

The Pentagon Papers and U.S. Imperialism in South East Asia

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With regard to long-term U.S. objectives, the Pentagon Papers again add useful documentation, generally corroborating, I believe, analyses based on the public record that have been presented elsewhere.¹ In the early period, the documentary record presents a fairly explicit account of more or less rational pursuit of perceived self-interest. The primary argument was straightforward. The United States has strategic and economic interests in South-east Asia that must be secured. Holding Indochina is essential to securing these interests. Therefore we must hold Indochina. A critical consideration is Japan, which will eventually accommodate to the “Soviet Bloc” if Southeast Asia is lost. In effect, then, the United States would have lost the Pacific phase of World War II, which was fought, in part, to prevent Japan from constructing a closed “co-prosperity sphere” in Asia from which the U.S. would be excluded. The theoretical framework for these considerations was the domino theory, which was formulated clearly before the Korean war, as was the decision to support French colonialism. The goal: a new “co-prosperity sphere” congenial to U.S. interests and incorporating Japan.

It is fashionable today to deride the domino theory, but in fact it contains an important kernel of plausibility, perhaps truth. National independence and revolutionary social change, if successful, may very well be contagious. The problem is what Walt Rostow and others sometimes call the “ideological threat” specifically, “the possibility that the Chinese Communists can prove to Asians by progress in China that Communist methods are better and faster than democratic {6} methods”.² The State Department feared that “A fundamental source of danger we face in the

¹ Cf. in particular, Gabriel Kolko, *The Roots of American Foreign Policy*, Beacon, 1969, and the discussion in J. And G. Kolko, *The Limits of Power*, Harper and Row, 1972; *At War with Asia*, Pantheon, 1970 chapter 1. The Indochina Story, Pantheon and Bantam, 1970, part III; see also the articles by Dower, Du Boff and Kolko in Chomsky and Zinn, eds., *Critical Essays on the Pentagon Papers*, Beacon, 1972

² See Walt W. Rostow and R.W. Hatch, *An American Policy in Asia*, Wiley and MIT Technology Press, 1955, p. 7. In Rostow’s view, this “ideological threat to our interest ... is as great as the military threat” posed by Communist China and the Soviet Union. It is “essential,” Rostow notes, “to emphasise ... especially the close link between Japan’s dangerous foreign trade problem and the requirements of growth in Southeast Asia” (p. 12), and to remove the “illusory glamour” of trade with the Communist bloc, which “represent[s] a powerful attraction” (though an unreal one), particularly to Japan (46–7). Furthermore, “The relative performance of India and Communist China over the course of their respective First Five Year Plans may very well determine the outcome of the ideological struggle in Asia”

Far East derives from Communist China's rate of economic growth which will probably continue to outstrip that of free Asian countries, with the possible exception of Japan", a matter of real as well as psychological impact elsewhere (*DOD*, book 10, 1198; June, 1959). The Joint Chiefs repeated the same wording two weeks later (1213), adding further that "The dramatic economic improvements realised by Communist China over the past ten years impress the nations of the region greatly and offer a serious challenge to the Free World" (1226). State therefore urged that the U.S. do what it can to retard the economic progress of the Communist Asian States (1208),³ a decision that is remarkable in its cruelty.

A few years later, in the midst of the fall 1964 planning to escalate the war, Michael Forrestal pointed out that we must be concerned with Chinese "ideological expansion", its need "to achieve ideological successes abroad", and the danger than any such ideological success will stimulate the need for further successes. Therefore "our objective should be to 'contain' China for the longest possible period" (III, 592, November 4, 1964); or, as the analyst puts it a bit more accurately, paraphrasing Forrestal, "the U.S. object should be to 'contain' Chinese political and ideological influence" (III, 218). William Sullivan picked up the same theme, viewing "Chinese political and ideological aggressiveness ... as a threat to the ability of these peoples to determine their own futures, and hence to develop along ways compatible with U.S. interests" (*ibid.*, analyst's paraphrase).

Note the typical assumption that self-determination is equivalent to U.S. interest, an assumption that is more than usually insipid [sic – RW] in the light of what the Pentagon Papers reveal about the actual U.S. response to Vietnamese efforts at self-determination. The same assumption, in effect, appeared much earlier in the important State Department Policy Statement of September 1948, discussed earlier, which took note of "our inability to suggest any practicable solution of the Indochina problem". This inability arose from the incompatibility of our long-term objectives with certain unpleasant facts. One long-term objective is to eliminate so far as possible Communist influence and to prevent Chinese influence, and "the unpleasant fact [is] that Communist Ho Chi Minh is the strongest and perhaps the ablest figure in Indochina and that any suggested solution which excludes him is an expedient of uncertain outcome". What is particularly interesting is the reason why we must "prevent undue Chinese penetration and subsequent influence in Indochina". The reason is "so that the peoples of Indochina will not be hampered in {7} their natural developments by the pressure of an alien people and alien interests".

This laudable concern for the "natural developments" of the people of Indochina, free from alien interests, is coupled with the statement of another long-term objective of U.S. policy: "to see installed a self-governing nationalist state which will be friendly to the U.S. and which ... will be patterned upon our conception of a democratic state", and will be associated "with the western powers, particularly with France with whose customs, language and laws [the peoples

(37). "India and Asia could be won to Communism without a Chinese Communist soldier crossing Chinese borders," if "the Communist bid to win Asia by demonstrating rapid industrialisation" is more successful than development in "Free Asian societies" (51–2).

It is also necessary "to learn to deal effectively with subversion and insurrection... as now in Southern Vietnam" (7). The book is interesting as the ideological expression of an influential planner of the 1960s, e.g. with its emphasis on our fundamental interest in preserving open societies with no "concentrated power" in the state (4f., 142; other forms of "concentrated power" go unmentioned). For further discussion, see *American Power and the New Mandarins*, Pantheon, 1969, p. 332. 2

³ These fears were re-evaluated shortly, when it appeared that China was undergoing an economic crisis, but may well be voiced again in the future.

of Indochina] are familiar, to the end that those peoples will prefer freely to cooperate with the western powers culturally, economically and politically” and will “work productively and thus contribute to a better balanced world economy”, while enjoying a rising standard of income.⁴ The U.S. and France, in short, do not constitute “alien people and alien interests” so far as the peoples of Indochina are concerned, and association with them does not hamper “natural developments.”

The NSC [National Security Council] Working Group of November 1964, in discussing the domino theory, pointed out the danger that mainland Southeast Asia might fall to Communist domination if South Vietnam does, noting that “If either Thailand or Malaysia were lost, or went badly sour in any way, then the rot would be in real danger of spreading all over mainland Southeast Asia” (III, 627). The Joint Chiefs added that they “are convinced Thailand would indeed go.” The NSC Working Group was further concerned with the “effects on Japan, where the set is clearly in the direction of closer ties with Communist China, with a clear threat of early recognition”; and with the possibility that “if the rest of Southeast Asia did in fact succumb over time,” the effects might be “multiplied many times over” and might, “over time, tend to unravel the whole Pacific defence structure.” The Joint Chiefs added that the loss of South Vietnam alone would have these effects, that the U.S. would not be able to prevent the rot from spreading, very likely, except through “general war”, and that the time frame for the unravelling of the whole Pacific defence structure will be short.

Shortly after, William Bundy and John McNaughton noted that the “most likely result” of the least aggressive option they were considering (Option A) “would be a Vietnamese-negotiated deal, under which an eventually unified Communist Vietnam would reassert its traditional hostility to Communist China and limit its own ambitions to Laos and Cambodia.” They added that “In such a case ... whether the rot spread to Thailand would be hard to judge.” It would, however, be {8} likely that the Thai “would accommodate somehow to Communist China even without any marked military move by Communist China” because they would “conclude we simply could not be counted on” (III, 661).

Option A was unacceptable: the United States was unwilling to accept its most likely outcome, a Vietnamese-negotiated deal leading to a unified Vietnam, Communist-led and hostile to China, its ambitions limited to Laos and Cambodia. Therefore the planners quickly moved to heightened aggression. The planners are vague as to just how the rot will spread to Thailand. They rule out the possibility, absurd in any event, that it will spread through the military activities of a unified Vietnam. Furthermore, the Thai will “accommodate”, they suggest, without any military move by China. Rather, the rot will spread because the Thai elite will have lost faith in the United States.

The planners are as vague about what is meant by a Thai “accommodation” to China, or why they fear this outcome, as they are about the spreading of “the rot” to Thailand. Evidently, it is not a matter of military conquest by China, as they make clear. There is only one rational explanation for their fears. They are concerned with the “ideological expansion” of China. The Thai elite, they fear, will have lost faith in the willingness or ability of the United States to help them prevent internal social change in Thailand or to counter a domestic insurgency. The only “threat” posed by a unified Vietnam, hostile to China and limiting its ambitions to Laos and Cambodia, is the “ideological threat,” the threat of social and economic progress, within a framework unacceptable to American imperial interests. This is the rot that may spread to Thailand, inspiring a communist-

⁴ U.S. Government edition of the Pentagon Papers [henceforth, *DOD*], book 8,p. 148, 144.

led nationalist movement there, which the Thai elite could not “count on” the United States to suppress.

Recall that in this period there was much talk of a competition between the Chinese and the Indian models of development (see note 2). In this context, fear of Chinese “ideological expansion” gave substance to the domino theory, quite apart from any fantasies about Chinese troops roaming at will through northern Thailand or Kremlin-directed aggression by the Viet Minh.

It is an interesting and important fact that the planners are generally so vague and imprecise about the mechanism by which the rot will spread in the wake of a communist victory in Vietnam, or about just what is entailed by an “accommodation” to Communist China. It cannot be an oversight; these are, after all, the crucial issues, the issues that led them to undertake successive stages of aggression in Indochina, at immense cost. But even internal documents, detailed analyses of options and possible consequences, refer to these central issues in loose and almost mystical terms. Occasionally, as in the document just cited, the planners make it clear that military conquest is not the mechanism they fear. Surely they did not believe that Ho Chi Minh was going to conquer Thailand or Malaysia, or set sail for Indonesia or Hawaii. One must assume that the planners were sufficiently in touch with reality to realise that Vietnamese support for an indigenous guerrilla movement could hardly be very significant in Thailand and Malaya (and would be of no significance beyond). Such movements could succeed only if they had powerful roots and were capable of rallying the local population. If nothing else, their own repeated failures to incite resistance in North Vietnam would have sufficed to establish this fact. And it is difficult to believe that the planners, not ignorant men, were so entangled in a web of fantasy that they anticipated Chinese aggression in Southeast Asia. As we see from the cited document, they regarded even a unified Vietnam that would be hostile to China as a danger to their plans, and anticipated that the mysterious Thai “accommodation” would take place even without any overt military moves by China

In fact, the American political leadership desperately sought some indication that China had aggressive intentions. A case in point was the U.S. government interpretation of Lin Piao’s statement of September 1965, which emphasised that national liberation movements must be self-reliant and cannot count on China for meaningful support. To McNamara, Rusk and others, this was a new *Mein Kampf*.⁵ The response of the Kennedy intellectuals to Mao’s talk about the East Wind prevailing over the West Wind,⁶ or Khrushchev’s statement of support for wars of national liberation, was of the same order. It would be misleading to say that these statements inspired fear or concern; rather, ideologists eagerly seized upon these statements, as in the case of the Lin Piao article, in an effort to justify programmes that they wished to undertake, or had already set in motion. As we will see directly, U.S. policy makers and American intelligence made determined (though unavailing) efforts to discover evidence that would prove the Viet Minh to be agents of “international communism.” They did not respond to such evidence by deciding to support the French, but rather sought such evidence after deciding, with certain qualms, to support the reconquest of Indochina by France.

These and many similar incidents make sense only on the assumption that the “rot” was the Communist “ideological threat,” which {10} must be combatted by direct intervention against

⁵ For some discussion, see Donald Zagoria, “The strategic debate in Peking,” in Tang Tsou, ed., *op. cit.*, vol. 2, pp. 249f.

⁶ See, for example, see Roger Hilsman’s discussion of this speech in his *To Move a Nation*, 1967. For comments, see my *American Power and the New Mandarins*, chapter 3, p. 262–6.

local Communist rebellion. But no skilful ideologist would want to see the implications spelled out too clearly, to himself or to others. Consequently, the central factors noted above are left a mystery, apart from occasional comments such as those I have cited.

It is important to be clear about what is at stake in discussion of the domino theory and related matters. The reality of perceived “dangers” is, of course, irrelevant to determining the motivation of policy makers. The fact that threats were perceived and taken seriously suffices to establish motive. The question of the reality of the threats is nevertheless of interest, for a different reason. If in fact a failure of intelligence or knowledge led to the perception of imaginary dangers, as is often alleged, then policy could be “improved” (for whose benefit, is another question) by replacing the policy makers by others who are more rational and knowledgeable. The issues are sometimes not kept separate, with much resulting confusion.

In Southeast Asia, the threat was heightened by a look at the allies of the United States. When Lyndon Johnson returned from Vietnam in May 1961, he spoke of the problem of reassuring our friends: in addition to Diem, these were Chiang, Sarit, and Ayub (II, 56). Such friends as these – the only ones mentioned – surely were endangered by the “ideological threat” that Rostow and others perceived. The threat would be enhanced if Vietnam were to be united and successful in mobilisation of the population for social and economic development, generally along Chinese lines, as might well have occurred, had force not been introduced.

The comparison of development in South and North Vietnam was not particularly encouraging to the U.S. in this regard. An Intelligence Estimate of May, 1959 concluded that “development will lag behind that in the North, and the GVN will continue to rely heavily upon U.S. support to close the gap between its own resources and its requirements” (*DOD*, book 10, 1191). In the North, the standard of living is low and “life is grim and regimented,” but “the national effort is concentrated on building for the future.” The South has a higher standard of living (and “there is far more freedom and gaiety” – for whom, is not specified, nor is there discussion of the distribution of wealth), but “basic economic growth has been slower than that of the North.” The higher standard of living in the South was not unrelated to the more than \$1 billion of U.S. non-military aid, the bulk of which financed import of commodities (*DOD*, book 10, 1191–3). In a similar context a few years later, an NSC working group took note of the discouragement in South Korea “at the failure to make as much progress {11} politically and economically as North Korea” (III, 627).

Perhaps the threat has now diminished, with the vast destruction in South Vietnam and elsewhere and the hatreds, and social disruption caused by the American war. It may be, then, that Vietnam can be lost to the Vietnamese without the dire consequence of social and economic progress of a sort that may be quite meaningful to the Asian poor. Perhaps the “second line of defence” of which U.S. planners spoke can be held, at least for a time.

If our friends – Diem, Chiang, Sarit, and Ayub, in 1961 – were toppled by popular movements, perhaps ultimately leading Japan to realign, influencing India, affecting even the oil-rich Middle East and then Europe, as the domino theory postulated, there would be a serious impact on the global system dominated by the United States and U.S.-based international corporations. Although some of the formulations of the domino theory were indeed fantastic, the underlying concept was no fantasy. Correspondingly, it comes as no surprise to discover that it is rarely challenged in this record. The analyst regards support for the French against Ho Chi Minh as “the path of prudence rather than the path of risk”; it “seemed the wiser choice,” given the likelihood that all of Southeast Asia might have fallen under Ho’s leadership (obviously not by military

conquest, say, in Indonesia). This he regards as “only slightly less of a bad dream that what has happened to Vietnam since” (I, 52). The domino principle, he notes “was at the root of U.S. policy” since Chiang’s defeat. It was also at the root of French policy, though the dominoes they were concerned with were in North Africa (I, 54). I have already noted McGeorge Bundy’s firm reiteration of the theory in mid-1967 (IV, 159).

In the years between, there is debate only over timing and probability. A CIA analysis of June, 1964 has frequently been described as a challenge to the validity of the domino theory.⁷ However, this analysis (III, 178) merely states that the surrounding nations probably would not “*quickly* succumb to communism as a result of the fall of Laos and South Vietnam” (my emphasis) and the spread of communism would not be “inexorable” and might be reversed, though the loss of South Vietnam and Laos “would be profoundly damaging to the U.S. position in the Far East,” and might encourage the “militant policies” of Hanoi and Peking.

The documentation for the pre-Kennedy period gives substantial support to this interpretation of U.S. motives. By April, 1945, the U.S. had publicly supported the reconstitution of French authority, somewhat evasively, while a “more liberal” pattern, specifically, “liberalisation of restrictive French economic policies”, was recommended “for the protection of American interests” (DOD, book 8,6–10). The U.S. interest in Indochina (“almost exclusively a French economic preserve, and a political morass”) was considerably less than in Indonesia, where “extensive American and British investments ... afforded common ground for intervention” (I, 29). It was urged that France move to grant autonomy to its colonies (or the people “may embrace ideologies contrary to our own or develop a Pan-Asiatic movement against all Western powers”) and that open door policies be pursued (DOD, book 8, 23). By December, 1946, it was noted that “French appear to realise no longer possible maintain closed door here and non-French interests will have chance to participate in unquestioned rich economic possibilities” (*ibid.*, 87). Although the resources of Indochina itself are repeatedly mentioned (e.g. *ibid.*, 183), it was of course the whole region (on the hypothesis of the domino theory) that was the primary consideration: “if COMMIES gain control IC, Thai and rest SEA will be imperiled” (*ibid.*, 220; June, 1949).

A National Security Council report of December, 1949 went into the situation in some detail (NSC 48/1, *ibid.*, 226f.). The problem is that now and for the foreseeable future, the USSR threatens to dominate Asia, an area of significant political, economic, and military power. The “Stalinist bloc” might achieve global dominance, if Japan, “the principal component of a Far Eastern war-making complex,” were added to it. “Whether Japan’s potential is developed and the way in which it is used will strongly influence the future patterns of politics in Asia.” “In the power potential of Asia, Japan plays the most important part” by reason of its economic potential and strategic position. “The industrial plant of Japan would be the richest strategic prize in the Far East for the USSR.” Communist pressure on Japan will mount, because of proximity, the indigenous Japanese Communist movement which might be able to exploit cultural factors and economic hardship, and “the potential of Communist China as a source of raw materials vital to Japan and a market for its goods.” Japan requires Asian food, raw materials, and markets; the U.S. should encourage “a considerable increase in Southern Asiatic food and raw material exports” to avoid “preponderant dependence on Chinese sources.” Analogous considerations hold of India. Furthermore, these markets and sources of raw materials should be developed for U.S. purposes. “Some kind of regional association ... among the non-Communist countries of Asia might become an important

⁷ E.g., by Chester Cooper, “The CIA and decision-making,” *Foreign Affairs*, Jan, 1972.

means of developing a favourable atmosphere for such trade among themselves and with other parts of the world.”

As has been emphasised by John Dower among others: “the {13} United States has never intended to carry the burden of anti-Communist and anti-Chinese consolidation alone. It has always seen the end goal as a quasi-dependent Asian regionalism.”⁸ The Pentagon Papers enrich the available documentation on this matter in a rather interesting way.

Continuing with NSC 48/1, it is recommended that under certain restrictions, trade with Communist China should be permitted, for the health of the Japanese and U.S. economies. The industrial plant of Japan and such strategic materials as Indonesian oil must be denied to the USSR, and kept in the Western orbit. The particular problem in Southeast Asia is that it “is the target of a coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin” (this is “now clear”), and has no responsible leaders, outside of Thailand⁹ and the Philippines. If Southeast Asia “is swept by communism we shall have suffered a major political rout the repercussions of which will be felt throughout the rest of the world, especially in the Middle East and in a then critically exposed Australia.”

The general lines of this analysis persist through the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. NSC 64 (I, 361f) concluded that Thailand and Burma would “fall under Communist domination” and the rest of Southeast Asia would be “in grave hazard,” if Indochina were “controlled by a Communist-dominated government.” The Joint Chiefs urged “long-term measures to provide for Japan and the other offshore islands a secure source of food and other strategic materials from non-Communist held areas in the Far East” (I, 336, April, 1950; they also recommended military aid and covert operations). A State Department Policy Committee interpreted NSC 64 as asserting that “the loss of Indochina to Communist forces would undoubtedly lead to the loss of Southeast Asia” (*DOD*, book 8, 351; October, 1950). NSC 48/5 saw the USSR as attempting to bring the mainland of East Asia and eventually Japan under Soviet control (May, 1951; *ibid.*, 425f.). Given Asian population, military capacity, critical resources and Japanese industrial capacity, it is essential to block this programme. An NSC staff study of February, 1952 warned that

The fall of Southeast Asia would underline the apparent economic advantages to Japan of association with the communist-dominated Asian sphere. Exclusion of Japan from trade with Southeast Asia would seriously affect the Japanese economy, and increase Japan’s dependence on United States aid. In the long run the loss of Southeast Asia, especially Malaya and Indonesia, could result in such economic and political pressures in Japan as to make it extremely difficult to prevent Japan’s eventual accommodation to the Soviet Bloc, (I, 375).¹⁰

⁸ John Dower, “The superdomino in postwar Asia: Japan in and out of the *Pentagon Papers*, in Chomsky and Zinn, eds., *op.cit.*.”

⁹ Compare Ho Chi Minh and Phibun Songkhram, the Japanese collaborator who had overthrown the government of Thailand in April, 1948 after his poor showing in the elections, “the first pro-Axis dictator to regain power after the war” (Frank C. Darling, *Thailand and the United States*, Public Affairs Press, 1965, p.65). Support from the United States was immediate, one of the measures taken “to deter Communist aggression in Southeast Asia” (*ibid.*, f. 67). {36} Back

¹⁰ It is sometimes argued that at best “citation of these views [which can now be documented extensively from internal documents as well as the public record] proves no more than conviction, and a mistaken conviction at that,” and therefore “the radical argument” that Japanese relations with Southeast Asia were a dominant consideration in American planning can be discounted Robert Tucker, *The Radical Left and American Foreign Policy*, Johns Hopkins, 1971, pp. 116–7. The argument is an obvious non sequitur, a particularly clear example of the fallacy noted earlier (p.

It went on to speak of the importance of Southeast Asian raw materials {14} (e.g., Indonesian oil, and the significance of Malaya, the largest dollar earner of the United Kingdom, to Britain's economic recovery), and U.S. strategic interests, developing the domino theory in detail.

NSC 124/2 in June, 1952 identified China as the main enemy, and gave a clear formulation of the domino theory, emphasising again the problem of raw materials and the threat of Japanese accommodation to Communism (I, 83–4, 384f.). The same themes persist, with added and even clearer emphasis, under the Eisenhower Administration. It was emphasised that Japan is the keystone of U.S. policy and that the loss of Southeast Asia (a likely consequence of the loss of Indochina, or even Tonkin) would drive Japan to accommodation with the Communist bloc, permitting Red China (now the main culprit, though some analyses still refer to “the Soviet Communist campaign in Southeast Asia”; cf. *ibid.*, book 9, 214; January, 1954) to construct a military bloc more formidable than that of Japan before World War II. The worldwide effects would be disastrous. Therefore Indochina must be saved, and its countries must be encouraged to integrate themselves into the “free world” system and to stimulate the flow of raw material resources to the free world, Japan being the critical factor (e.g., I, 436, 438, 450, 452). In June 1956, John F Kennedy gave a clear formulation of the basic thesis:

“Vietnam represents the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the Keystone to the arch, the finger in the dike. Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, the Philippines and, obviously, Laos and Cambodia are among those whose security would be threatened if the red tide of Communism overflowed into Vietnam ... Moreover, the independence of Free Vietnam is crucial to the free world in fields other than the military. Her economy is essential to the economy of all of Southeast Asia; and her political liberty is an inspiration to those seeking to obtain or maintain their liberty in all parts of Asia – and indeed the world. The fundamental tenets of this nation's foreign policy, in short, depend in considerable measure upon a strong and free Vietnamese nation.”¹¹

Intelligence estimates repeated, with various nuances, the general assumptions of the domino theory (see e.g., *DOD*, book 10, 999, September, 1955, for a qualified statement). NSC and JCS memoranda also elaborate the same assumptions consistently, adding also conventional proposals that the investment climate for U.S. capital be improved (*ibid.*, 1206) and that Southeast Asian countries be integrated into the free world economic system (*ibid.*, 1206, 1228, 1234, 1288).

In the 1960s, there is an increasing component of irrationalism and posturing, with much talk of psychological tests of will, humiliation, the American image, making sure that the other fel-

xx). Documentation of the *conviction* suffices to establish motive; its *accuracy* is clearly irrelevant to the determination of motive. Tucker compounds his logical fallacy with a factual error. He states that “The radical argument of Japanese dependence on Southeast Asia is difficult to take seriously.” This, however, is not a “radical argument” but rather the conviction of the planners, by arguing merely the irrelevant question of the accuracy of the conviction, Tucker in effect concedes the actual “radical argument” while appearing to reject it. To make matters still worse, when he turns to the question whether the conviction was held, he hedges, claiming only that “at least after 1964” one cannot attribute Vietnam policy to this conviction. Again irrelevant, since no one whose views Tucker discusses proposed that this was the operative factor after 1964. From every point of view, then, Tucker's discussion of this point is entirely inept. It is, however, the only attempt I know of to respond to what Tucker calls “the radical argument”. On Japanese – Southeast Asian relations and their significance, see Jon Halliday and Gavan McCormack, *Japanese Imperialism*, Penguin, 1972.

¹¹ Cited in Cooper, *The Lost Crusade*, p. 168.

low blinks first. The {15} latter is not without its ironic aspects. Thus the analyst regards 1961 as “peculiarly difficult year” for the United States because of “the generally aggressive and confident posture of the Russians ... and the generally defensive position of the Americans” (II, 21). It was, therefore, difficult to make concessions or to give ground to the Soviets, a matter which indirectly affected Vietnam. Anything, anywhere, that “was, or could be interpreted to be a weak U.S. response, only strengthened the pressure to hold on in Vietnam.” Chester Cooper believes, however, that “Kennedy’s foreign policy stance was given an added fillip in late 1962 following his dramatic success” in the Cuban missile crisis. Vietnam then provided an opportunity to prove to Peking and Moscow that their policy of “wars of liberation” was dangerous and unpromising, and also “provided both a challenge and an opportunity to test the new doctrines” of counterinsurgency.¹² It would appear, then, that whether the U.S. stance with respect to its great power rival is defensive or not, the determination to win in Indochina is fortified.

By early 1964, concern over the effects of the “loss” of South Vietnam reached a peak of what can perhaps properly be called “hysteria”. In the analyst’s phrase, referring to the February deliberations, “Stopping Hanoi from aiding the Viet Cong virtually became equated with protecting U.S. interests against the threat of insurgency throughout the world” (III, 153). Ralph Stavins hardly exaggerated when he describes the “clouds on the horizon” as seen from Washington in the early 1960s: “Hanoi would overthrow Diem with a few guerrilla bands, and the United States, as a direct consequence, would be forced to retire from the arena of world politics.”¹³ Such fears were incorporated into the important NSAM 288 of March 1964, which presented what the analyst calls “a classic statement of the domino theory” (III, 3). Throughout the world, it held, “the South Vietnam conflict” is regarded as a test case of U.S. capacity to help a nation to meet the Communist ‘war of liberation’. Thus, purely in terms of foreign policy, the stakes are high ...” The Memorandum stated in clear terms that “We seek an independent non-Communist South Vietnam” free to accept outside – meaning, American – assistance, including “police and military help to root out and control insurgent elements.” And it stated that unless we can achieve this objective, “almost all of Southeast Asia will probably fall under Communist dominance” or “accommodate to Communism,” with an increased threat to India, Australia, Japan, and indeed, throughout the world, given that the conflict is a “test case.” (II, 50–1; II, 459–61). Although these views were modulated later on (cf. III, 220, 658), the essential idea of South Vietnam as a {16} “test case” remained and the commitment to a non-Communist South Vietnam was never modified.

Despite the hyperbole, the rational core of policy-making remained in the early 1960s, and in fact can even be detected in the wildly exaggerated doctrine of Vietnam as a “test case” or in the incredible interpretations given to speeches of Mao or Khrushchev. In one sense, Vietnam was indeed to serve as a test case. Developing countries were to be taught a harsh lesson. They must observe the rules of the international system as determined by the powerful – who, like many a stern disciplinarian, saw themselves as benign, even noble in intention. Developing countries must not undertake “national liberation” on the Chinese model, extricating themselves from the international system dominated by Western and Japanese state capitalism, with mass mobilisation, a focus on internal needs, and exploitation of material and human resources for internal development. If they are so foolhardy as to disobey the international rules, they will be subjected to subversion, blockade, or even outright destruction by the global judge and executioner.

¹² *The Lost Crusade*, Dodd, Mead, 1970, pp. 410–1.

¹³ Stavins, Barnet and Raskin, *Washington Plans on Aggressive War*, Random House, 1970, p. 20.

The problem of Japan continued to be a serious, though much less central issue. An important NSC working group in November, 1964, considering the problem of escalation, discussed “the effect on Japanese attitudes through any development that appears to make Communist China and its allies a dominant force in Asia that must be lived with.” They already perceived a danger that Japan will move toward closer ties with Communist China, and “the growing feeling that Communist China must somehow be lived with might well be accentuated” if the U.S. were not to prevail in Indochina (III, 623, 627; William Bundy’s draft). It is important, in short, that Japan not accommodate to China, that Japan not drift towards a readiness to live with China. Again in June, 1965, William Bundy warned of the importance of considering Japanese views in choosing policy, for fear that Japan may turn to “accommodation and really extensive relationships with Communist China” (IV, 614). We know from other sources that in the 1950s Japan was pressured to break trade relations with China, and that access to Southeast Asia was explicitly offered as an inducement.¹⁴ Japan’s need for markets was also an important consideration for President Kennedy.¹⁵ It must, of course, be kept in mind that Japan in those years was not generally perceived as an immediate rival; in fact, until 1965 Japan always had an unfavourable trade balance with the United States.¹⁶ Japan was perceived as a potential threat, if it drifted from the U.S. global system and began to live with” China. {17}

Failure to appreciate the historical circumstances and the range of Options actually available to policy-makers sometimes leads to superficial commentary on this matter. For example, Charles Kindleberger argues that Japan is a “difficult counterexample” to the theory that United States economic foreign policy is motivated by self-interest,¹⁷ specifically, to the theory that “foreign aid to less developed countries is to keep these countries dependent” and that U.S. policies “are designed to use the dollar as a main instrument of control over the capitalist world.” Putting aside the question whether the theory is defensible, consider the logic of Kindleberger’s argument: why does he regard Japan as a “difficult counterexample”? His reason is that Japan has been assisted by the U.S. in various ways, but is not “a puppet of the United States.” By the same logic, we can prove that Soviet aid to China and Rumania, for example, was not granted out of self-interest. In fact, Kindleberger’s argument holds only on the further assumption that the United States is omnipotent: on this assumption, if U.S. aid is intended to induce some nation to remain within the American-dominated system, then that nation must be a puppet; and if the nation is not a puppet, it follows that U.S. assistance cannot have been intended as a device to maintain control or influence.

In the real world, however, U.S. policy-makers faced a rather different problem. They had a variety of means at hand to influence post-war Japanese development toward integration into the “free world” system. A likely alternative, which they successfully overcame, was that “the workshop of the Pacific” might undergo revolutionary social change or “accommodate” to the closed systems developing in East Asia, (cf., e.g. NSC 48/1, discussed above). The option of guaranteeing that Japan would be “a puppet” was not available; whether it would have been chosen

¹⁴ See *At War with Asia*, chapter 1, for references. For general background on this matter, see John Dower, “The Superdomino in Postwar Asians: Japan in and out of the *Pentagon Papers*” Back

¹⁵ See C. Fred Bergsten, “Crisis in U.S. Trade Policy”, *Foreign Affairs*, July 1971.

¹⁶ For data, see Yasuo Takeyama, “Don’t take Japan for granted”, *Foreign Policy*, Winter, 1972.

¹⁷ Or, as he puts it in his caricature, the theory that “United States economic foreign policy is unrelievedly evil”. *Public Policy*, Summer, 1971; Review Article on Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism*, Modern Reader Paperbacks, New York, 1969.

had it been feasible is another question.¹⁸ The results are a mixed blessing to U.S. capital – bad for textiles and a bonanza for oil interests, to mention two examples – but surely preferable to the perceived alternatives. In any event, once Kindleberger’s untenable implicit hypothesis is removed, the “difficult counterexample” becomes quite manageable. Reasonable discussion of the matter is impeded by a kind of paranoia that is developing about “Japan, Inc.” For example, Zbigniew Brzezinski predicts that Japan will seek to “exclude” computers from its liberalisation policy on foreign investment, failing to mention the fact that a wholly-owned subsidiary of IBM, IBM Japan, has an estimated 40% share of the Japanese computer market (apart from other arrangements, of various sorts, between U.S. and Japanese companies in the computer fields).¹⁹ {18} In fact, Japanese liberalisation is proceeding, and if the outcome of the competition between U.S. and Japanese capital may be in doubt, it should not be forgotten that quite apart from questions of scale, the U.S. holds many cards, for example, control of most of Japan’s sources of petroleum.²⁰ In any event, prior to the full-scale U.S. invasion of South Vietnam, with its vast and unanticipated costs, it was quite reasonable to suppose that Japan would remain, for some time, a reasonably well-behaved junior partner in the American-dominated system.

Perhaps a word might be added with regard to the commonly heard argument that the costs of the Vietnam war prove that the U.S. has no imperial motives (as the costs of the Boer war prove that the British empire was a figment of the radical imagination). The costs, of course, are profits for selected segments of the American economy, in large measure. It is senseless to describe government expenditures for jet planes, or cluster bombs, or computers for the automated air war, simply as “costs of intervention.” There are, to be sure, costs of empire that benefit virtually no one: 50,000 American corpses or the deterioration in the strength of the U.S. economy relative to its industrial rivals. The costs of empire to the imperial society as a whole may be considerable. These costs, however, are social costs, whereas, say, the profits from overseas investment guaranteed by military success are again highly concentrated in certain special segments of the society that are generally well-represented in the formation of state policy. The costs of empire are in general distributed over the society as a whole, while its profits revert to a few within. In this respect, the empire serves as a device for internal consolidation of power and privilege,²¹ and it is quite irrelevant to observe that its social costs are often very great or that as costs rise, differences may also arise among those who are in positions of power and influence. While serving as a device for internal consolidation of privilege, the empire also provides markets, guaranteed sources of inexpensive raw materials, a cheap labour market, opportunities for export of pollution (no small matter for Japan, for example), and investment opportunities. On the assumptions

¹⁸ On the evolution of U.S. policy in the crucial 1945–50 period, see John Dower, “Occupied Japan and the American Lake”, in *America’s Asia*, on the limits of American power in the real world, see J. and G. Kolko, *The Limits of Power*.

¹⁹ Brzezinski, “Japan’s global engagement”, *Foreign Affairs*, January 1972, p. 273; Takeyama, *op. cit.* For comparison, U.S. firms control about 40% of the British computer industry (Raymond Vernon, *Sovereignty at Bay*, Basic Books, 1971, p. 240). Excluding table-top machines, IBM has about 70% of Japan’s computer market (Koji Nakamura, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Aug. 21, 1971).

²⁰ On this and related matters, see Malcolm Caldwell, “Oil and imperialism in East Asia”, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, vol. 1 no. 3, 1971.

²¹ Thus the director of USAID for Brazil finds it quite natural that “we have spent \$2 billion [since 1964] on a programme one objective of which is the protection of a favourable investment climate for private business interests in this country”, while the total investment is about \$1.7 billion. Church sub-committee Hearings, pp. 165–6; see note 15.

of the domino theory, even in its more rational versions, the stakes in Vietnam in this regard were considerable.

The same fallacy is one of several that undermine the familiar argument that our economic stake in the “third world” is too slight a fraction of GNP to play any significant role in motivating third world interventions.²² The private interests that stand to gain from foreign intervention are undeterred by its social costs and will exert their often substantial influence to engage state power in support of {19} their interests, however small a fraction of GNP they represent. Quite apart from this, it is in general impossible to decouple economic interests in the third world from those in industrial societies, as the case of Vietnam clearly illustrates, with the long-standing concern of policy-makers for the fate of the “farther dominoes,” such as Japan.²³

Still, it might very well be true that had the costs been anticipated, the Vietnam venture would not have been undertaken. But in the real world, policy-makers do not operate with a knowledge of ultimate costs, and cannot begin all over again if plans go awry. At each point, they consider the costs and benefits of future acts. On these grounds, the Vietnam involvement might very well have seemed reasonable, within the framework of imperialist motives, though by the 1960s, with the influx to Washington of ideologists and crisis-managers, it can be argued – I think rather plausibly – that other and more irrational considerations came to predominate.

Furthermore, even now that the bill is in, the effort might be judged a moderate success for those segments of American society that have a major interest in preserving an “integrated global system” in which American capital can operate with reasonable freedom. Consider the assessment of the editor of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, generally committed to economic liberalism. He speaks of “the ring of success stories in East And Southeast Asia,” with the Japanese economy serving as “the main factor in pulling the region together and providing the shadowy outlines of a future co-prosperity sphere ... and neatly complement[ing]” the economies of the rest of the region. “The U.S. presence in Vietnam,” in his view, “has won time for Southeast Asia, allowing neighbouring countries to build up their economies and their sense of identity to a degree of stability which has equipped them to counter subversion, to provide a more attractive alternative to the peasant than the promises of the terrorist who steals down from the hills or from the jungles at night” – or on different ideological premises, allowing these countries to become more securely absorbed within the neocolonial global system. Whatever premises one adopts, the fact is that “American businessmen ... are convinced of the potential of Asia and the Pacific Basin as the world’s third largest and fastest growing market area,” and are moving

²² This is argued, with reference to Vietnam, by Arthur Schlesinger Jnr. in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, May 10, 1972; and commonly, by others. Schlesinger considers the “more sophisticated” economic argument that defeat in Vietnam would jeopardize American economic interests throughout the third world, failing to notice that this is not the argument that has been offered by those he hopes to refute. Rather, they have generally pointed out that the workshop of the Pacific, Japan, was a primary consideration of American policy in Vietnam. He also remarks that the Pentagon Papers seem to record “no instances of business intervention in American Vietnam Policy”. The relevance of this observation is not apparent, given the fact that the state executive is largely staffed by representatives of corporate interests, as has often been noted. See note 49. It is hardly necessary for business to “intervene” in an enterprise that it largely controls.

²³ On other fallacies, see R.B. Du Boff and E.S. Herman, “Corporate dollars and Foreign Policy”, *Commonweal*, 21 April, 1972.

rapidly into the region, a process that is continuing “since the initiation of ‘Vietnamisation’.” U.S. investments now total nearly 70% of all foreign investments in the region.²⁴

The imperial drive that is clearly expressed in many documents may have been blunted by the unexpected resilience and obstinacy of the Vietnamese resistance. It has, nevertheless, partially achieved its aims, though in retrospect it might be argued that other means would perhaps have been more efficacious. In general, however, it seems fair to say that the policy to which they gave rise was also fairly rational, if cynical. But I emphasise again that to demonstrate the motive force of the imperial drive, it is necessary only to exhibit the concerns that guided it, not their realism.

To be sure, the imperial drive is often masked in defensive terms: it is not that we are seeking to dominate an integrated world system incorporating Japan, but rather that we must deny strategic areas to the Kremlin (or “Peiping”), thus protecting ourselves and others from their “aggression”. The masters of the Russian empire affect a similar pose, no doubt with equal sincerity and with as much justification. The practice has respectable historical antecedents, and the term “security” is a conventional euphemism. The planners merely seek to guarantee the security of the nation, not the interests of dominant social classes.

There is, in fact, a sense in which the “defensive” rhetoric is appropriate. It is natural for the managers of the world’s most advanced industrial superpower, organised more or less along capitalist lines, to seek free and open competition throughout the world in fair confidence that the interests they represent will tend to predominate. Thus they seek only to deny various areas to closed systems, national or imperial. The United States, like Britain in the period of its world dominance, tends towards the “imperialism of free trade,” while maintaining the practice of state intervention for the benefit of special interests and demanding special rights (as in the Philippines) where they can be obtained.²⁵

Many commentators deny that U.S. policy was determined, or even influenced by long-term imperial objectives, and argue that the Pentagon Papers reveal no imperial drive. A case can be made for this view, particularly in the 1960s. Leslie Gelb makes the interesting point that “no systematic or serious examination of Vietnam’s importance to the United States was ever undertaken within the government.”²⁶ He attributes the persistence of the Vietnam venture, in the face of this oversight, to multiple factors: the stranglehold of cold war assumptions, bureaucratic judgments, anti-Communism as a force in American politics and other domestic pressures, and so on.²⁷ He points out that although the view that “Vietnam had intrinsic strategic military and economic importance” was argued, it never prevailed; properly, of course, since Vietnam has no

²⁴ Derek Davies, “The region”, *Far Eastern Economic Review Yearbook*, 1971, p. 38; 1972, pp. 37–40. Although he refers to the domino theory as “a flight of fantasy”, nevertheless he expresses a moderate version of it in such assessments as these. The economic and strategic significance of South-east Asia is stressed by many observers. Few would go so far as Peter Lyon, who argues that if some enemy monopolised the region and exploited its resources fully (as Japan could not, in World War II), “then plainly the world balance of power very probably would have swung already in favour of South-east Asia’s new hegemony” (*War and Peace in Southeast Asia*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, Oxford, 1969, p. 106). But with qualifications, the point of view is not uncommon.

²⁵ On the British precedent, see Michael Barratt Brown, *After Imperialism*, revised edition, Merlin Press, 1970; Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968.

²⁶ “Vietnam: the system worked”, *Foreign Policy*, Summer, 1971. See also his comments in the *New York Review*, December 2, 1971 and in *Life*, September 17, 1971.

²⁷ Daniel Ellsberg explores in detail the hypothesis that domestic factors, in particular, the effect of anti-communism on electoral success, predominated in decision-making. “The quagmire myth and the stalemate machine”, *Public Policy*, Spring, 1971. See his *Papers on the War*, for an extended version.

such *intrinsic* importance. Rather its importance derives from the assumptions of the domino theory, in his formulation, the theory “by which the fall of Indochina {21} would lead to the deterioration of American security around the globe.” “It was ritualistic anti-communism and exaggerated power politics that got us into Vietnam,” he maintains, noting that these “articles of faith” were never seriously debated (*New York Review*). Nor, we may add, is there any record of a debate or analysis of just how American “security” would be harmed by a victory of the nationalist movement of Indochina which had been “captured” by the Communists, or just what components of “American security” would be harmed by the triumph of a nationalist movement which, it was expected, would be hostile to China and would limit its ambitions to Laos and Cambodia.

Hannah Arendt has discussed a variety of rather different irrational factors that impelled policy-makers in Vietnam.²⁸ “The ultimate aim,” she concludes, “was neither power nor profit ... [nor] ... particular tangible interests,” but rather “image making.” “something new in the huge arsenal of human follies.” “American policy pursued no real aims, good or bad, that could limit and control sheer fantasy,” in particular, no imperial strategy. Ignorance, blind anticommunism, arrogance, self-deception lie behind American policy.

She is certainly correct in noting these elements in the Pentagon history. Thus in the face of all historical evidence, the U.S. authorities persisted in the assumption, a point of rigid doctrine, that China was an agent of Moscow, the Viet Cong an agency of North Vietnam, which was in turn the puppet of Moscow or “Peiping” or both, depending on the mood of the planners and propagandists, who, surely, had more than enough information at hand to refute, or at the very least to shake their confidence in these assumptions. A kind of institutionalised stupidity seems a possible explanation.

There is ample material in the Pentagon Papers to support such interpretations, from the time when Dean Acheson, in a cable to Saigon, spoke of the need to aid the French and the Associated States of Indochina “to defend the territorial integrity of IC and prevent the incorporation of the ASSOC[iated] States within the COMMIE-dominated bloc of slave states” (October, 1950; I, 70), and on to the present. One of the most remarkable revelations of the Pentagon Study is that the analysts were able to discover only one staff paper, in a record of more than two decades, “which treats communist reactions primarily in terms of the separate national interests of Hanoi, Moscow, and Peiping, rather than primarily in terms of an overall communist strategy for which Hanoi is acting as an agent” (II, 107; an intelligence estimate of November, 1961). Even in the “intelligence community,” where they are paid to get the facts straight and not to rant about {22} helping the French defend the territorial integrity of Indochina from its people and the Commie-dominated bloc of slave stateS, it was apparently next to impossible to perceive, or at least express the simple truth that North Vietnam, like the Soviet Union, China, the United States, and the NLF, has its own interests, which are often decisive.

It is amusing to trace the efforts to establish that Ho Chi Minh was merely a Russian (or Chinese) puppet – as obviously must be the case. The State Department, in July, 1948, could find “no

Emphasis on these factors is not inconsistent with the imperialist interpretation if we inquire further into the origins of domestic anti-communism, though an important question of emphasis remains. Notice also that by 1965, questions of long-term motive were of only marginal importance. We were there. Period.

²⁸ “Lying in politics: reflections on the Pentagon Papers”, *New York Review*, Nov.18,1971.

evidence of direct link between Ho and Moscow” (but naturally “assumes it exists”).²⁹ State Department intelligence, in the fall, found evidence of “Kremlin-directed conspiracy ... in virtually all countries except Vietnam.” Indochina appeared “an anomaly.” How can this be explained? To intelligence, the most likely explanation is that “no rigid directives have been issued by Moscow” or that “a special dispensation for the Vietnam government has been arranged in Moscow” (I, 5, 34). In September, 1948, the State Department noted that “There continues to be no known communication between the USSR and Vietnam, although evidence is accumulating that a radio liaison may have been established through the Tass agency in Shanghai” (*DOD*, book 8, 148, grasping at straws). American officials in Saigon added that “No evidence has yet turned up that Ho Chi Minh IS receiving current directives either from Moscow, China, or the Soviet Legation in Bangkok.” “It may be assumed,” they conclude from this, “that Moscow feels that Ho and his lieutenants have had sufficient training and experience and are sufficiently loyal to be trusted to determine their day-to-day policy without supervision” (*ibid.*, 151). By February, 1949, they were relieved to discover that “Moscow publications of fairly recent date are frequently seized by the French,” indicating that “satisfactory communications exist,” though the channel remains a mystery (*ibid.*, 168; also “there has been surprising[ly] little direct cooperation between local Chinese Communists and the Viet Minh”).

“We are unable to determine whether Peiping or Moscow has ultimate responsibility for Viet Minh policy,” an intelligence estimate of June, 1953 relates (I, 396), but it must be one or the other – that is an axiom. In the context of a discussion of Chinese Communist strategy, intelligence concludes that the Communists are pursuing their present strategy in Indochina because “It diverts badly needed French and US resources from Europe at relatively small cost to the Communists” and “provides opportunities to advance international Communist interests while preserving the fiction of ‘autonomous’ {23} national liberation movements, and it provides an instrument, the Viet Minh, with which Communist China and the USSR can indirectly exert military and psychological pressures on the peoples and governments of Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand” (I, 399). Might there be another reason why the Viet Minh fight on?

Occasionally, there is a ray of light. The NSC Working Group in the fall of 1964 observed that the most likely result of the least aggressive option it was considering “would be a Vietnamese-negotiated deal, under which an eventually unified Communist Vietnam would reassert its traditional hostility to Communist China and limit its own ambitions to Laos and Cambodia” (III 229; and III, 661). But such moments are rare.

It is tempting to use such evidence to support the claim that ignorance, mythology, and institutionalised stupidity led U.S. policy-makers into a series of disastrous errors. If only they had realised that Stalin was luke-warm or negative towards Mao and the Greek guerrillas, that there was no “pattern of Communist conquest .. manifest” in Guatemala in 1954,³⁰ that the Viet-

²⁹ Similarly, Leslie Gelb in the summary and analysis section on origins of the {38} insurgency, notes that “No direct links have been established between Hanoi and perpetrators of rural violence” in the 1956–9 period. Still he tends, rather cautiously, towards the view that “some form of DRV apparatus” may have “originated and controlled the insurgency” in those years (though “it can on be inferred” – the reader is invited to sample the evidence presented for the inference; I, 243).

³⁰ Senate Concurrent Resolution 91 of June 25 1954 found “strong evidence of intervention by the international Communist movement in the State of Guatemala, whereby government institutions have been infiltrated by Communist agents, weapons of war have been secretly shipped into that country, and the pattern of Communist conquest has become manifest...” Cited by Franck and Weisband, *Word Politics*, p. 52; an important study of how ideological nonconformists is defined as aggression by the dominant power in a regional bloc, in Guatemala, Cuba, and the Dominican

namese were conducting their own struggle for national liberation. If only William Bundy had had a course in Vietnamese history at Yale. But ignorance and paranoia obscured the facts.

This theory, however, leaves too many questions unanswered. To mention only the simplest: why were policy-makers always subject to the same form of ignorance and irrationality? Why was there such a systematic error in the delusional systems constructed by post-war ideologists? Mere ignorance or foolishness would lead to random error, not to a regular and systematic distortion: unwavering adherence³¹ to the principle that whatever the facts may be, the cause of international conflict is the behaviour of the Communist powers, and all revolutionary movements within the U.S. system are sponsored by the USSR, China, or both.³² Why was the latter assumption so far beyond challenge that no examination of Vietnam's importance was ever undertaken (Gelb)? Ignorance and stupidity can surely lead to error, but hardly to such systematic error or such certainty in error.

And there is a second and even more obvious question: why is the United States anti-communist? With respect to the first question, whether it is Acheson, Rostow, Stevenson, Kissinger, or whoever, one generally finds the same distortion as in the sorry record of the "intelligence community". From one or another such source we hear that Stalin supported Mao and incited the Greek guerrillas and Ho Chi Minh; China invaded India; the Viet Cong are agents of international communist aggression; and {24} so on. These are, indeed, articles of faith. The crisis-managers do not argue these claims; they merely intone them. All are at best highly dubious and probably false, so the available record indicates, but questions of fact are beside the point in theological disputation.

What is not beside the point is that these articles of faith are highly functional. The fact is that anti-communism provides a convenient mythology to justify colonial wars, and to gain the popular support that is often hard to rally, given the grisly nature and substantial costs of such endeavours. But to explain the U.S. attack on Vietnam on grounds of anti-communist delusions would be as superficial as explaining the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia or Hungary merely on grounds of fear of West Germany or Wall Street. No doubt, at some level, the Soviet leadership

Republic, in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In each case, there is a desperate search for proof that the indigenous elements are agents of the great global enemy.

³¹ It is sometimes argued that U.S. policy revealed its freedom from counter-revolutionary imperatives in Bolivia and Yugoslavia, for example. In Bolivia, Eisenhower supported the most right-wing group that had any base of power successfully, as it turned out, from the viewpoint of U.S. economic interests.

For a succinct review, see Rebecca Scott, "Economic aid and imperialism in Bolivia", *Monthly Review*, May 1972. As for Tito, Acheson explained in connection with the possibility of a "Titoist outcome" in Indochina that "U.S. attitude [could] take [account] such possibility only if every other possible avenue closed to preservation area from Kremlin control" (*DOD*, book 8, 197 May, 1949). Recall that Acheson had no evidence of Kremlin control in Indo china, nicely illustrating the point at issue. In general, U.S. policy towards Yugoslavia in the context of the cold war hardly serves as a counter-example to the thesis that it is guided by the principle of maintaining a "stable" system of societies open to U.S. economic penetration.

³² On this matter, see John Gittings in M. Selden and F. Friedman, *America's Asia*, Panther, 1970. He shows how easily China replaced Russia as the master plotter in official and academic interpretation of Far Eastern affairs, when reliance on the alleged Russian role became too far fetched. It now appears that the official demonology is being reconstructed once again, with the Soviet Union as the chief villain, surely a wise move by state propagandists. It would, for example, be difficult in the long run to gain taxpayer support for an immense military budget on the basis of the "Chinese threat", but it is considerably easier to whip up hysteria over the alleged Soviet menace along the lines of the "bomber gap" and "missile gap" of earlier years. Precisely what we see today. The U.S. lead in deliverable warheads and strategic weapons technology (e.g., MIRV) notwithstanding, the Alsop brothers and the like would have us believe that we are now virtually at the mercy of the Kremlin.

believes what it says, and is bewildered at the bitter reaction to its selfless and benevolent behaviour. Perhaps Russian public opinion indeed “is proud of its country’s armed power in Prague and speaks of Czechoslovak weakness, ingratitude, irresponsibility, etc.”³³ Similarly, Washington claims to be defending democracy and warding off “internal aggression” or subversion by agents of international communism when it helps to destroy a mass popular movement in Greece, supports an invasion of Guatemala, invades the Dominican Republic, and devastates the peasant societies of Indochina, *inter alia*. Its defenders, and many critics as well, are at most willing to concede error if the costs mount too high, and cannot conceive that any “responsible” or “qualified” observer might have a rather different view. Some still insist that the United States pursues its foreign policy for the most part “for reformist, even utopian goals,” and that this policy can only be faulted for being “callow, sentimental, savagely stupid...”³⁴ It is remarkable how difficult it is, even for those who see themselves as critics, to interpret U.S. behaviour by the standards of evaluation and analysis that would, properly, be applied to any other great power.

The fact that policy-makers may be caught up in the fantasies they spin to disguise imperial intervention, and sometimes may even find themselves trapped by them, should not prevent us from asking what function these ideological constructions fulfil – why *this* particular system of mystification is consistently expounded, in place of some alternative. Similarly, one should not be misled by the fact that the delusional system presents a faint reflection of reality. It must, after all, carry some conviction. But this fact should not prevent us from proceeding to disentangle motive from myth.

The efforts of the “intelligence community” to establish the thesis {25} that the Viet Minh were agents of international communism reveals quite clearly the function of the “international communist conspiracy” in postwar American foreign policy. There is no doubt that the Soviet Union, within the limits of its power, established its harsh and oppressive imperial rule. But it was not this fact that determined American policy in Southeast Asia. Contrary to the fantasies of Walt Rostow and others, the U.S. did not first discover that the Viet Minh were agents of a Kremlin-directed conspiracy and then proceed to aid France to beat back Russians aggression against South-east Asia.

Rather, the U.S. merely applied in Indochina the general policy of establishing Western-oriented regimes that would cooperate (“freely”) with the West (and Japan), “culturally, economically and politically,” and “contribute to a better balanced world economy” – the “world economy” in question being, of course, that of the “free world”. In its essentials, the policy was

³³ Peter Wiles, “The declining self-confidence of the super-powers”, *International Affairs*, vol. 47, no. 2 April 1971.

³⁴ W. Pfaff, *Condemned to Freedom*, 1971, p. 80. A variant is the view expressed by Michael Howard: “The suspicion, clumsiness, and brutality of the Russians the inexperience and confusion of the Americans; the weariness, impotence and nostalgia of the British” – these were the major factors in preventing a post-war settlement. “The Americans, bless them, still found it hard to believe that {39} natural processes would not everywhere throw up regimes which would docilely accept their leadership...” (“Realists and Romantics: on Maintaining an International Order”, *Encounter*, April 1972). This particular form of sentimentality finds little support in the historical record, which reveals, rather, fairly systematic policies designed to take over British positions of power and influence and to create a global capitalist order in which the U.S., given its enormous advantages, would be likely to predominate. The U.S. did not believe that “natural processes” would lead to subservient regimes in Southern Europe, East Asia, and the Caribbean, nor did it await such processes; rather it acted directly and forcefully to institute regimes of the sort it preferred. While not uniformly successful, these policies and their execution revealed no more inexperience or confusion than might be expected, given the unavoidable uncertainties of global planning. See, e.g., the work of the Kolkos, cited above.

not fundamentally different, say, from American policy in Italy in 1943, or in Greece and Korea shortly after.³⁵ To implement this policy in Vietnam, it was necessary to destroy the forces that had “captured the nationalist movement”, since these forces had a different model of social and economic development in mind. But this would have appeared too cynical, if stated frankly. Therefore it was necessary to recast the issue in “defensive” terms, and to establish that these nationalist forces were really the agents of aggression by an international conspiracy, aimed ultimately at destroying the freedom of the United States itself. The “intelligence community” thus took upon itself, or perhaps was assigned the task of demonstrating the thesis that was required as the ideological underpinning of the U.S. intervention. It is interesting, but not very surprising given the background, that the failure of intelligence to establish the needed link in no way impeded the ideologists, who simply continued to insist that the required thesis was correct, accepting and proclaiming it as an Article of Faith. The same pattern has appeared elsewhere, with predictable regularity.

Turning to the second question: why is the United States anti-communist? A conventional answer is that the United States opposes communism because of its aggressive, expansionist character. Thus it is argued that we do not seek to overthrow communism where it represents the status quo, as in Eastern Europe; and that when President Kennedy, in an often-quoted remark, said that we would always prefer a Trujillo to a Castro,³⁶ he meant that “the power requirements of the struggle with the Soviet Union took precedence over the commitment to a ‘decent democratic regime.’” As to China: {26}

“The containment of China has not been pursued simply because China has a communist government, but because of China’s outlook generally and her policy in Asia particularly. It is China’s insistence upon changing the Asian status quo, and the methods she has used, that explain American hostility.”³⁷

Such proposals cannot withstand analysis. It is true, but irrelevant, that the U.S. will not risk nuclear destruction to roll back Communism; again, one should not overlook the objective

³⁵ On Korea, see Jon Halliday, *The Korean Revolution, Socialist Revolution* vol. 2, no. 6, Nov.-Dec. 1970; Soon Sung Cho, *Korea in World Politics, 1940–50*, California, 1967; Gregory Henderson, *The Politics of the Vortex*, Harvard, 1968, chapters 5–6. Though Cho and Henderson give a different interpretation to these events, what they describe is the destruction of indigenous Korean political social structures by force and terror and the imposition of a right wing regime. The explanation in terms of “blunders”, “ignorance and policy weakness”, and so on, becomes much less persuasive if we consider U.S. Korean policy not in isolation, as is common academic practice, but rather in its global context, where remarkable similarities appear to U.S. intervention and its effects elsewhere, e.g., in Greece at exactly the same time. Halliday’s openly and clearly expressed sympathies for socialist revolution may be compared with the conservative bias implicit – but, typically, never explicitly recognised – in Henderson and Cho. Consider, e.g., such observations as these: though under the People’s Republic that the U.S. destroyed in South Korea there were occasional acts such as “interventions, usually against landlords in landlord-tenant disputes,” nevertheless “people were generally well-behaved” (Henderson, p. 119); “... the Americans in the South took steps to encourage democratisation by establishing an effective Korean administration under the military government, and by stamping out what they felt were irresponsible leftist political movements” (Cho, p. 131), beginning with the outright suppression of the Communist party in late 1946.

In fact, U.S. Korean policy from 1945 presents suggestive analysis, in some interesting respects, to U.S. policy in Vietnam, a matter that might be further explored.

³⁶ A. Schlesinger, *1,000 days*, p. 769.

³⁷ Robert Tucker, *The Radical Left and American Foreign Policy*, Johns Hopkins, 1971, p. 112; *Nation or Empire?* Johns Hopkins, 1968, p. 117.

limits on American power, as Tucker does. Tucker's interpretation of Kennedy's remark seems to presuppose that American hostility towards Castro was a consequence of his turn towards the Soviet Union, which is of course untrue. Perhaps one can argue that American hostility was not a determining factor in this move, but that it preceded it is beyond argument.³⁸ With respect to China, Tucker's argument is weaker still. What methods did China use in changing the status quo beyond its borders? In what respect were these methods "objectionable" in comparison with American methods in the Far East? In what sense was the forceful reimposition of French colonialism, in opposition to a communist-led Vietnamese nationalist movement, an attempt to preserve the status quo after World War II? Why the effort to demonstrate that the Vietnamese revolutionaries – or the backers of Arbenz or Bosch – were Russian or Chinese agents, despite the evidence at hand, leading ultimately to the religious faith that this must be so? The answers to these questions entirely undermine Tucker's effort to "explain American hostility."

Tucker is, in fact, mistaken about what counts as an explanation of policy. He is nearer the mark when he points out that Castro "would refuse to do our bidding" and "would stand as a challenge to our otherwise undisputed hegemony in this hemisphere," but he does not pursue these observations to the degree of specificity that any serious discussion of policy must achieve. In what respects would Cuba refuse to do our bidding and challenge our hegemony? This question Tucker does not answer, or even pose. He says merely that "America's interventionist and counter-revolutionary policy ... may be accounted for in terms of a reasonably well-grounded fear that the American example might become irrelevant to much of the world," along with the "will to exercise dominion over others." These remarks are sufficiently vague to be immune to any objection. Tucker is in error when he states that "A radical critique cannot *consistently* accept this explanation."³⁹ It would, however, be quite accurate to say that no serious critique can accept such proposals as an explanation of policy. Rather, any serious critique will pursue the matter further, asking what elements of the American example must some foreign society adopt to allay {27} these fears. Was it fear that Guatemala would choose soccer rather than baseball as its national sport that precipitated the 1954 intervention? Was the Bay of Pigs invasion rooted

³⁸ We need not trace the development of Cuban-U.S. affairs to demonstrate this point, which is admitted even by those who deny that "Castro was unwillingly pushed into the Soviet camp by American blunders or malevolence" (Ernest Halperin, characterising the position of Andrés Suárez, *Cuba: Castroism and Communism*, MIT, 1967, in the foreword). Thus Suárez points out that Cuba was attacked "by airplanes based along the U.S. coastline" at the time when the U.S. was using its influence to prevent the Cubans from buying jets in Great Britain (Oct. 1969), and adds: "I think this makes it sufficiently clear {40} why, and for what, Soviet aid was sought" (p. 74). The matter is not relevant to refuting Tucker's contention, but it should be noted that a good case can be made that American hostility was a factor of some importance in Castro's shift to the Soviet Camp. See e.g., Maurice Zeitlin and Robert Scheer, *Cuba: Tragedy in our Hemisphere*, Grove, 1963. For a general discussion of the background, see Gordon Connel-Smith, *The Inter-American System*, Oxford, 1966. He draws the quite reasonable conclusion that "the Cuban government's intention to implement a policy aimed at ending the privileged position hitherto enjoyed by the United States in the island's affairs" made the clash as inevitable as "the growing links between Cuba and international communism" (p. 170); and this intention also lies behind the fact that "the United States infinitely preferred Trujillo to Castro" (p. 169). Given the vagueness of his discussion, it is unclear whether Tucker would agree with this conclusion. If he would then his objection to the "radical critique" is of vanishing empirical content.

³⁹ *The Radical Left and American Foreign Policy*, p. 111–2. [Emphasis mine] Tucker refers to a third consideration underlying Kennedy's observation on supporting a Trujillo as long as there is a risk of a Castro, namely, concern for domestic anti-communism. This reference overlooks the crucial question of the origins and functions of propaganda. On this matter, see Richard M. Freeland, *The Truman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism*, Knopf 1972 and several essays in David Horowitz, ed., *Corporations and the Cold War*, Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation and Monthly Review Press, 1969.

in the fear that Cuban intellectuals would prefer continental phenomenology to American-style analytic philosophy? Is it our concern that the model of American political democracy might prove “irrelevant” that explains why the U.S. executive so prefers Brazil to Chile? Again, a serious look at real historical examples reveals at once the emptiness of Tucker’s proposals. He believes himself to be offering a more cogent alternative to a “radical critique”, but in fact is offering no alternative at all, but merely abstracting away from the particular specific questions that must be faced by any serious effort, radical or not, to explain the American policy of counter-revolutionary intervention.

Tucker’s is one of the few efforts to respond seriously to a “radical critique” of foreign policy. An analysis from outside the prevailing ideology is rarely taken seriously, and in fact there is an interesting literary genre devoted to the refutation of non-existent arguments attributed to “radicals”: e.g., the “Marxist argument” that capitalist societies need war to survive, or the “revisionist argument” that the U.S. is solely responsible for postwar international tensions etc. Tucker does, however, give a generally fair presentation of the views he rejects. It is therefore particularly interesting to observe his failure to come to grips with them, in fact, his avoidance of the actual problems of explanation of policy.

This failure follows a not unfamiliar pattern. It is commonly argued, for example, that American interventionism is not attributable to the normal workings of state capitalism, but to some deeper motive, such as the “drive for power.” The reasoning, again, is shoddy, and it is important to see why. The failure of the argument does not lie in the identification of the “power drive” as the cause of imperialist intervention; this premise is sufficiently vague so that we can grant it to be true without fear of refutation. Rather, the argument fails because it does not recognise – once again – that a generalisation is not refuted by rephrasing it in terms that are logically equivalent, or even by tracing it to deeper theses from which it derives. Thus suppose one were to argue that the normal behaviour of a businessman is not governed by the pursuit of profit (or, say, growth, assuming this to be an empirically distinguishable thesis), but rather by a “deeper” drive for power. Again, we may accept the claim that the normal behaviour of the businessman is explained by a drive for power, which manifests itself in a capitalist society in the pursuit of profit. This claim merely restates, and does not contradict {28} the hypothesis that the behaviour of a businessman, in a capitalist society, is governed by the pursuit of profit.

Much the same is true of the vague musings about a “generalised drive for power” which often appear in discussions of American foreign policy. It may well be true that any autocratic system of rule will support and intensify the “drive for power” and give it free rein.

In a capitalist society, the operative form of autocratic rule is the private control of the means of production and resources, of commerce and finance; and further, the significant influence on state policy by those who rule the private economy, and who indeed largely staff the government. As already noted, elements of the private autocracy who have a specific concern with foreign affairs will naturally tend to use their power and influence to direct state policy for the benefit of the interests they represent, regardless of social costs. Where they succeed, we have imperialist intervention, quite commonly.

It might be argued that a healthy democracy would impede imperial planners, for two reasons: in the first place, considerations of self-interest would serve as a brake on imperial ventures with their often substantial social cost; and secondly, a functioning democracy might foster other values beyond domination and power – solidarity, sympathy, cooperative impulses, a concern for creative and useful work, and so on. The prevailing ideology tends to downgrade and scoff

at such motives, often appealing to the alleged discoveries of the “behavioural sciences”, but this farce need not detain us here. The important point is that the resort to a “power drive” as the explanation of imperial intervention is not false, but irrelevant, once its true character is laid bare. It is fair, I think, to suggest that this “alternative explanation” merely serves as a form of mystification; it serves to obscure the actual workings of power. We return to this matter directly.

The question remains: why is American ideology and policy anti-communist? Or a further question: why has the U.S. been anti-fascist (though selectively)? Why was fascist Japan evil in 1940, while fascist Greece and Portugal (preserving the status quo in Africa) are quite tolerable today? And why is the U.S. generally anti-colonialist, say in Indonesia shortly after World War II, when the conservative nationalist leadership appeared at first to favour foreign investment, but (reluctantly) not in Indochina where the alternative to a barely disguised French colonialism was an indigenous communist resistance?

It is not too difficult to discern a criterion that serves rather well to determine which elements in foreign lands receive support, and {29} which are labelled enemies. It is surely not the humanitarian impulse; nor is it the prospects for development that determine the official U.S. response: China or Cuba might well have profited from capital grants for development – more so, at least, than from blockade, invasion, and harassment. Nor is it the fear of our great power rivals that leads us to intervene half way around the world, as is plainly shown by the determined effort to prove that Russia and China were responsible for the “internal aggression” in Vietnam, in the face of the evidence that they were not, and analogous efforts in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Nor do democratic or authoritarian rule, blood-thirstiness, aggressiveness, or a threat to U.S. security (in a proper sense of the term) provide a plausible criterion. Brazil and South Africa are as vicious as they come. The horrendous Indonesian massacre of 1965 was greeted with calm, and in some circles, the whole sequence of events evoked only polite applause. China has been the least aggressive of the great powers. The Viet Minh and the Pathet Lao are hardly a threat to U.S. security. Fascist Japan was no doubt an aggressive power – in some ways, not unlike the U.S. today⁴⁰ – but the U.S. was prepared to seek a *modus vivendi* in 1939 provided that U.S. rights and interests on the mainland were guaranteed. And fascist Greece is quite all right today; it plays its NATO role, provides bases for U.S. naval forces,⁴¹ and as an added attraction, there is – as Secretary of Commerce Maurice Stans put it so lyrically not long ago – “the welcome that is given here to American companies and the sense of security the Government of Greece is imparting to them.”⁴²

Friends and enemies can be identified, to a rather good first approximation, in terms of their role in maintaining an integrated global economy in which American capital can operate with relative freedom.

The so-called “communist” powers are particularly evil because their “do-it-yourself” model of development tends to extricate them from this system. For this reason, even European colonialism, which was bad enough, is preferable to indigenous Communism. For the same reason, Washington will prefer a Trujillo to a Castro.

⁴⁰ On certain similarities, see *American Power and the New Mandarins*, Chapter 2; also Hilary Conroy, “Japan’s war in China: historical parallel to Vietnam?”, *Pacific Affairs*, Spring, 1970.

⁴¹ Supporting what might misleadingly be called a U.S. security interest. On the relation between Greece and U.S. interests in the Middle East, see Kolko and Kolko, *op. cit.*, Chapter 8.

⁴² M.S. Modiano, “Stans, in Athens, hails the regime”, *New York Times* April 24, 1971.

The Study Group of the Woodrow Wilson Foundation and the National Planning Association was perceptive, and more honest than many contemporary ideologists, when it described the primary threat of communism as the economic transformation of the communist powers “in ways which reduce their willingness and ability to complement the industrial economies of the West,”⁴³ their refusal to play the game of comparative advantage and to rely primarily on foreign investment for development. If the “developing nations” {30} choose to use their resources for their own purposes, or to carry out internal social change in ways which will reduce their contribution to the industrial economies of the state capitalist world, these powers must be prepared to employ sufficient force to prevent such unreasonable behaviour, which will no doubt be described as “internal aggression” by agents of international communism. The Soviet Union reacts no differently when Czechoslovakia seeks a degree of independence or social change.

At a much different level of domination, British car workers must not be permitted to demand too great economic benefits or a share in management in the Ford plant, and must remain subject to the threats that can be wielded quite effectively by an international corporation. In East Asia, which many regard as a most promising region for the “internationalisation of production” as well as for supplying raw materials,⁴⁴ the problems will be particularly acute. Surely such considerations lie at the very core of American foreign policy, a conclusion that is in no way surprising when we observe who staffs the executive, which designs and implements foreign policy. Though these are far from the sole operative factors in US policy, and are often overwhelmed by the impact of ideological commitments which themselves grow out of such concerns, it is surely the beginnings of wisdom to recognise their crucial role.

To be sure, it will often be maintained that U.S. policy is motivated by a concern for political democracy. To test the force of this concern, we can consider how US policy typically evolves when political democracy is destroyed, while US economic intervention is freed from constraints – and we can compare such policy with the typical US reaction when an economy is closed to American economic penetration, whether or not political democracy is more or less maintained. Latin America provides an ample (though by no means complete) set of test cases. Considering American policy towards Brazil and Chile, Guatemala for the past two decades, the Dominican Republic since 1965, and so on, there can be little doubt as to the outcome of such an investigation. Connel-Smith, in a study by no means hostile to US policy, puts the matter in terms that seem quite adequate:

⁴³ W.Y. Elliot, ed., *The Political Economy of American Foreign Policy*, New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1955, p. 42. For quotations from this interesting document, and some discussion, see *At War with Asia*, pp. 5, 17, 35–8. See Barratt Brown, *op. cit.*, for a historical discussion of this matter.

⁴⁴ For much enthusiastic discussion, see the report of the SEADAG symposium in *Asian Survey*, April 1971; See chapter 4 for discussion of this and related material.

The interests of workers in the host country tend to be overlooked in the study of the impact of multinational corporations. For example, Raymond Vernon, summarising what is by far the most extensive research into this and related topics, concludes that as a rule multinational corporations generate tensions on the part of “elite groups”; the flexibility of the multinational is “seen as posing a threat for government leaders bent on control, for local businessmen who aspire to compete, and for intellectuals who are hoping to challenge the status quo” (*op. cit.*, pp. 249, 265), but not for workers who are concerned, say, that management can break a strike by threatening to transfer operations to another country. Predictably, unions and others concerned with workers’ interests have a different view. See, e.g. Hugh Scanlon, “International combines versus the unions”, *Bulletin of the Institute for Workers’ Control*, vol. 1 no. 4; and several articles in the preceding special issue on the motor industry. These articles, incidentally, deal with concrete examples, not merely hypothetical concerns. See also John Genrard, *Multinational Corporations and British Labour*, British-North American Committee, 1972.

“... United States concern for representative democracy in Latin America is a facet of her anti-communist policy. There has been no serious question of her intervening in the case of the many right-wing military coups, from which, of course, this policy generally has benefited. It is only when her own concept of democracy, closely identified with private, capitalistic enterprise, is threatened by communism that she has felt impelled to demand collective action to defend it” (*op. cit.*, p. 343–4).

Those who are called upon to implement and defend U.S. policy {31} are often quite frank about the matter. As noted earlier the director of USAID for Brazil, to take one recent and very important case, explains quite clearly that protection of a favourable investment climate for private business interests – in particular, American investors – is a primary objective of U.S. policy, which has contributed \$2 billion of the American taxpayer’s money since 1964 to secure a total investment of \$1.7. To be sure, he mentions other objectives as well: our “humanitarian interests” and our “security objectives.” As to our humanitarian interests, they seem a bit selective, and correlate remarkably well with “the protection and expansion, if possible, of our economic interests, trade and investment, in the hemisphere” (*op. cit.*, p. 165). Thus our humanitarian interests in Brazil, as measured by the aid programme, showed a marked upsurge after the April 1964 “revolution” which, among other achievements, overcame the “administrative obstacles to remittance of income developed under the Goulart regime” (*ibid.*, p. 185–7, 215). Another achievement that correlated with the vast flow of aid was the rise of private investment from 50% to 75% of total investment (*ibid.*, p. 208).⁴⁵

Or perhaps our humanitarian interests, as measured by the aid flow, were stirred by the incidence of state violence and torture in Brazil under the new regime, or perhaps by the significant decline in the share of GNP of the bottom 80% of the population,⁴⁶ and the reported decline in wages for most workers that accompanied the significant rise in production under “a dictatorship, established to protect the privileges of a small property-owning class and to assure the growing control of the nation’s economy by imperialistic interests.”⁴⁷ As for the security objectives, the fear that Brazil under Goulart posed a security threat to the United States seems a bit

⁴⁵ See, in this connection, “The Hanna Industrial Complex, part I,” NACLA Newsletter, vol. II, no. 3, May 1968. Hanna was one of the major beneficiaries of the 1964 coup.

⁴⁶ *Washington Post*, Dec. 6, 1971: some “awkward points” for visiting dictator Medici. Christopher Roper reports in the Finance section of the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* May 13, 1972, that: “Wages have been deliberately held down, and statistical evidence shows that real wages of factory workers in Sao Paulo – the largest industrial centre in the southern hemisphere of the world – have been almost halved over the past 10 years. Family incomes have only kept pace by workers working longer hours and wives going out to work”. But “Foreign capital has been given a warm welcome”; “Volkswagen operates one of the largest integrated car manufacturing plants in the world; Ford is about to manufacture Pinto engines for Detroit in Sao Paulo (the ones Henry II decided not to make in Britain?) [cf. note 44]; and Nippon Steel from Japan is thinking about building one of the world’s largest steel mills...” Notice that while U.S. policy is quite clearly determined, as stated, by “the protection and expansion... of our economic interests,” the rules of the international capitalist game, if more or less followed, lead to certain problems even for the strongest player.

⁴⁷ Marcio Moreira Alves, “Brazil: what terror is like”, *Nation*, March 15, 1971. Alves is a former member of Parliament, a leader of the Catholic left, now in exile in Paris. He cites figures indicating that the average wage for 70% of workers has declined by almost 20% since 1964, while production has increased by more than 20%. He also describes the concentration of wealth, “the hunger and misery that drive millions of landless peasants to the cities”, the destruction of peasant leagues by the army, the police and the private paramilitary forces of landlords, the banning in many places of the Catholic basic education movement which promoted peasant organisation, the destruction of schools for peasants established by foreign missionaries, “the incredible violence that the state itself must use to keep the masses quiet while the privileged squander the nation’s riches”, the torture and murder, the anti-semitism of the

far-fetched; and as far as Brazil itself is concerned, the military perceive no external threat to the country,⁴⁸ so that the extensive American military aid is clearly either for “internal security” – that is, protection of the regime, whose acts have so awakened our humanitarian concerns, from its own population – or for threats against Brazil’s neighbours, in particular, those neighbours who might choose to jeopardise the closely related economic interests of the Brazilian privileged elite and American investors. We are, I am afraid, reduced to the first objective: the protection and expansion of “our” economic interests in the hemisphere.

Before we attribute this or that misadventure to “blind anti-communism” we would do well to distinguish several varieties of anti-communism. Opposition to indigenous movements that might {32} pursue the so-called “Communist” model of development, extricating their societies from the international capitalist system, is not “blind anti-communism,” strictly speaking. It may be “anti-communism,” but it is far from blind. Rather, it is rational imperialism which seeks to prevent the erosion of the world system dominated by Western and Japanese capital. On the other hand, reference to a “coordinated offensive directed by the Kremlin” against Southeast Asia in 1949 (NSC 48/1) or to the “militant and aggressive expansionist policy advocated by the present rulers of Communist China” (George Carver of the CIA) is, indeed, blind anti-communism – or to be more precise, it is perhaps blind, but is not anti-communism *at all*. Rather, it is pure imperial ideology, beyond the reach of evidence or debate, a propaganda device to rally domestic support for military intervention against indigenous communist-led movements. The device is, no doubt useful for the policy-makers themselves, for their own self-image Blocking the machinations of the agents of Russian or Chinese aggression can be seen as a laudable, even noble enterprise. It takes a fair degree of cynicism, however, to undertake the destruction of those who had captured the nationalist movement. In Vietnam, the first form of anti-communism motivated U.S. intervention, while the second was called upon to justify it – as elsewhere, repeatedly.

It may be argued, with justice, that this view is no more than a first approximation to a general understanding of foreign policy, and omits many second-order considerations. Thus it would not be correct to claim that formation of foreign policy is in the interests of a monolithic corporate elite. On the contrary, there are conflicting interests. But we would expect to find, and do find, that those interests that are particularly concerned with foreign policy are well-represented in foreign policy-formation.⁴⁹ By similar dynamics, regulatory agencies tend to fall into the hands of industries that are particularly concerned with their decisions. It is, furthermore, no doubt true that at some point ideology takes on a motive force of its own. There are other interacting, and for the most part mutually supportive factors: the interest of the “state management” in the Pentagon in enhancing its own power;⁵⁰ the role of government-induced production of rapidly-obsolescing luxury goods (largely military) as a technique of economic management, with a resulting need to secure strategic raw materials; the usefulness of an external enemy as a device to whip the taxpayer into line, in support of the production of waste and the costs of empire; the heady sense

military officers (e.g. a case of a 23-year old revolutionary killed under torture, “excessively beaten by his questioners because he was Jewish”), and so on.

⁴⁸ Church Subcommittee Hearings, p. 149.

⁴⁹ On this matter, see Kolko, *Roots of American Foreign Policy*, chapter I; Richard Barnett, *The Economy of Death*, Atheneum, 1969, part II; William Domhoff, *The Higher Circles*, Random House, 1970, chapter 5; David Horowitz, “The Foundations”, *Ramparts*, April 1969, and “The Making of America’s China Policy”, *Ramparts*, October, 1971. See also Scott, *op. cit.*, introduction and chapter 8, on interconnections between the CIA and important business interests.

⁵⁰ This particular factor is explored by Seymour Melman, *Pentagon Capitalism*, McGraw Hill, 1970.

of power, to which academic ideologues in particular seem to succumb so readily. Such factors as these produce a fairly stable system to support the basic imperial {33} drive, which is second nature to the men of power in the state executive in any event.⁵¹ There are many specific factors that must be considered in a detailed examination of particular decisions, such as those that led us ever more deeply into Indochina. Nevertheless, it seems reasonably clear that American policy, like that of any great power, is guided by the “national interest” as conceived by dominant social groups, in this case, the primary goal of maximising the free access by American capital to the markets and human and material resources of the world, the goal of maintaining to the fullest possible extent its freedom of operation in a global economy. At the same time, ideologists labour to mask these endeavours in a functional system of beliefs.

It is interesting that such analyses of foreign policy, which incorporate the material interests of private or quasi-private capital as a central factor interacting with others, are often characterised as “vulgar economic determinism” or the like when put forth by opponents of the system of private control of resources and the means of production. On the other hand, rather similar formulations receive little attention when they appear, as they commonly do, in official explanations of state policy or in right-wing literature. What is more, explanations that emphasise, say, vague emotional states (a feeling of insecurity or “irrelevance as a model”) or ideological elements or error are not similarly characterised as “vulgar emotional (ideological) determinism” or “vulgar fallibilism.”

The term “vulgar economic determinism” is particularly surprising, given that those segments of (quasi-) private capital that are particularly affected by foreign policy decisions are generally well-represented in the formation of state policy. One would therefore expect that the view mislabelled “vulgar economic determinism” would serve as a kind of null hypothesis. Since it is, furthermore, quite plausible as an explanation for basic foreign policy decisions (and, not infrequently, the justifications offered for them), the reaction becomes still more curious. The label too often serves to deflect attention from the proposed explanations, which are much easier to ignore when misrepresented. This is a standard reaction to analysis that raises questions about prevailing ideology. Compare much of the response to “revisionist” work on the cold war several years ago.⁵² Many illustrations can be given. The matter is worth investigation in itself.

It is possible to give some useful advice to an aspiring political analyst who wants his work to be received as thoughtful and penetrating – advice, I am sure, which applies to any society, not merely {34} ours. This analyst should, first of all, determine as closely as possible the actual workings of power in his society, the actual structure of decision-making in social, economic and political affairs. Having isolated certain primary elements and a number of peripheral and insignificant ones, he should then proceed to ignore the primary factors, or perhaps dismiss them as unimportant, the province of extremists and ideologues. He should rather concentrate on the minor and peripheral elements in decision-making. Better still, he should describe these in terms

⁵¹ See *At War with Asia*, chapter 1, for some further discussion of the multiplicity {42} of mutually supportive factors, and the stable system they tend to produce.

⁵² E.g., Herbert Feis ridicules the view, which he attributes without specific reference to Gar Alperovitz, that “the Soviet government ... was merely the hapless object of our vicious diplomacy”. The view that Alperovitz actually develops is that “the Cold War cannot be understood simply as an American response to a Soviet challenge, but rather as the insidious interaction of mutual suspicions, blame for which must be shared by all” (cf. Alperovitz, *Cold War Essays*, Anchor, 1970, pp. 135, 31; cf. also Christopher Lasch’s comments, in the introduction, on “the general failure of orthodox historians to engage the revisionist argument”).

that appear to be quite general and independent of the social structure that he is discussing (“power drive,” “fear of irrelevance,” etc.). Where he considers policies that failed, he should attribute them to stupidity and ignorance, that is, to factors that are socially neutral. Or, he may attribute the failures to noble impulses that led policy-makers astray, impulses that led them, in particular, to fail to appreciate the venality, ingratitude and barbarism of subject peoples. He can then be fairly confident that he will be regarded as thoughtful and perhaps even profound, and that he will escape the criticism that his efforts at explanation are “simplistic” (the truth is often surprisingly simple). He will, in short, benefit from a natural tendency on the part of the privileged in any society to suppress – for themselves as well as others – knowledge and understanding of the nature of their privilege and its manifestations.

In the particular case of Vietnam, anti-communism served as a convenient device for mobilising the American people to support imperial intervention. After a time, they were no longer willing to bear the costs or were appalled at the consequences. At this point, the propaganda device, no longer effective, is discarded. We now hear laments about the Cold War myths that led us to a “Greek tragedy” in Vietnam. But the war goes on.

The motive force for the American war in Indochina lies, it seems to me, where it was located in the earliest internal documents of the state executive: in the perceived significance of Southeast Asia for the integrated global system that was to be organised by American power – and, under reasonable assumptions, dominated by American power for the primary benefit of those who possess that power. Although in the 1960s, other and more irrational considerations may have predominated for a time, once again today, the continuing U.S. effort to achieve a Korea-type solution in Indochina, whatever the cost to its people, can be traced to the same fundamental objectives.⁵³

⁵³ On the substance of the “Nixon Doctrine” see John Dower’s essay in Brodine *et. al.*, *Open Secret*.

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