclusion in Steele, p. 295.
\textsuperscript{85}See text in "Lin Piao on the 'People's War,'" \textit{Current History}, LI, No. 301 (September, 1966), 173.
\textsuperscript{86}See, respectively, Butwell, 3 and Schlesinger, p. 87.
\textsuperscript{87}U Thant, \textit{Viet-Nam Reader}, p. 265.
with their nations' nationalism, so long as they are wise enough to meet the most pressing economic and social demands of their people, they are not likely to succumb to communism."

Related to the domino and test case theories was the belief that the World War II experience with aggression prescribed that all aggression must be arrested in its early stages. Stated frequently as the "Munich analogy," this argument was attacked by non-government writers. Two authors in particular--Arthur Schlesinger and Howard Zinn--devote particular attention to the Munich comparison. Alleging that, "One touches the Munich analogy and it falls apart," Zinn isolates "important differences" between the Munich situation of 1938 and today:

**Munich**

... the main force operating against the Czech status quo was an outside force, Hitler's Germany; the supporting force was the Sudeten group led by Konrad Henlein.

The Czech government, whose interests the West surrendered to Hitler in 1938, was a strong, effective, prosperous, democratic government. ... 

**Vietnam**

Since 1958 (and traceable back to 1942), the major force operating against the status quo in South Vietnam has been an inside force, formed in 1960 into the NLF; the chief supporter is not an outside nation but another part of the same nation, North Vietnam.

The South Vietnamese government which we support is a hollow shell of a government, unstable, unpopular, corrupt. ... 

Arthur Schlesinger, too, finds a naive sort of history inherent in the Munich analogy. He comments ruefully that in Vietnam "Santayana's

88 Kahin, Viet-Nam Reader, p. 294.

aphorism must be reversed: too often it is those who can remember the past who are condemned to repeat it."

A final postscript to the entire Munich-domino scenario was drawn in terms of alleged losses to U.S. prestige resulting from the Vietnam war. Wayne Morse concluded that the war actually united nations against us and that it showed our weakness. In a chapter entitled "The Price We are Paying," Arthur Schlesinger wrote of the monetary cost, the economic dislocations and the social strife resulting from the war. Coupling the domestic disasters brought by Vietnam to its foreign ramifications Schlesinger wrote of his feelings concerning the poisonous atmosphere which the war carried in its wake:

All this has produced what may, in the long run, be the most serious cost of all—a cost both domestic and foreign: the ebbing away of belief in the American government. It is an irony that a war undertaken to demonstrate the credibility of the American word should end in erosion of confidence in American integrity and purpose.

The Reservations in Retrospect

Lloyd Bitzer has argued that the unique feature of the enthymeme lies in "joint efforts of speaker and audience..." He writes that "enthymemes occur only when speaker and audience jointly produce them. Because they are jointly produced, enthymemes intimately unite speaker


\[91\] Morse, Viet-Nam Reader, pp. 286-87.

\[92\] Schlesinger, p. 75.
and audience and provide the strongest possible proofs. . .". This
conception of proof through cooperation of persuader and hearer is
characteristic of the working of the administration rationale for
involvement in Vietnam. The government reasoned from commonly held
cold war premises about man, the world and our role in global affairs.
However, although application of the cold war stereotype made the war
more understandable, it also marked a tendency to disregard certain of
the elements of the Vietnam situation. In the foregoing review of
critical comment on the case for commitment, adversaries supplied
discrepant information and interpretation which mitigated against the
certainty ascribed to claims in the case on Vietnam. The existence of
reservations applicable to the argumentation does not mean that the
position of the U.S. government on Vietnam was "wrong." Rather, such
opposing data should serve to remind us that many of the strongly stated
administration arguments were and are subject to challenge. Thus, the
aggression thesis might not be "beyond question," "inescapable," or
"conclusive." Further, the assertion that there existed "no evidence"
of support for the Viet Cong seems extreme in light of the critical
analysis of the war. In sum, the administration was able to amass
evidence to support its interpretation of the Vietnam war. But, at
times the government may have overstated its case by employing qualifiers
which denoted close to absolute certainty.

93 Lloyd F. Bitzer, "Aristotle's Enthymeme Revisited," Quarterly
Journal of Speech, XLV, No. 4 (December, 1959), 408.
Chapter VII

THE CASE FOR VIETNAM INVOLVEMENT: A RETROSPECT

No single study of even the government side of the Vietnam debate could ever presume to be definitive. The sheer mass of the documentary record requires that any work by a single author be selective. One comment by former Secretary of State Dean Rusk vividly impressed this truism upon me. At one point in my interview with Mr. Rusk he turned to one of his bookshelves and picked up a volume of the *Pentagon Papers*. Indicating his general satisfaction with the selection of documents, he explained that, nevertheless, his entire office could hold at most perhaps only one-tenth of the documentary record of the war. It must be borne in mind, therefore, that this research has barely penetrated the surface in terms of the potential sources for study.

It was partly my inability to read everything ever written on Vietnam that early prompted me to seek interviews with prominent Vietnam policy makers. Former Secretary of State Rusk was most kind in permitting me a portion of his valuable time for a discussion. Believing that the interview should be treated as an intellectual whole I feel that it is particularly appropriate to treat it here. The interview gives valuable perspective to the preceding six chapters which were based solely on my analysis of public and private manuscripts. In this present chapter I will initially set forth several of the major insights from the meeting.
with Mr. Rusk. Having done so, I will draw together my conclusions about the overall impact of this present study.

A Conversation with Dean Rusk

My meeting with Dean Rusk took place in his office in the School of Law of the University of Georgia at Athens, Georgia. I flew to Athens for the purpose of interviewing him and the discussion took place on July 5, 1973 from 1:15 to 3:00 p.m. I should note that Mr. Rusk requested that I not tape record the session. Thus, my account of the meeting is drawn from notes I made during and shortly after the interview.

The Policy Makers as Advocates

Advocacy has always been understood to entail an effort to state one's case in the most persuasive fashion. Comparison of the secret record of Vietnam diplomacy to public statements on the war reveals a clear effort to minimize the negative and maximize those positive aspects of the war most supportive of the administration argumentation. Thus, for example, Saigon weaknesses, admitted in private, were omitted in official discussions of the conflict. The apparent effort to state the situation in the most favorable manner depicts the decision makers as advocates defending a desired interpretation of the data on Vietnam.

The role of Washington officials as policy advocates in the Vietnam debate was the focus of a series of questions which I put to the former Secretary of State. Citing what I called the proclivity to state the administration case in strong terms--with a sort of right versus wrong aura--I asked the former Secretary to comment on the
description of the war as the defense of freedom against tyranny. Rusk answered that there existed a sort of naivete about advocacy. He emphasized that "advocates should not be expected to poor mouth what they are doing." Rusk meant that it was only natural for a policy maker to speak in favor of his policy--defending his decisions by stating them in the most persuasive manner.

Mr. Rusk reinforced this statement by analogy. Consider, he said, what FDR might have done in January, 1942--"he could have made a case for defeat." Roosevelt might have addressed the nation and said: the Nazi forces have overrun Europe; Rommel is knocking at the gates of Alexandria; Hitler is pressing Stalingrad and my advisers inform me that the Russians will be knocked out of the war in six months; we have not been able to stop the Japanese from taking vast areas in Asia and we have no idea of when we will be able to do so; in short, the jig is up, the situation is impossible and we must give up the war.

All of the above, of course, said Rusk, was true. However, the President, even in the face of these facts, saw a need to pursue the war in hopes of victory. FDR, in this view, could have advocated a hasty peace, but, instead emphasized the need to fight and the promise of success. In other words, he made a policy decision and defended it by amassing data and arguments in favor of his war policies. He did not ignore adversity, but he put it in the perspective of an expectation of eventual success.

Further clarifying how the Vietnam war was defended, Rusk called attention to the fact that in testimony and interviews as well as in speeches, there was considerable pressure to be concise. Thus, information was selected and presented in a few sentences--discussions which
could have easily consumed days rather than minutes. In this connection
Rusk mentioned that diplomacy operated on an assumption of optimism:
that things were subject to improvement. (Otherwise, he commented, we
would just turn things over to the military.) Rusk related that he had
once studied the questions in his news conferences, finding that eighty
percent of them dealt with the future. Now, he said, the Secretary of
State couldn't just reply: "I don't know;" thus, predictions had to be
made and these were governed by the need to be brief, to select data and
the general tendency toward diplomatic optimism. In this view, con­
straints operated to create a rhetoric which was optimistic, which,
perforce, selected information and presented the data so as to support
the chosen policy.

Later in the interview I returned to this subject, making refer­
ence to administration efforts to refute the claims of critics.
Apologizing for my harsh interpretation of the administration argumenta­
tion, I referred to my perception of a tendency to state opponents' argu­
ments in the weakest fashion, excluding their reasoning and assump­
tions. Rusk smiled and leaning back in his chair reflected that admin­
istration critics practiced much the same technique. Agreeing readily
with this observation I steered the conversation back toward the
question of advocacy, citing the fact that the administration privately
reflected over many weaknesses in the Saigon governments. Indeed, said
Mr. Rusk, it was important to remember that in a political debate the
participants were all advocates. "If," he commented, "we had aired all
our gripes about South Vietnam, then people might have said 'let's get
out.'" Rusk continued, speaking to the government's realization of
Saigon shortcomings. He recalled that he and others had kidded
Secretary McNamara about the Defense Secretary's trip to Vietnam when McNamara went up and down the country holding General Khanh's arm up in the air. Pausing for a moment Rusk leaned forward and added, however, that "we could have sold the war more." Rusk reminded me that, although the government defended its policies, the administration might have chosen to sponsor war rallies or have sent out movie stars (as in World War II). The Federal Government, he continued, could even have attempted to engender and encourage hate for North Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh. But, he said, the administration deliberately avoided doing this. There was no desire to create a war psychology—just to defend the chosen policy.

To give further perspective to our support for Saigon Rusk turned and picked up a reference which listed the leadership and governments of the world. Paging through this volume, he commented that if one were to consider the governments of the nations of the world, probably only one-third would be of a type that we would consider tolerable. This statement related to another earlier answer when Rusk indicated that in foreign policy one must often deal with agents and agencies which are considerably less than ideal. He spoke of Kennedy's efforts to recognize the legitimacy of neutralism which, he said, Dulles had felt to be almost immoral. Thus, less distinction was made in the treatment of allies and neutrals. As a function of broadening our relations, Rusk continued, we came to deal with major independent leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and General Sukarno of Indonesia—some of whom, he said, were not nice people at all. The image I perceived was that in foreign policy one rarely dealt in ideals—policy makers made the best of existing situations. In this view the Vietnam decision makers were quite aware of the shortcomings of our Vietnamese allies but their own
policy perceptions convinced the American leaders of the need to support Saigon. In defense of that decision they made the strongest case possible for backing the South Vietnamese government, minimizing its weaknesses and maximizing its strong points. As a final commentary on the subject of advocacy Rusk advised me that all informed citizens should view the government as only one source of information. Citizens should seek all the data possible, remembering that both governmental and non-government spokesmen were advocates.

Analogy and the Lessons of the 1930's

The public and private record since 1945 reveals a strong regard for the lessons of the past and a concomitant desire to form present policy with a view toward avoiding earlier error. This world view was strongly reinforced in my interview with the former Secretary of State. In relating how he first became interested in foreign policy Secretary Rusk recalled that the Japanese invasion of Manchuria had strongly captured his attention. Thereafter, he followed developments in China closely, although, he said, later events swept the China incidents from center stage. Rusk added that during the late 1930's he picketed shipments of scrap steel to Japan--recalling that his protest efforts had about as much success as later such protestations. Rusk recalled that he had been present at the Oxford Union when the Union voted not to fight for king and country.

At this point I related my observation of the importance accorded analogy--particularly the Munich comparison--in the administration defense of Vietnam policy. I outlined briefly what I have earlier called the cold war consensus and asked Rusk to comment on the usefulness of
analogy in formulating diplomacy. Mr. Rusk replied that he believed analogy to be necessary for life—otherwise we would always be scraping our leg on the same chair, never learning to steer clear of it. In other words, our actions had to be guided by our experiences. Secretary Rusk called to memory his support of the League of Nations and his opposition to Japanese scrap steel purchases. He spoke of evidence of British weakness, such as the Oxford Union vote and indicated his belief that when Hitler invaded Poland, the German dictator believed that neither the British nor the United States would participate in the war. Thus, he said, the central lesson for men of his generation became that collective security was the key to world peace.

However, after World War II, the western powers demobilized so quickly that when Stalin looked out over Western Europe he saw few opposing military divisions. There is such a thing, Rusk reflected, as "tempting a thief." (He recalled once being fined in Germany for tempting thieves by leaving his boat unlocked.) Mr. Rusk spoke of a series of post-World War II events which convinced western statesmen that the future boded ill. He cited Russian pressure against Iran and Turkey, and the 1948 communist coup in Czechoslovakia. These events, Rusk affirmed, were the beginning of the cold war. In particular, he said, Soviet encouragement of the North Korean invasion and the Berlin blockade seemed at the time to herald an atmosphere which could easily lead to a Third World War. This interpretation of the post-war period, which builds upon the World War II and early cold war experiences, is entirely consistent with the documentary record examined earlier.
Vietnam as a Test Case

One of the major foci of this dissertation has become the relationship of Vietnam-era argumentation to the belief and rhetoric of the cold war. Thus, I queried Secretary Rusk about the claim that Vietnam served as a test case of the communist cold war strategy of subversion. Rusk answered that he felt at the time that the way in which we reacted to the Vietnam crisis--under SEATO--would determine the strength of other such commitments. He explained the context of administration action in Vietnam in the 1960's. The United States had been confronted by Khrushchev over Berlin in 1961. In 1962 the Cuban missile crisis--which Rusk termed the gravest situation in the post-war period--marked a Soviet effort to strike a serious blow at the security of the United States. Thus, when the situation in Vietnam became more serious the administration had further cause to wonder "what are these characters trying to do." Somewhat later, when Rusk spoke of the suggestions being made in 1952 to transfer American forces in Korea to Indochina, I interposed and asked Rusk to discuss the degree to which these two situations were being treated as analogous. Rusk's answer further elucidated the Kennedy-Johnson administration's perception of the threat posed by Vietnam in the 1960's. He spoke of the drumfire of calls for world revolution plus the memories of Mein Kampf which influenced policy makers. In sum, the administration was faced with what Secretary Rusk called a series of crises thrust upon it. In addition, these calls for revolution seemed to harken of the days of Hitler. The atmosphere convinced the administration that the war in Vietnam posed a serious cold war threat to world peace and security.
At this juncture Mr. Rusk underscored his belief that the United States had never opposed communism as a social system. Rather, we attempted to counter efforts to impose the social system of communism on others by force. In this context, the Secretary explained that there were two general situations which could lead to nuclear war: (1) a condition whereby the adversary would be driven into a corner, forced to choose between total humiliation or total war, and (2) a situation where the enemy would misjudge our intent and believe, falsely, that we would not act. In clarifying the latter situation Rusk spoke of a conversation with Khrushchev on the Berlin situation. The Soviet leader told Rusk that Britain, France and West Germany had all assured him that they would not fight a nuclear war over West Berlin. How then, asked Khrushchev, can you expect me to believe that the United States would fight. Rusk told me that he answered that the United States might just be foolish enough to fight for principle.

Returning to the issue of Vietnam as a test case, former Secretary Rusk affirmed that the actions we took there would send out signals to our adversaries--signals which described our probable response to other potential challenges. What was at stake in Vietnam, he said, was the validity of the entire collective security structure which had been painstakingly constructed after World War II. Rusk spoke of the government's concern over how the world would react to our policy--what judgments the people of Malasia or even West Berlin would make about our fidelity.

In addition to these specific testimonies to the interest in the cold war implications of Vietnam, the entire tone of Secretary Rusk's
discussion of Vietnam bespoke of the policy makers' pronoeness to empha-
size the international aspects of Vietnam over and above defending South
Vietnam as an end in itself. Rusk added that he had heard reference
made to a memorandum by John T. McNaughton--an Assistant Secretary of
Defense--which detailed various reasons for our commitment--attempting
to quantify the percentage each contributed to our decision. Mr. Rusk
said he would have relegated such a memorandum to the trash can, had it
come across his desk. While Secretary Rusk thus declined to weigh the
relative importance of the various arguments for commitment, the tenor
of the discussion seemed to reveal relatively greater concern for the
wider implications of the war as opposed to considerations based on the
effect of a communist takeover in Vietnam itself.

Opposition to the War

The consensus of support for the Administration policy in Viet-
nam obviously atrophied considerably in the years after 1965. I asked
Secretary Rusk to comment on his perception of how war opposition came
about. At what point and why did the consensus come apart? Rusk indi-
cated that there were many factors involved in the emergence of opposi-
tion to our Vietnam policy. First, he said, John Kennedy had far better
relations with the liberals than did President Johnson. For example,
Rusk continued, Arthur Schlesinger was quite supportive of Kennedy's
policy on Vietnam, while at the same time highly critical of the Johnson
Administration. Another reason for the change in attitude on the war
by segments of the population was the effect of changes in editorship
of the New York Times and the Washington Post. Succeeding editors were
not as favorable to administration policy as had been their predecessors.
Finally, Mr. Rusk concluded that the major reason for weariness with war had been the impact of the fighting on the American people. A democracy, he said, prefers a quick end to a war. Generalizing on this observation, Rusk said that in retrospect he saw himself as having made two miscalculations: (1) he underestimated the tenacity of the North Vietnamese in absorbing enormous losses, believing that they would not stick with it "at that cost;" and (2) Rusk overestimated the patience of the American people in sustaining the war.

In discussing the administration's perception of popular feeling for its policies, Rusk explained that the government perceived great support well into 1967. In executive sessions with committees of the Congress, he explained, the members of the Cabinet found a great reservoir of support for the war. For example, Rusk cited the 1964 hearings on the Southeast Asia Resolution. After the questioning session Senator Fulbright told Rusk that the administration draft was the best of all such resolutions ever considered by the committee. (Secretary Rusk noted that when the text of this hearing was published that Senator Fulbright had this remark removed from the printed record.) He cited another index of Congressional support in the form of a May 17, 1967 open letter of Senate doves to Ho Chi Minh, where the doves, although hoping for an end to the war, nevertheless told Ho Chi Minh that they were totally opposed to a unilateral United States withdrawal. Further, Mr. Rusk cited a 1967 "Affirmation: Vietnam" rally in Atlanta, noting that such open support for the Vietnam war which existed in 1967 would have been impossible by 1969. Rusk told me that throughout the 1964-1967 period he consistently found Congressional support for the
administration policy in his executive sessions with the Congress. And he so informed President Johnson.

Speaking about war criticism, Rusk noted that Senator Eugene McCarthy, although a vocal war opponent, almost never attended Senate Foreign Relations Committee sessions with the Secretary of State and, thus, never addressed his complaints to the Secretary. (In fact, Rusk added, Senator Fulbright often had great difficulty in securing a sufficient number of committee members to justify a hearing.) McCarthy's reticence was in contrast, Rusk commented, to Wayne Morse who stated his premises of opposition. Thus, Mr. Rusk told of his respect for Senator Morse and noted that they have remained friends to this day.

Secretary Rusk's recollections indicate that until 1967 the administration clearly felt that the Congress was with the executive branch and, thus, the crescendo of criticism thereafter came as somewhat of a surprise. Rusk seemed to manifest chagrin that former Vietnam policy supporters became critics—e.g., Schlesinger and Fulbright. He illustrated the tendency of some Kennedy-era hawks retroactively to cast themselves as early war opponents by alluding to Roger Hilsman. Setting the background for one question, I cited Hilsman's observation that the Johnson Administration might have harmed its case by claiming too much for its policies. Rusk interposed that in this connection I should consider that Hilsman had been fired from his position as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs. While Hilsman's departure has come to be interpreted as resulting from his early opposition to a hawkish policy, Rusk explained that, after finally agreeing to submit his resignation, Hilsman forwarded Rusk a three-page letter in which he maintained a hawkish attitude. For example Hilsman complained that the
administration had failed to emphasize, sufficiently, our efforts to stop communism in Vietnam. Secretary Rusk added that Hilsman has never made this letter public and has come to be regarded as one of the original doves.

**Overall Impressions**

I must confess that nothing I learned from the interview came as any great surprise. Perhaps the most significant finding came in the form of the administration's self-perceived stance as an advocate. Although the documentary record of Vietnam convinced me that the government policy makers functioned as advocates, I was not at all certain that they were aware of this role. For instance, the right-versus-wrong tone of the administration case made it entirely plausible that the policy makers functioned as "true believers"—apostles of a policy position based on revealed truth to which valid opposition was not possible. Such, however, was clearly not the case. Just as President Johnson perceived his Johns Hopkins speech as a persuasive effort, so too, did Secretary Rusk regard the executive branch decision makers as advocates. The fact that administration argumentation was intended as a persuasive case validates my attempt to employ argumentative and rhetorical devices to study it. Further, since the policy makers strove to state their position in the most persuasive fashion, my attempt to specify reservations to official claims is worthwhile.

Secretary Rusk's strong belief in the lessons of the past validates the earlier-expressed conclusion that such a position underlay the post-World War II diplomacy of this country. Rusk's description of the administration's perception of Vietnam as another challenge following
Berlin and Cuba serves as further evidence that the cold war ideology was inherent to the rationale for involvement in Vietnam. The close connection of the rhetoric of Vietnam involvement to its cold war antecedents helps to account for the tendency to see Vietnam as part of a pattern of conflict more than as an individual problem. Both the Rusk interview and the documentary record of the period reveal a preoccupation with the effect of our Vietnam policy on other U.S.-backed defense systems.

**Conclusions Concerning the Rationale for Vietnam Involvement**

At this point it is appropriate to draw together the several strands of thought developed in the course of this research. Throughout this discussion I have viewed the official side of the Vietnam debate as part of an argumentative system. Initially, in my treatment of the cold war and the history of American involvement in Vietnam, I attempted to organize the policy makers' image of the Vietnam conflict within the atmosphere of cold war thought, language, and rhetoric. Clearly, shared beliefs about the nature and origins of World War II and the cold war were conveyed in a characteristic language of confrontation. Vietnam early became linked to the general conflict with communism and, thus, was described in cold war terminology.

This shared image of communism and our role as its antagonist--coupled with events in and beliefs about Vietnam--created a powerful rhetorical exigence in 1964-1965. As Rusk and Johnson relate, the situation in Vietnam was perceived as another communist challenge which, if successful, would be a harbinger of further difficulty. Thus, the policy of escalation and the defense of that policy grew out of the cold
war political and rhetorical tradition. As various audiences responded
to the Vietnam rhetoric and policy, the administration received feedback
data detailing both support and opposition to its activity. In the dis­
cussion of administration response to criticism, the government's ten­
dency to disparage and dismiss opposition was quite pronounced.
Detractors were attacked on a variety of grounds and their policy
alternatives were expressly refuted.

The treatment of Vietnam as an argumentation system—character­
ized by distinctive rhetoric emerging from a shared pattern of beliefs—
constitutes a basis for assessing the overall implications of this study.
In chapter I, I set forth nine general research foci in terms of ques­
tions about the rhetoric of Vietnam commitment. Let me now evaluate the
degree to which the questions have been answered in the course of this
research. The original questions were as follows:

1. What was the nature of the Vietnam war and how did we come to
   be involved in it?

2. What were the arguments justifying U.S. involvement?

3. What assumptions and beliefs underlay the case for commitment
to Vietnam?

4. To what extent was Vietnam policy defense related to the
   rhetoric of the cold war? Was Vietnam policy defended via
   arguments based on cold war or local Vietnam circumstances?

5. What was the relationship between our Vietnam policy and U.S.
   foreign policy since World War II? Were our actions in Vietnam
   consistent with our post-war policy?

6. What persuasive strategies underlay the case for commitment?
   To what extent were policy alternatives deemed viable?

7. What judgments may be made about the fairness and accuracy of
   the administration argumentation? Was the case consistent?
   Was it overstated?
8. To what extent was the official position on Vietnam cast in terms of catch-phrases? Was language used to dichotomize? Was the rhetoric colored by a distinctive costume of words?

9. What were the stated goals of our Vietnam policy? To what extent were these goals rooted in concern for principle or based on perceptions of U.S. self-interest?

The foregoing research has touched upon all of these queries. Insights into these questions may best be communicated by organizing the results around three overall conclusions:

1. Vietnam policy defense constituted a major persuasive effort and took the form of a consistent and coherent argumentative case.

2. The case for commitment to Vietnam may best be understood as an outgrowth of and response to the beliefs and rhetoric of the cold war.

3. The certainty attributed to claims in the case for Vietnam involvement oftentimes was overstated. This exaggeration of claim had an impact on both the formal validity and rhetorical effect of the administration argumentation.

1964-1967 Vietnam Policy Defense as an Argumentative Case

It seems clear that the Johnson Administration policy makers viewed themselves as advocates in a political debate. Analysis of secret documents and personal memoirs, reveals that the decision makers sincerely believed their own account of the history of the Vietnam war as a cold war conflict. Almost uniformly they saw Vietnam as part of a world-wide pattern of subversion and aggression. Failure to check the threat in Vietnam was interpreted as potential proof of American impotence in stemming the trend toward a world ruled by power and might.

The rhetoric of Vietnam involvement reflects this shared political meaning system. Thus, the rhetoric of Vietnam policy justification was founded on a consistent and coherent set of claims about politics,
the world and American responsibilities. The survey of the administration case, in chapter IV, constitutes a complete response to the second research question dealing with the arguments for commitment. Documents produced over a four-year period by twenty spokesmen reveal the existence of a consistent case for involvement. Scrutiny of the official literature easily produces an awareness that the defense of Vietnam escalation rested on characteristic claims which may be isolated and organized.

**Vietnam as a Cold War Conflict**

The extended discussions of the cold war have revealed the strong intellectual pull of what I have called the cold war consensus. The letters and memoirs of the prime movers of the post-World War II period clarify the process by which a consensus of belief on the confrontation with communism grew and ultimately predominated. The confidential documents of three decades outline the impact of this cold war thinking on the major decision makers— their beliefs, perceptions and policy preferences. Our study of the history of the Vietnam conflict indicates that, by 1964, Vietnam had been perceived and described in cold war terminology for a period of seventeen years.

Against this background, it was understandable that the persuasive response to the exigence of Vietnam should have been a rhetoric cast in the atmosphere and expressed in the language of the cold war. Consistent with the perception of Vietnam as "just another" of a series of continuing conflicts, the policy makers stressed the international facets of the Vietnam struggle. Thus, while the commitment to Vietnam was described partly as an effort to save the Vietnamese from foreign
domination, the thrust of the case for involvement focused on the need to prove our commitment so as to safeguard the strength of our world-wide system of defense commitments.

These observations supply an answer to the first, third and fifth research questions posed in chapter I of this study. Question One dealt with the nature of the Vietnam war and, in retrospect, it is easy to understand that policy makers' strong beliefs about communism in and about Vietnam caused them to perceive the struggle as a simple case of "communist aggression." Our fear of the Viet Minh communist party caused us to overcome our initial reluctance to support French Indochinese colonialism.

This understanding of the Vietnam war provides a definitive answer to the query concerning possible assumptions which underlay the Vietnam rhetoric (Question Three). The rhetorical record clearly establishes the relationship of Vietnam rhetoric to cold war reasoning. In chapter VI, I documented the presence of the cold war consensus in the Vietnam-era argumentation. Further, it appears that the history of America's Vietnam policy clarifies the process by which the war became part of the world-wide confrontation with communism. In chapter III, I traced Washington's growing concern for Indochinese communism and our subsequent support for a series of anti-communist forces in Vietnam. Thus, in response to Question Five, it appears that our policy was wholly consistent with American perceptions of the requirements for successful cold war diplomacy.

Consistent with the perception of the Vietnam conflict as a skirmish in an ongoing struggle, the war was cast in the costume of cold war language. Described as a contest between freedom and communism, our
actions were put in terms of defense against aggression. Suggestions for withdrawal and the like were considered a "surrender" or "retreat." In sum, the accumulated vocabulary of the cold war was invoked to detail the essential nature of the Vietnam war and our necessary involvement in it. This finding supports an affirmative answer to the eighth research question—the rhetoric of Vietnam was, indeed, furthered by a distinctive costume of words which allowed for convenient dichotomization of "free world" and "communist" actions and aims.

My interview with Dean Rusk and the documentary record of the Indochinese crisis combine to confirm that defense of 1964-1967 policy was rooted in a concern for the wider implications of the war. Although our support of Saigon was said to be a protection of Vietnam's self-determination, the official argumentation emphasized that failure in Vietnam would encourage further communist aggression. Thus, any answer to research Question Four would necessarily rank the "test case" aspects of the war as more crucial than local imperatives such as defending the freedom of Vietnam for its own sake.

Analysis of specific argumentative strategies revealed that in so far as argumentation from analogy, direction and unlimited development characterized the case for involvement, the case was—as I have earlier concluded—largely supported by extending the implications of the war beyond the borders of Vietnam. Vietnam was fit into the mold of resistance to aggression, and the importance of that resistance was put in terms of dissuading other would-be aggressors. Question Six dealt with the identification of argumentative strategies. In this connection it is clear that reliance on analogic-type proof reinforce the emphasis on the wider cold war aspects of the war. Further, as the Munich and
other supportive analogies were interpreted as definitive, the administration rejected alternative interpretations of the Vietnam war. Analysis of the tactic of refutation, in chapter V, confirms the government's proclivity to reject, outright, opposing policy options.

The Impact of Exaggeration of Certain Administration Claims

Like almost all situations in life, the vicissitudes of the 1964-1967 involvement and escalation were more complex than the stereotyped language of the cold war would allow. Further, as advocates of a particular interpretation of the events, the administration naturally stressed favorable conditions and minimized circumstances tending to reflect badly on the chosen policy. Thus, as we have seen, the claims in the administration were, generally, strongly stated without reservation. The lack of reservations in the case became a major concern in chapter VI. In detailing the counter-case espoused by administration critics, I sought to indicate that the official position on the war should have included reservations reducing the certainty attributed to many of the claims. Failure to adjust qualifiers to reflect the presence of discrepant data meant that, in some cases, the rhetoric of Vietnam involvement was built on exaggerated and overstated arguments. This finding supplies an answer to Question Seven, which dealt with the precision with which the administration matched data and claim. Further, to the extent that the case for commitment distorted the facts of the war to fit the declarations of our rhetoric, we may answer the query posed by Question Nine: While the Vietnam policy justifications were rhetorically rooted in adherence to lofty principle, they were, oftentimes, prone to overstate
the applicability of such principles as "freedom" and "self-determination" to a government such as in Saigon.

My discussion with former Secretary of State Rusk convinced me that administration exaggerations resulted, partly, from the government's effort to make the strongest case possible for its interpretation of the war. Paradoxically, however, in addition to problems of formal validity resulting from the absence of reservations, overstated claims also weakened the persuasive impact of the administration case. In chapter III, I described the process by which the intellectual elite and certain Vietnam correspondents came to reject the exaggerations of the administration case. Although both groups constituted a minority of the U.S. population, the alienation of the elite and the press created a formidable body of spokesmen skeptical of U.S. policy. The increase in "dovish" criticism, 1964-1967, posed great difficulties for the administration and necessitated repeated efforts to refute the detractors.

I questioned Secretary Rusk about the process by which the consensus of support for United States policy broke down. None of Rusk's four responses--the liberals' coolness toward Johnson, changes in New York Times and Washington Post editorship, and public war weariness--admitted of any weakness in the case for commitment. This stress on factors extraneous to the validity of the administration case reveals that the policy makers seemingly failed to realize that their own exaggerations had a counterproductive effect. Overstatements in the official argumentation helped to alienate individuals who became opponents of America's Vietnam policy. Thus, the lack of reservations in the administration rationale--a factor of formal validity--had a decidedly negative impact on the rhetorical success of the administration case.
It may well be that the analysis of contemporary issues carries with it the dual disadvantages of incomplete availability of documentation and excessive personal involvement. It is possible that no one who has experienced the divisive debate over the Vietnam war could be free of strong opinion on the war—a personal circumstance which the author readily admits. I have attempted, nevertheless, to assume the role of a rhetorical analyst and critic—to probe the case for commitment to Vietnam and to search out its origins, development and structure. The "truth" of the Vietnam war has yet to be established and is probably unknowable. The journalist, polemicist, historian and critic can only hope to illuminate selected aspects of what seems to have been reality. In this spirit, I submit my observations about the administration side of the Vietnam debate, 1964-1967, and enter them into the public record of the conflict.
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