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The Cold War Consensus

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY
JANUARY 1961

In honor of the men and women of the armed forces of the United States who served in the Vietnam War. The names of those who gave their lives and of those who remain missing are inscribed in the order they were taken from us.

INSCRIPTION ON THE VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL
WASHINGTON, D.C. DEDICATED APRIL 27, 1979

The Cold War environment, and the initial encounter of the Korean War, cre-
ated an identifiable foreign policy consensus among the American leadership
and the public at large. This consensus was composed of a set of beliefs, values,
and premises about America's role in the world and served as an important guide
for U.S. behavior during the height of the Cold War (the late 1940s to the late
1960s). In the first part of this chapter, we will (1) identify the principal com-
ponents of the Cold War consensus, (2) illustrate how strong the key values of
this consensus were in American society, and (3) briefly describe the Cold War's
evolution in the first three decades after World War II. In particular, we will show
that the Cold War consensus largely shaped American policy making during this
period, but that interactions between the United States and the Soviet Union re-
flected both periods of hostility and periods of accommodation.

In the second half of the chapter, we will discuss how the Cold War consensus
met challenges during the 1960s from a variety of sources:

• A changing international environment, particularly in the Third World,
  Eastern Europe, and Western Europe, which made implementing the
  containment strategy difficult

• The American domestic environment, particularly as a result of the Cuban
  Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War, which made policy making difficult

• The emergence of new political leadership in the late 1960s and 1970s
  with alternate views for achieving global order in the face of the Soviet
  and Communist challenge

In sum, both anticommunism and containment, as the cornerstones of American
foreign policy, were modified, as the United States entered the 1970s. And some
of the chill of the Cold War was dispelled.

KEY COMPONENTS
OF THE COLD WAR CONSENSUS

Lincoln P. Bloomfield has compiled an extensive list of U.S. foreign policy values
in his book *In Search of American Foreign Policy.*[1] Table 3.1 reproduces a portion of
that list, which will serve as a starting point for our discussion of the **Cold War
consensus.**

America's Dichotomous View of the World

Bloomfield reminds us of the dichotomous view most Americans held of the
world: one group of nations led by the United States and standing for democracy
and capitalism, another group led by the Soviet Union and standing for totali-
tarianism and socialism. Even this dichotomy is not wholly accurate, however, as
the United States came to define the **"Free World"** not in a positive way—by
adherence to democratic principles of individual liberty and equality—but in a

Table 3.1 The American Postwar Consensus in Foreign Policy

- Communism is bad; capitalism is good.
- Stability is desirable; in general, instability threatens U.S. interests.
- Democracy (our kind, that is) is desirable, but if a choice has to be made, stability serves U.S. interests better than democracy.
- Any area of the world that "goes socialist" or neutralist is a net loss to us and probably a victory for the Soviets.
- Every country, and particularly the poor ones, would benefit from American "know-how."
- Nazi aggression in the 1930s and democracy's failure to respond provides the appropriate model for dealing with postwar security problems.
- Allies and clients of the United States, regardless of their political structure, are members of the Free World.
- The United States must provide leadership because it (reluctantly) has that responsibility.
- "Modernization" and "development" are good for poor, primitive, or traditional societies, and they will probably develop into democracies by these means.
- In international negotiations the United States has a virtual monopoly on "sincerity."
- Violence is an unacceptable way to secure economic, social, and political justice—except when vital U.S. interests are at stake.
- However egregious a mistake, the government must never admit having been wrong.

Source: In Search of American Foreign Policy: The Humane Use of Power by Lincoln P. Bloomfield. Copyright 1974 by Oxford University Press, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author.

negative way—by adherence to the principles of anticommunism. Thus, the "Free World" could equally include the nations of Western Europe (including the dictatorships of Spain and Portugal through the mid-1970s) and the military regimes of Central and South America—because both embraced anticommunism. Such an "alliance" provided a ready bulwark against Soviet expansion.

U.S. Attitudes toward Change

A substantial part of the Free World structure was grounded in an abiding concern over Soviet expansion, but a second concern was also present: **U.S. attitudes toward stability and change.** During this period, change in the world was viewed suspiciously. It tended to be seen as Communist-inspired and therefore something to be opposed. Stability was generally the preferred global condition.

Change was feared because it might lead to enhanced influence (and control) for the Soviet Union. This gain in influence could occur directly (by a nation's formal incorporation into the Soviet bloc) or indirectly (by a state's adopting a "neutral" or "nonaligned" stance in global affairs). As a consequence, Americans tended to be skeptical of new states following the **"nonaligned" movement** initiated by Prime Minister Nehru of India and President Tito of Yugoslavia,

among others. At this time, such a movement represented a loss for America's effort to rally the world against revolutionary communism.

Change was even more troublesome for the United States when it appeared in a nationalist and revolutionary environment. Even though Americans tended to sympathize philosophically with nationalist and anticolonialist movements, global realities, as viewed by American policy makers, often led them to follow a different course. J. William Fulbright, senator from Arkansas and former chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, described this dilemma in dealing with nationalism and communism in a revolutionary setting:

> we are simultaneously hostile to communism and sympathetic to nationalism, and when the two become closely associated, we become agitated, frustrated, angry, precipitate, and inconstant. Or, to make the point by simple metaphor: loving corn and hating lima beans, we simply cannot make up our minds about succotash.[2]

The resultant American policy, as Fulbright goes on to state, was often to oppose communism rather than to support nationalism.

American Intervention to Stall Communism

The fear of change was manifested in a dramatic way: the several American military interventions (either directly or through surrogates) in the 1950s and 1960s to prevent Communist gains. A few instances will make this point. In 1950, of course, U.S. military forces were deployed to help the South Koreans in the Korean War. In 1953, the United States was involved in the toppling of Prime Minister **Mohammed Mossadegh** of Iran and the restoration of the Shah. In 1954, the CIA assisted in the overthrow of the **Jacobo Arbenz Guzman** government in Guatemala because of the fear of growing Communist influence there. And in 1958, President Eisenhower ordered 14,000 marines to Lebanon to support a pro-Western government from possible subversion by Iraq, Syria, and Egypt.

The early 1960s saw three more interventions for a similar reason. In April 1961, the **Bay of Pigs** invasion of Cuba, planned and organized by the CIA, was attempted without success. It was launched to topple the Communist regime of Fidel Castro, who had seized power in 1959. In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson ordered the marines to Santo Domingo, **Dominican Republic,** to protect American lives and property from a possible change in regimes; communist involvement was the rationale. Finally, of course, the Vietnam War, which began substantially in the early 1960s (although U.S. involvement went back to at least 1946), was justified by the desire to prevent the fall of **South Vietnam** and subsequently all of Southeast Asia, to the communists.[3]

Beyond these direct interventions, the military was used in another way during the height of the Cold War. Two foreign policy analysts, Barry M. Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan, provide some useful data on this topic in their examination of the **"armed forces as a political instrument."** Blechman and Kaplan state: "[a] political use of the armed forces occurs when physical actions are taken by one or more components of the uniformed military services as part of a

Table 3.2 Use of American Military Force during Eight Administrations, 1946–1988 (Categorized by Regions)

Administration	Latin America	Europe	Middle East and North Africa	Rest of Africa	Asia	Total
Truman	5	16	7	1	6	35
Eisenhower	18	6	13	2	19	58
Kennedy	17	6	4	2	11	40
Johnson	13	11	6	5	13	48
Nixon	6	2	9	—	12	29
Ford	—	1	4	1	6	12
Carter	3	2	4	4	5	18
Reagan	25	1	35	4	9	74
Regional Totals	87	45	82	19	81	

Sources: Calculated by the author from Barry M. Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan, *Force Without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1978), pp. 547–553, for the years 1946–1975; Philip D. Zelikow, "The United States and the Use of Force: A Historical Summary," in George K. Osborn, Asa A. Clark IV, Daniel J. Kaufman, and Douglas E. Lute, eds., *Democracy, Strategy, and Vietnam* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1987), pp. 34–36, for the years 1975–1984; and from data generously supplied by James Meernik of the University of North Texas for 1985–1988. See the text and these sources for a definition of an incident in which military force is used.

deliberate attempt by the national authorities to influence, or to be prepared to influence, specific behavior of individuals in another nation without engaging in a continuing contest of violence."[4] By this definition, then, a naval task force that is moved to a particular region of the world, troops put on alert, a nonroutine military exercise begun, and the initiation of reconnaissance patrols may be all examples of the use of armed forces to further one state's political goals toward another country.

Blechman and Kaplan identify some 215 incidents from 1946 to 1975 that illustrate the use of armed forces for political goals. Of those, 181 occurred during the height of the Cold War (1946–1968). The top half of Table 3.2 shows the breakdown of these incidents from the administrations of Truman through Johnson. President Eisenhower used the military most frequently (he was in office longer than the other presidents); however, presidents Kennedy and Johnson had the highest average use. Latin America and Asia were the most frequent areas where U.S. forces were deployed for all Cold War presidents except for Truman, who, as one might suspect, was most interested in Europe.

Overall, then, even though the number of direct military interventions is relatively limited, the use of armed forces as a political instrument was frequent during the period of Cold War consensus. Blechman and Kaplan conclude that "when the United States engaged in these political–military activities, the outcomes of the situations at which the activity was directed were often favorable from the perspective of U.S. decision makers—at least in the short term."[5] About long-term outcomes, though, Blechman and Kaplan are less sanguine; nevertheless,

this consequence of the Cold War consensus appeared to be popular among policy makers.

The bottom half of Table 3.2 shows the American use of force for the last two decades of the Cold War—from the Nixon through Reagan administrations.[6] During this period, the use of military force waned somewhat, with 133 incidents—down from the previous 181. This decline occurred across all areas of the world, except for the Middle East and North Africa, where the use of force rose dramatically (by 60 percent), from 30 incidents through 1968 to 52 from 1969 through 1988. With the dramatic events in this region for all American administrations—the **Yom Kippur War** of 1973 (Nixon), the **Egyptian–Israeli and Syrian–Israeli disengagement agreements** (Ford), the **Camp David Accords** in 1978 (Carter), and the **Lebanon intervention** in 1982 (Reagan)—this increase becomes more understandable, but is still quite remarkable.

When the use of force in this latter part of the Cold War years is analyzed by administration, it can be seen that all presidents—except Reagan—relied on it less than did their predecessors during the first two decades of the Cold War. Reagan, by contrast, accounted for more than 55 percent of all uses of American force. In all, his administration more often employed American forces than any other administration in the postwar period. This conclusion holds even when we take into account that Reagan served longer than any of the others except for Eisenhower. Still a comparison of the eight years of the Reagan administration with the eight years of the Eisenhower administration, shows that Reagan's use of force was greater than Eisenhower's by slightly over 25 percent (74 versus 58 incidents).

Displays of force and occasional violence came to be justified to defend American interests. Challenges to national security (increasingly defined as global security) were not to go unmet, with the justification that confronting potential aggressors was essential to world peace. The so-called **Munich syndrome,** the fear of appeasing an aggressor as Chamberlain had done with Hitler, became another theme of American Cold War thinking. Drawing on historical analogies such as this as a guide to present policy was an important source in shaping a response to aggression.[7]

The United States as Model

Given the nature of the perceived global struggle, a final important theme emerged from this postwar consensus. The United States came to believe that it alone could "solve" the problems of the poor and emerging nations through its technological skills,[8] and that it could offer itself as the model for achievement of development and democracy. As a result of these beliefs, large-scale development efforts were initiated, particularly in the 1960s. Such a policy came to be viewed as markedly paternalistic, however, and some states viewed it warily. It also led to frustration for Americans when development did not occur as rapidly as envisioned or when democracy did not result. Nonetheless, America's confidence in itself during the 1950s and 1960s seems to summarize nicely the general value orientation that the United States employed to achieve its view of global order and to oppose the strategy of the Soviet Union.

**Table 3.3 Attitudes toward Stopping
the Spread of Communism, 1950–1951**

In general, how important do you think it is for the United
States to try to stop the spread of communism in the world—
very important, only fairly important, or not important at all?

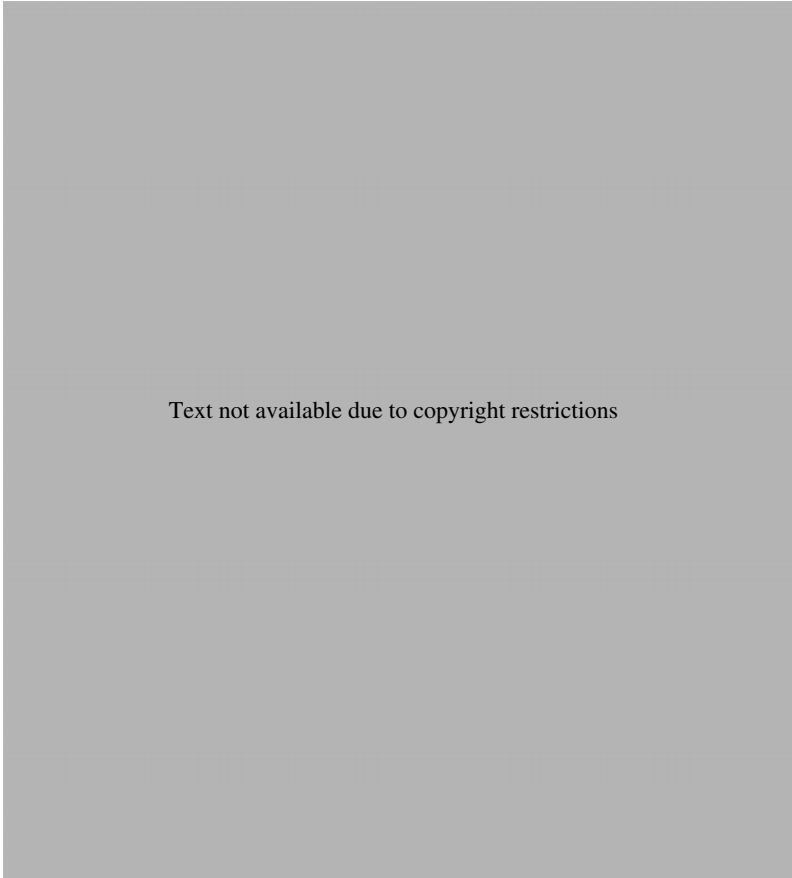| Survey Date	Very Important	Fairly Important	Not Important	Don't Know
January 1950	77%	10%	5%	8%
April 1950	83	6	4	7
June 1951	82	7	4	7

Source: Eugene R. Wittkopf, *Faces of Internationalism: Public Opinion and American Foreign Policy,* Table 6.1 (p. 169). Copyright 1990, Duke University Press. Reprinted with permission.

THE PUBLIC AND THE
COLD WAR CONSENSUS

Bloomfield's list (from Table 3.1) provides an excellent summary of Cold War consensus, but it does not convey how deeply held its views were among the American public during the late 1940s and 1950s. Fortunately, some public opinion survey data are available that provide additional support for Bloomfield's generalizations.[9] In particular, they depict prevailing American attitudes toward the perceived threat from international communism, the use of American troops to combat it abroad, and, more generally, public attitudes regarding how relations with the Soviet Union should be conducted.

Table 3.3 summarizes the results to a survey question asked on three occasions in 1950 and 1951: "In general, how important do you think it is for the United States to try to stop the spread of communism in the world?" On average, 80 percent of the American public answered with "very important," and another 8 percent answered with "fairly important." Only 5 percent saw stopping communism as "not important." When a similar question was asked two years earlier about the threat of communism spreading to specific regions and countries, the results were virtually the same (Table 3.4). Between 70 and 80 percent agreed with the statement that if Western Europe, South America, China, or Mexico were to become Communist it would make a difference to the United States.

The public was also quite willing to use American force to stop the spread of communism, even if it meant going to war. In two surveys, one in 1951 and another in 1952, the public was asked the following: "If you had to choose, which would you say is more important—to keep communism from spreading, or to stay out of another war?" Less than 30 percent chose to stay out of war, and about two-thirds were willing to take action. Further, about the use of American forces to stop communist attacks against particular countries or regions, the

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response was usually overwhelmingly favorable. Regarding the Philippines, the American-occupied zone in Germany at the time (and what eventually became West Germany), and Formosa, the public favored going to war with the Soviet Union if these attacks happened. Similarly, it favored using force if Central or South America were attacked by another country. Indeed, Americans appeared willing to sustain a worldwide effort to stop communism, even if it included the use of armed force.[10]

Short of force, the public expressed support for efforts to stop communism, and it was generally quite willing to provide economic and military assistance to countries threatened by communism. As political scientists Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro report, "By March 1949, for example, NORC [the National Opinion Research Center] found solid support for military aid to Europe (60% approving), for continuing the Marshall Plan (79%), and for maintaining or increasing the level of [European] recovery spending (60%)."[11] Further, in surveys by NORC between January 1955 and January 1956, the average level of support for economic aid for countries opposing Communist aggression was about

81 percent. Finally, in six surveys in 1950 and 1951, support for military assistance averaged 57 percent.[12]

By the end of World War II, the public was highly suspicious of dealing with the Soviet Union. As Page and Shapiro also report, a large majority felt as early as March 1946 that the United States was "too soft" on the Soviet Union, and by March 1948, that percentage had increased to 84 percent.[13] Further, they report that the percentage of the public expecting cooperation with the Soviet Union dropped precipitously from mid-1945 through mid-1949 to roughly 20 percent, across all educational levels.[14] This wariness of the Soviet Union was to continue throughout the Cold War years.

In short, after summarizing a wealth of American survey data on the early Cold War period, Page and Shapiro conclude: "The U.S. public accepted the logic of the Cold War and favored appropriate policies to carry it out."[15]

PATTERNS OF INTERACTION
DURING THE COLD WAR, 1946–1972

Even with the deeply held views that constituted the Cold War consensus and the evident hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union, interactions between the two states were not played out in a straight-line fashion of either increasing or decreasing levels of hostility. Instead, the **Cold War was largely a series of ebbs and flows,** from periods of greater to fewer hostilities and greater to lesser advantage by one power over the other. Neither party had achieved all of its goals, but neither was able to vanquish the other. As the United States and the Soviet Union changed in their capabilities and as the international system changed, the nature of the Cold War also changed, with the first major attempt at accommodation occurring in the early 1970s.

Foreign policy analyst and later national security advisor to President Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski, has captured these ebbs and flows in U.S.–Soviet relations over the height of the Cold War and has categorized them into six phases through 1972.[16]

Phases 1 and 2—1945–1947 and 1948–1952

The early years of the Cold War (1945–1947) were marked by uncertainty in the relationship between the two powers. The United States had some advantages in terms of its international standing and its economic capacity, but military power still probably advantaged the Soviet Union. In all, and as our discussion in Chapter 2 suggests, there was considerable uncertainty over the direction of policy by both states during these immediate post–World War II years.

By the 1948–1952 period, however, the Soviet Union was in a more assertive policy pattern, and the United States was largely relegated to responding to its challenges, whether in Eastern Europe, with the fall of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland and the Berlin blockade of 1948–1949 or in Asia,

with the establishment of communism in China and the outbreak of the Korean War. Hostility and conflict were sharp and intense.

During this second phase, the Soviet Union had to deal with an independent-minded Communist state in Yugoslavia, led by Josip Broz Tito. Moscow eventually expelled the Yugoslav Communist Party from the Soviet-run Cominform—a bureaucratic mechanism to enforce ideological orthodoxy in the communist world—but **"Titoism"** survived for more than three decades as a form of independent communism, often serving as a thorn in Moscow's side.[17]

Phase 3—1953–1957

During the 1953–1957 phase, by contrast, the United States was in a better position to respond to the Soviet challenge. Indeed, in Brzezinski's estimation, the United States was preeminent on numerous fronts—political, military, economic, and domestic. U.S. military capability was enhanced with a large increase in long-range nuclear bombers, its adoption of a nuclear strategy of massive retaliation, and the conventional arms buildup in Western Europe. The American economy was expanding, too, and the gap in the Soviet and U.S. economies was widening. The United States was also in a strong position politically and was largely able to work its political will in international affairs through the several alliance structures that it had created throughout the world.

Even during this period of American ascendancy and intense rivalry between the two superpowers, however, there were some nascent efforts at accommodation. For example, after Stalin's death in 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower made a conciliatory speech to the Soviet Union, which responded with some informal contacts. In 1955, an **Austrian State Treaty** was signed that required Soviet and American troops in Austria be withdrawn.[18] In July of the same year, the **"spirit of Geneva"** blossomed with a summit conference among the leaders of the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and Great Britain.[19] Finally, in 1956, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, at the Twentieth Party Congress, renounced the inevitability of war among the capitalist states—an important Stalinist tenet—and raised the possibility of longer-term accommodation with the West.[20] **"Peaceful coexistence"** had entered the lexicon of American–Soviet diplomacy, but rivalries were still intense.

Phase 4—1958–1963

In the next phase of the Cold War, beginning roughly in 1958, hostilities once again intensified. The Soviets attempted to engage in a truly global policy and expanded their activities in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and even in the Western Hemisphere. Khrushchev proclaimed his support for "national liberation struggles" around the world and attempted to put the United States on the defensive in numerous trouble spots.

In Europe, for example, the United States and the Soviet Union faced off over the future of **Berlin** in 1958–1959 and 1961.[21] In November 1958, the Soviet Union proposed to sign a separate peace treaty with the East German

government ending the former's control over the Soviet sector of Berlin and allowing the East Germans to control access to the British, French, and American sectors. (Because Berlin was located about 100 miles inside East Germany, it was particularly vulnerable to such action.) Moscow did not act immediately, however. Instead, it served notice that it would give the West six months to address how and if Western access to Berlin would continue before it effected a change in Berlin's status. The United States viewed this declaration as an ultimatum and stood firm to resist it. The deadline passed without incident, however, and no immediate Soviet actions were taken.

In 1961, Khrushchev raised the Berlin issue anew with a newly elected American president, John F. Kennedy. His demands were essentially the same: a peace treaty that would include East German control over access to Berlin, an end to all access rights by the Western allied powers, and the establishment of West Berlin as a "free city" within East German territory. President Kennedy responded by emphasizing U.S. determination to defend West Berlin, and he took several actions to demonstrate that resolve.[22] In a matter of days, on August 13, 1961, the Soviet Union and the East German government began to seal East Berlin from the West with a wall initially of wire and eventually of mortar.

The **Berlin Wall** was a response both to the actions of the U.S. and its allies in Berlin and to the extraordinary flow of East German refugees to West Berlin. Moreover, the wall—which stood until November 9, 1989—came to serve as a prominent symbol of the Cold War and the deep ideological and political gulf that existed between East and West.

In the developing world, similar confrontations occurred, reflecting how the East–versus–West dimension dominated global politics during this period. In the Central African Republic of **Congo** (later Zaire), the United States and the USSR found themselves supporting opposite sides in a civil war that erupted after independence from Belgium was achieved in June 1960. Both sent considerable resources to bolster their allies as the Cold War was played out in an arena far from either's territory. In the Western Hemisphere, with Fidel Castro's successful revolution in Cuba and his eventual declaration that he was a Marxist–Leninist, there was a second confrontation between East and West with the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961. Asia, too, saw the United States and the Soviet Union deeply involved in the civil war in Laos, resulting in another East–West conflict.[23]

Phase 5—1963–1968

The Cold War reached its climax with the **Cuban Missile Crisis** of October 1962 and its aftermath and with the escalation of the **Vietnam War.** During this period, the United States once again asserted its globalist posture and challenged the Soviet Union and its allies. Changes in governments from Brazil to Algeria and from Ghana to Indonesia produced a global environment more favorable to U.S. interests, although, as Brzezinski contends, this "new phase did not involve a return to the mutual hostility of the fifties."[24] Instead, efforts at accommodation persisted.

The **Limited Test Ban Treaty** in 1963, the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty** in 1968, the opening of a "hotline" between Washington and Moscow,

the beginning of a more differentiated U.S. strategy toward Eastern Europe, and continuing superpower summitry all suggest that the tenor of the Cold War was changing. These events, and several international shifts in power, had a profound impact on the stability of the Cold War consensus, as we discuss shortly.

Phase Six—1969–1972

The final phase in Brzezinski's description of the Cold War commenced in 1969 with Richard Nixon's election as president and ended roughly with the **Moscow Summit of 1972.**

At the Moscow summit, the **Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I)** produced two important nuclear arms pacts: one limiting offensive arms; the other limiting defensive arms (the **Anti–Ballistic Missile Treaty**). The significance of these agreements lay in the recognition by each superpower of the destructive capacity of its nuclear arsenal and the need to address this mutual danger. Equally significant was that United States and the Soviet Union recognized their essential equivalence in international affairs, and as a result, agreements for greater political, economic, and social interaction were struck in addition to the military accords. The intense chill of the Cold War appeared to have been replaced by the spirit of **détente** ("relaxation of tensions") between the superpowers.

Détente proved to be somewhat short-lived, lasting at most until December 1979, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. However, it had been fraying and unraveling from the early-1970s onward, as disputes between the two superpowers arose over the lack of fidelity to political, military, and economic agreements struck in Moscow in 1972. Similarly, elements of the Cold War were resurrected during the Reagan years, especially during his first term. Only toward the end of Reagan's administration and with the ascendance of Mikhail Gorbachev in the Soviet Union was the Cold War thaw to begin once again.

CHALLENGES TO THE
COLD WAR CONSENSUS

Despite the ebbs and flows in the Soviet–American relationship and the resurgence of the Cold War in the early 1980s, the values and beliefs of the Cold War consensus had begun to be challenged as early as the mid- to late 1960s—predominantly because of the changing world environment, which was increasingly multipolar rather than bipolar. New power centers began to appear within the Communist world, among the Western allies, and between the developed world and the Third World.[25]

Other serious challenges to the postwar consensus were over the limits of American power as exercised in the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 and even more so over America's Vietnam policy, particularly from 1965 to the early 1970s. Although these latter two challenges were initiated abroad, their impact was profoundly manifested at home. In particular, Vietnam produced a full-blown

domestic debate over the conduct of American foreign policy, and it is often cited as having signaled the death knell of the Cold War consensus.

The Sino–Soviet Split

The split between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union, the two largest Communist powers, challenged the Cold War assumption about the basic unity of international communism and the degree to which it was directed from Moscow. Throughout the height of the Cold War, the United States had treated communism as a monolithic movement that everywhere took its orders from the Soviet Union. When China and the Soviet Union became increasingly antagonistic toward one another in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the West, and the United States in particular, was forced to rethink this assumption.

In many ways, the Sino–Soviet split should not have been surprising to U.S. policy makers, as **both *historical rivalries* and *social–cultural differences* had long characterized Soviet–Chinese relations.** Historically, the Soviet Union had always coveted access to and control over Asia and, in turn, had always feared the growth of Chinese influence. Likewise, the Chinese had always perceived Russia as an "imperialist" power that threatened their sovereignty and territorial integrity. Territorial disputes date back at least to the signing of the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1659 and continued into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the disintegration of China at the hands of outside, including Russian, powers.[26]

On a cultural level, too, deep suspicions had permeated Soviet and Chinese views of one another. The Soviets viewed a possible invasion by the "Mongols" from the East with grave concern and the Chinese regarded the Soviet commissars with similar apprehension. To the Chinese, the Russians were "foreigners" and "barbarians," intent on destroying the glories of Chinese culture and society. Although the other "imperialist" powers were driven from China with Mao's successful revolution of 1949, the Soviets remained. Their continued presence reinforced Chinese hostility.

Despite these profound suspicions, a formal alliance was forged between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China in 1950, raising the belief in official Washington that past differences had been resolved rather than temporarily shelved. In fact, mutual self-interest apparently dictated this formal tie. The China of **Mao Tse-tung,** although successful in its domestic revolution, was still weak and not fully an independent actor in global affairs. The Soviets, badly in need of global partners in a world of capitalist powers, had much to gain by allying with their new ideological partner.[27]

Nevertheless, new differences between the two Communist giants quickly began to grow and were superimposed on the disputes of the past. **These new difficulties were mainly *economic* and *ideological*.** The Soviet Union provided economic and technological assistance to China, but it was insufficient. The low aid levels frustrated the Chinese aim of self-sufficiency, a goal that the Soviet Union did not share. Most important, the Soviet Union refused to help the Chinese build an independent nuclear force, and it is this refusal that has been identified by some as the catalyst for the new Sino–Soviet split.[28]

On an ideological level, Mao's brand of communism, unlike Khrushchev's, did not call for "peaceful coexistence" with the West.[29] Nor did it call for emulating the Soviet model of heavy industrialization as the road to modernization and socialism. Further, the Soviets and the Chinese disagreed over the de-Stalinization movement, engaged in a continuous debate over the degree of diversity allowable among Communist states and parties, and adopted differing views on the nature of the worldwide revolutionary movement.[30] In short, Mao's proclamations on the "correct" interpretation of Marxism-Leninism were increasingly perceived as direct challenges to Soviet leadership of the communist world.

By the late 1950s and into the early 1960s, the traditional Sino–Soviet split reemerged full blown. American officials slowly began to recognize this global reality and to see the need for a policy that did not homogenize the Communist powers.

Disunity in the East And West

A second readjustment in America's view of the Communist world as wholly unified occurred in Eastern Europe when differences emerged within the **Warsaw Pact**—the military alliance between the Soviet Union and its Eastern European neighbors. Although these were nowhere as severe as the Sino–Soviet split, they again suggested that some change was needed in the unidimensional way in which the United States viewed and approached the Communist world during the Cold War.

Uprisings in East Germany in 1953 and Poland in 1956, outright revolt in Hungary later in the same year, and the call for communism "with a human face" in Czechoslovakia by 1968 all signaled a changed Eastern Europe. Considering also Yugoslavia's long-standing independent Communist route, Albania's departure from the Warsaw Pact in 1968, and Romania's break with Eastern Europe over the recognition of West Germany in 1967, it became clear that Eastern Europe was hardly the model of alliance unity.

It soon also became apparent to American observers that exploiting the internal differences within the Eastern bloc was yet another way of moving these nations away from Soviet control. Furthermore, the Eastern-bloc nations themselves sought to expand economic advantage through diplomatic contact and recognition.[31] This was another reason for the United States to change its strategy of strict bloc-to-bloc relations if these economic and political opportunities were not to be lost.

But readjustments in this unified East–versus–unified West definition of global politics were not confined to disharmony among the Communist states. If the Soviet Union faced challenges from the People's Republic of China and Eastern Europe, America faced them within its own NATO alliance. By the early 1960s, the United States could no longer automatically expect the Western European states to follow its foreign policy lead. More accurately, it could no longer dictate Western policy. With the economic recovery of France and West Germany and the emergence of the **European Common Market,** a number of European states wanted a more independent role in world affairs—or at least wanted to not be subservient to American policy prescriptions.

The best example of the need for a perceptual readjustment within the Western bloc was over the foreign policy pursued by France under President **Charles de Gaulle** (1958–1969), the undisputed leader of the Western European challenge to U.S. leadership. Under de Gaulle, France sought to restore some of its lost glory by relaxing its strong linkage with the United States, weakening overall American influence over Western European affairs, and improving ties with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. De Gaulle's ultimate goal, in fact, was to break the "hegemonic" hold on Europe of both the Soviet Union and the United States and to establish a "community of European states" from the "Atlantic to the Urals."[32] In his global design, France would once again play a central role in European politics.

To accomplish this, de Gaulle undertook a series of initiatives to reduce American influence and weaken Soviet control over the continent. First, in 1958, shortly after gaining the French presidency, he reportedly proposed a **three–power directorate for the NATO alliance,** under which policy decisions would be made only with the unanimous consent of the United States, Great Britain, and France. In effect, his proposal would give France a veto over NATO policy. Second, despite American objections, de Gaulle announced his plan to develop an independent French nuclear capability, the *force de frappe,* and refused to join in American and British (and later German) plans for an integrated nuclear force. Third, and perhaps most dramatically, he announced in 1965 that France would withdraw from the military structure of NATO in 1966. This last act was probably the single most potent challenge to Western unity. With France's military withdrawal, the appearance of political divisions within NATO became a reality.

Both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations favored a strong, unified Europe, closely allied to the United States. De Gaulle did not favor such close American involvement in European affairs. Instead, he took a series of other actions to reshape Western European politics more in accord with his views and as a further means of frustrating American dominance. To this end, he sought to reshape the European Common Market, increase French–German ties (at the expense of American–German ties), and isolate Great Britain.

De Gaulle first attempted to reduce the supranational components of the Common Market—the power of the European commission, for example—and to increase the emphasis on intergovernmental components within it. To accomplish this, he proposed the Fouchet Plan, which was both a broadening of the Common Market arrangements to include political, cultural, and defense activities and a lessening of centralized control. Although this plan was ultimately rejected, it caused considerable controversy and division within the European Community. De Gaulle's second move was to veto British entry into the Common Market, on two different occasions (1963 and 1967), fundamentally because Britain was too close to the United States. Finally, de Gaulle sought, largely unsuccessfully, to forge a strong alliance between France and West Germany. His strategy, once again, was to break the close ties between the United States and the Federal Republic. In the main, he was rebuffed by successive German chancellors, although he did manage to put into effect the **German–French Treaty of Friendship** in January 1963.[33]

Bridges across East and West

Although de Gaulle's actions were not the only source of dissension within the Western Alliance, they did represent the most consistent pattern of movement away from the bipolar world of the Cold War. But his challenge to this bipolarity did not stop with his actions toward America and Western Europe. He also opened up contacts with Eastern Europe and took policy steps clearly at odds with the mentality of bloc-to-bloc relations of the previous decade. These actions alarmed the Americans because de Gaulle was operating unilaterally, outside the Western Alliance, but they undoubtedly pleased the Eastern Europeans because they granted these nations some legitimacy in the eyes of the West. Their effect on the Soviets was probably mixed because, while granting recognition to Eastern Europe, they had the potential effect of undermining Warsaw Pact unity.

De Gaulle's Eastern Europe strategy was first to increase social, cultural, and economic ties and then to proceed toward political accommodation. For instance, educational exchanges, tourism, and trade between France and Eastern Europe increased dramatically. More important, perhaps, France initiated political contacts with the Eastern Europeans at the highest levels of government.

In the first part of his political campaign to **"build bridges" to the East,** de Gaulle sent his foreign affairs minister to several Eastern European countries. Dramatic in itself this step was in response to the visits to France by numerous East European political officials. Even more dramatic was de Gaulle's decision to visit Eastern Europe himself, making official visits to the Soviet Union in June 1966, Poland in September 1967, and Romania in May 1968. He also accepted invitations to visit Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Bulgaria, but these trips were not made before he left office.[34] The significance of De Gaulle's contacts cannot be overstated, given that Western policy was not to offer official diplomatic recognition to the Eastern European governments because of their failure to recognize West Germany.

Throughout these visits, and despite acknowledged differences, mutual calls for reconciliation were made. De Gaulle's characterization of Europe's division into blocs as "artificial" and "sterile" epitomizes his continuing effort to break the political divisions of the Cold War,[35] and, indeed, his efforts were an impetus to greater contact between East and West. For instance, West Germany's accommodative policy toward East Germany (known as *Ostpolitik*) was slowly nurtured from 1966–1969 and came to fruition soon after.

French initiatives were also important harbingers of changes in the politics of Europe. For Americans, they once again demonstrated the difficulties of conducting *bipolar* policy in a world that was increasingly *multipolar.*

The Nonaligned Movement

In the post–World War II years, another major political force was unleashed: the desire for independence by colonial territories, especially throughout Asia and Africa. In fact, more than ninety nations were granted or achieved political independence from their colonial overseers from 1945 through 1980. Fourteen became

independent in the years from 1945 to 1949, nine from 1950 through 1959, forty-three from 1960 to 1969, twenty-six states 1970 through 1979, eight from 1980 to 1989, twenty-four from 1990 to 2000, and one after 2000 (see Table 3.5).[36]

This surge of independence began in Asia and northern Africa. Pakistan, India, and the Philippines, among others, gained their independence in the late 1940s, whereas Tunisia, Cambodia (Kampuchea), Morocco, Libya, and Malaysia, among others, gained theirs by the mid-1950s. The decolonization of Africa mainly occurred in the early 1960s, although Ghana and Guinea led the way in the late 1950s. By the end of the 1960s, in fact, some 66 new nations were part of the international system, and this process continued into the 1970s, albeit at a slower pace.

The decolonization movement proved to be a third major challenge to the bipolar approach that underlay American foreign policy during the Cold War. The new states generally refused to tie themselves into the formal East–West bloc structure and, instead, followed an independent, nonaligned foreign policy course. To demonstrate their independence, they actually started a nonaligned movement.

The founder of the nonaligned movement was **Jawaharlal Nehru** of India, who as early as 1946 had stated that India "will follow an independent policy, keeping away from the power politics of groups aligned one against another."[37] He continued his efforts on behalf of this movement once he reached power, helping to organize the **Conference of Afro–Asian States** held at Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955. This conference is sometimes cited as the initial step in the development of a nonaligned movement because it was the first time that former colonial territories met without any European powers in attendance. However, the tone of the debate and the principles adopted later were criticized as not fully reflecting nonalignment principles.[38]

The more formal institutionalization of this movement was the **Belgrade Conference** in September 1961. Spurred on by the organizational efforts of Nehru as well as leaders such as Tito of Yugoslavia, Nasser of Egypt, Nkrumah of Ghana, and Sukarno of Indonesia, this conference of twenty-five nations produced a statement of principles for a "third way" in world politics.[39]

In effect, the nonaligned states wanted not only to reject bloc politics but also to expand their numbers. They saw their contribution to world peace as directly opposite to the way world politics had been conducted up to that time. That is, they would take an active part in world affairs through their own initiatives and in their own way, without going through the coordinated actions of a bloc of states. More specifically, they would reject military alliances with the superpowers (including the hosting of military bases) that, in effect, extended the politics of the Cold War through intermediaries. In this sense, nonalignment did not mean noninvolvement or rejection of global politics, but it did mean the rejection of international politics as it had played out during the Cold War.[40]

The nonaligned movement proved highly successful, and its adherents rapidly increased. In less than a decade, the movement's membership had doubled, with fifty-three nations attending the Third Summit Meeting in Lusaka, Zambia, in September 1970.[41] The new members were primarily colonial territories that had

Table 3.5 The Growth of New Nations, 1945–2006

1945–1949

Bhutan	Jordan	Lebanon	Sri Lanka
India	Korea, North	Myanmar	Taiwan
Indonesia	Korea, South	Pakistan	
Israel	Laos	Philippines	

1950–1959

Cambodia	Libya	Morocco	Tunisia
Ghana	Malaysia	Sudan	Vietnam
Guinea			

1960–1969

Algeria	Cyprus	Malawi	Senegal
Barbados	Equatorial Guinea	Maldives	Sierra Leone
Benin	Gabon	Mali	Singapore
Botswana	Gambia	Malta	Somalia
Burkina Faso	Guyana	Mauritania	Swaziland
Burundi	Ivory Coast	Mauritius	Tanzania
Cameroon	Jamaica	Nauru	Togo
Central African Republic	Kenya	Niger	Trinidad and Tobago
Chad	Kuwait	Nigeria	Uganda
Congo	Lesotho	Rwanda	Zambia
Congo, Dem. Republic	Madagascar	Samoa	

1970–1979

Angola	Fiji	Qatar	Tonga
Bahamas	Grenada	St. Lucia	Tuvalu
Bahrain	Guinea-Bissau	St. Vincent and	United Arab
Bangladesh	Kiribati	the Grenadines	Emirates
Cape Verde	Mozambique	Sao Tome and Principe	
Comoros	Niue	Seychelles	
Djibouti	Oman	Solomon Islands	
Dominica	Papua New Guinea	Suriname	

1980–1989

Antigua and Barbuda	Brunei	Micronesia, Fed. States	Vanuata
Belize	Marshall Islands	St. Kitts and Nevis	Zimbabwe

1990–1999

Armenia	Georgia	Namibia	Ukraine
Azerbaijan	Kazakhstan	Palau	Uzbekistan
Belarus	Kyrgyzstan	Russia	Yemen
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Latvia	Slovak, Rep.	
Croatia	Lithuania	Slovenia	
Eritrea	Macedonia	Tajikistan	
Estonia	Moldova	Turkmenistan	

2000–2006

East Timor

gained their independence in the early to middle 1960s. Essentially the new participants in world politics were joining the ranks of the nonaligned.

The United States was always a bit skeptical of the nonaligned movement and the degree of its independence in world politics. Indeed, a continuous debate existed from the movement's inception over how "nonaligned" it was, given that its pronouncements were often more critical of the West than of the East and typically more critical of capitalism than socialism. Further, several prominent nonaligned nations had close ties with the Soviet Union. Cuba, Vietnam, and Afghanistan, among others, could hardly be viewed as "nonaligned" in global politics during much of the movement's history. Despite this anomaly, the movement itself provided yet another reason for American policy makers to conclude that global politics would no longer conform to their image of East versus West.

The Missiles of October: The First Crisis of Confidence

The last important challenge to America's Cold War consensus—prior to the Vietnam War—was the **Cuban Missile Crisis.** Although both episodes were foreign policy events, their impact was as much domestic as foreign, and they profoundly affected America's thinking about its role in the world. They brought home to American leaders and to the American people—in a most dramatic fashion—the limits of the United States in influencing the Soviet Union and the Third World, and they illustrated the limited extent to which American beliefs and values were able to create the global design the Cold War consensus envisioned.

The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 16–28, 1962, was the closest that the United States and the Soviet Union had come to nuclear confrontation since the advent of atomic power. It began when Cuba, under the leadership of **Fidel Castro** since 1959, and having by this time declared itself a "Marxist–Leninist" state, turned to the Soviet Union for assistance against alleged American intrigues. The crisis centered on the introduction of Soviet "offensive" intermediate-range ballistic missiles into Cuba during the fall of 1962. Such Soviet actions were in violation of its stated commitment to introduce only "defensive" weapons.

On the discovery of the missiles on October 16, 1962, President John Kennedy set out to devise an appropriate strategy to remove them from territory only 90 miles from American shores. Thus, after a week of highly secret deliberations through his Executive Committee of the National Security Council, he finally announced on October 22, 1962, that a naval quarantine would be set up in an 800 mile ring around Cuba to interdict further missile shipments. (See Map 3.1.) Furthermore, he threatened the Soviet Union with a nuclear response if the Cuban missiles were used against the United States. A series of other measures, through the Organization of American States, the United Nations, and bilateral contacts with the Soviet Union, were undertaken to remove the missiles already in place.

After another week of tense confrontation and exchanges of diplomatic notes, the Soviets agreed to remove the missiles under United Nations supervision. The United States, in exchange, pledged not to attempt to overthrow the Castro regime. Subsequent information about the crises, uncovered through a series of conferences in the late 1980s and early 1990s among American, Soviet, and
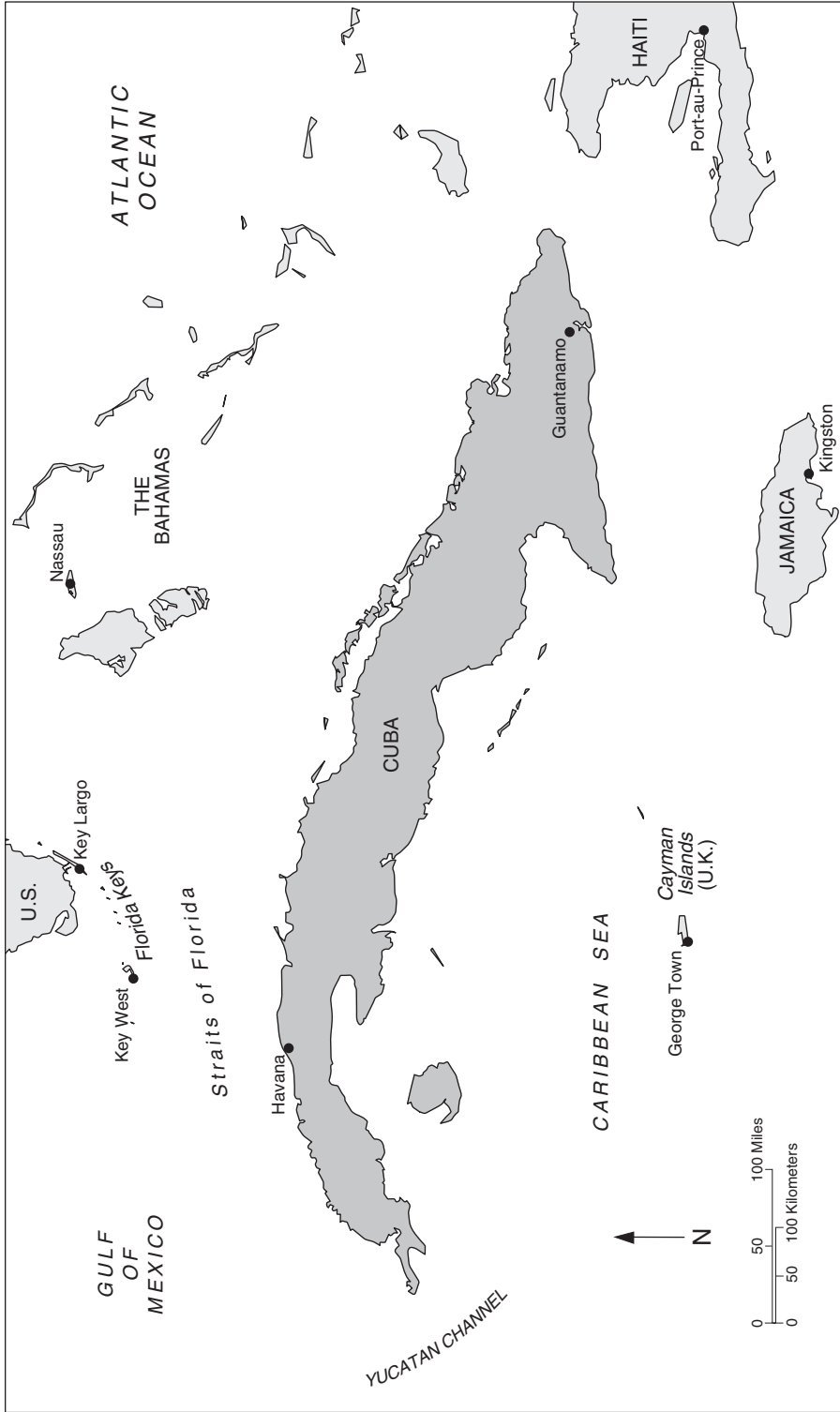
MAP 3.1 Cuba

Cuban participants, revealed that another, informal, exchange was struck between the United States and the Soviet Union: The Soviet Union would remove its threatening missiles from Cuba and the United States would remove its threatening missiles from Turkey.[42]

The Missile Crisis has long been the subject of analysis and reanalysis, and it has yielded various lessons for Soviet–American relations during the Cold War and for nuclear relations generally.[43]

Lesson 1: The Risk of Nuclear Annihilation First, the crisis fully brought home to both Soviet and American leaders (and their populaces) that nuclear annihilation was a real possibility—mutual assured destruction, or MAD, was no longer an abstract theory. Although the United States may have been relatively safe from Soviet nuclear attacks in the 1950s, the development of intercontinental missiles—and even intermediate-range missiles such as those that had been placed in Cuba—demonstrated that this safety no longer existed. Americans were now vulnerable to Soviet nuclear weapons, just as the Soviets were to the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

Political analysts Len Scott and Steve Smith conclude that, with the new data available on the crisis, this lesson is even clearer today. "Recent sources," they report, "seem to show absolutely clearly that U.S. decision-makers were extremely worried about the prospect of any Soviet nuclear response, so much so that the result was to nullify the enormous nuclear superiority that the United States enjoyed at the time."[44] Two other analysts, James Blight and David Welch, writing from new material and from the review conference discussions, identify the **"perceptions of risks"** as the primary "meta-lesson" to be drawn from the Cuban Missile Crisis.[45]

Put differently, mutual survival proved more important than the unilateral interests of either country. Despite their avowed antipathy toward one another, then, neither the Soviet Union nor the United States wanted to back the other into a corner where all-out war (and nuclear holocaust) or surrender was the only option. This caution is reflected in the various personal accounts of the decision making at the time and in the importance that was attached to "placing ourselves in the other country's shoes" during the crisis.[46]

Lesson 2: The Possibility of Rational Policy Making Both the United States and the Soviet Union proved capable of rationally evaluating their national interests and global consequences during the crisis. This was especially important for American policy makers. Because of the Cold War consensus, Americans had tended to view skeptically Soviet decision making. Being so consumed by Marxist-Leninist ideology, would the Soviets be able to assess the costs and the consequences of their actions and respond prudently? The answer was clearly yes, as reflected in the outcome of the crisis and in the subsequent scholarly research on it.[47] Rational policy making with the Soviet Union might just be possible.

Yet some recent assessments also make clear the need to go beyond the rational policy-making assumption in drawing any lessons from this dramatic episode.

First, **reliance on the "rational actor"** alone fails to account "for the values and priorities of the president. For that, cognitive models are required."[48] That is, an understanding of the values, beliefs, and perceptions of the leaders in the crisis and the roles they played is important for understanding the successful resolution of the crisis and represents a useful lesson to take away from it. Second, **organizational and bureaucratic factors in policy making** during the crisis (see Chapters 9 and 10) actually produced more nuclear risks than previously thought. Policy managers were, in fact, less successful in controlling the actions of their subordinates in the field than many might want to believe.[49] One recent analysis that focuses on the crisis, for example, makes this point dramatically by noting that, during this period, "the U.S. nuclear command system clearly did not provide the certainty in safety that senior American leaders wanted and believed existed at the time."[50]

Lesson 3: The Likelihood of Mutual Accommodation   Finally, and perhaps most important, the crisis brought home the reality that the Soviet Union and the United States were going to be major participants in international relations for a long time and that each might just as well devise policies that would acknowledge the interests and rights of the other. In other words, neither superpower was capable of dislodging the other from its place in world politics quickly or easily. Thus, for the Americans, any vision of **"rolling back communism"** was illusory at best; for the Soviets, any vision of capitalist collapse was myopic. In this way, the Americans and the Soviets learned that accommodation with their major adversary was possible—and necessary—for mutual survival. Somewhat ironically, the nuclear showdown over the missiles in Cuba has been cited as the beginning of détente between the Soviet Union and the United States.

In sum, the Cuban Missile Crisis—even with the Soviets' humiliation over the removal of its missiles from Cuba—challenged the Cold War view that the Soviet Union or Communism could be quickly and easily dislodged from global politics. A foreign policy based solely upon this assumption was therefore likely to be frustrating and self-defeating. (Although this point is difficult to demonstrate, the Soviet Union probably learned similar lessons about the United States.) At the same time, and equally important, the crisis illustrated the possibility of negotiating with an implacable foe—even over the most fundamental questions—and of accommodating a world of different political and social systems.

VIETNAM

American involvement in Vietnam began at the end of World War II and lasted for almost thirty years, until the evacuation of American embassy personnel from Saigon at the end of April 1975. (See Map 3.2.) It spanned six administrations, from Truman's to Ford's. Guided largely by the values and beliefs of the Cold War consensus, Vietnam nevertheless produced the most divisive foreign policy debate in the history of the republic and ultimately produced a major foreign policy
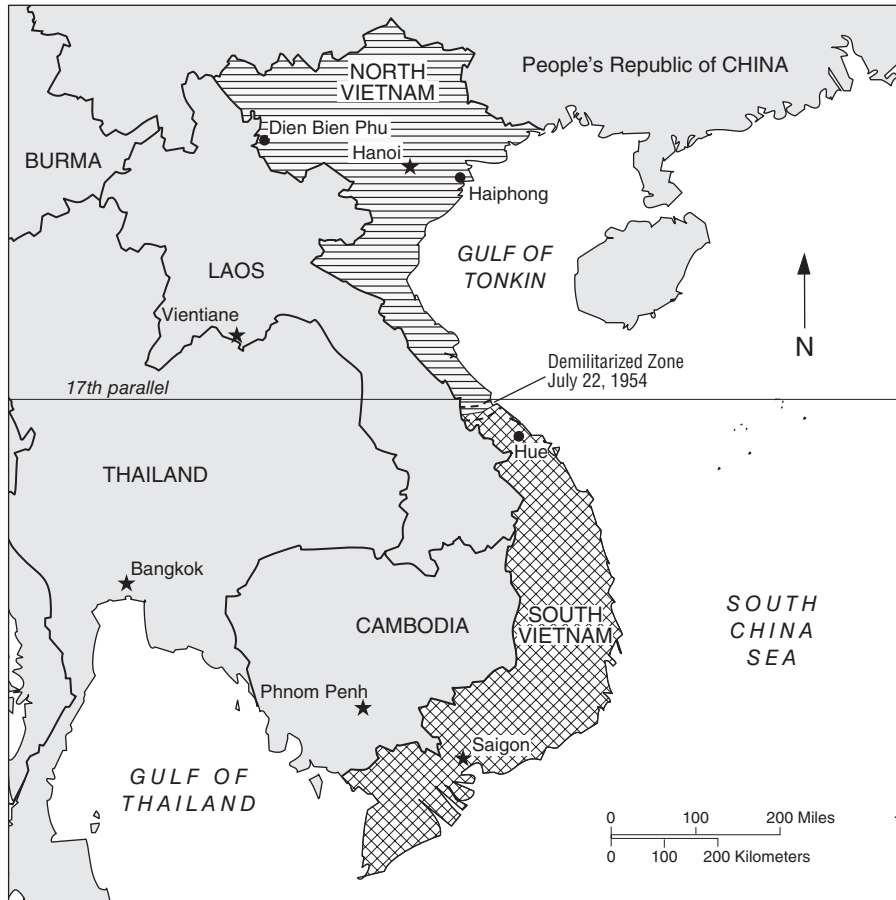
MAP 3.2 Vietnam, 1954–1975

defeat for the United States. At home, its most important outcome was that it signaled a change in Cold War foreign policy—at least until the Reagan administration in the 1980s.

Before we assess the overall impact of Vietnam, we will present a brief sketch of American involvement there.

The Origins of Involvement, 1945–1963

President Roosevelt gave the first hint of American interest in Indochina with his preference for an international trusteeship arrangement over the countries that today are Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam near the end of World War II. However, the events of the immediate postwar years and the rise of the Cold War propelled the United States in a different direction. The Truman administration had

serious reservations about identifying itself with colonialism, but Soviet actions toward Eastern Europe, Communist success in China, and uncertainty about the political leanings of **Ho Chi Minh**—the leader of the Vietnamese independence movement—ultimately led the United States to assume "a distinctly pro-French 'neutrality.'" As a result, Truman began providing clandestine economic and military assistance to France in the late 1940s in its war against the Vietminh (the followers of Ho Chi Minh).[51]

After the outbreak of the Korean War, which seemed to confirm Washington's suspicions about Soviet global intentions, American involvement in the war in Indochina deepened. More than $133 million of military hardware was committed to the French for Indochina, and another $50 million was sent in economic and technical assistance to the governments that they had established. Throughout the rest of the Truman administration, the United States provided more and more military and economic assistance, until American aid constituted 40 percent of the war's total cost.[52]

The Eisenhower administration took the rationale for American involvement in Vietnam one step further by invoking much of the language of the Cold War and by continuing to increase assistance to the noncommunist, French-backed Vietnamese government. In a 1954 news conference, Eisenhower referred to the **"falling dominoes"** in Southeast Asia, and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles hinted at the role of the Chinese Communists in causing the unrest there.[53] Yet the administration did not go much beyond providing economic and military assistance and, in fact, explicitly ruled out the use of American forces to rescue the French from defeat at the decisive battle of **Dien Bien Phu** with the Vietminh in 1954. Instead, it sought a negotiated outcome at a **1954 Geneva conference on Indochina.**[54] That conference called for an armistice between the parties, a temporary division of the country at the 17th parallel, and elections in 1956 to decide on reunification. The United States neither actively participated in this conference nor did it sign the accords or endorse them. The proposed all-Vietnam election scheduled for 1956 was never held.

The United States quickly became the principal supporter of the noncommunist South Vietnamese government of Premier (later President) **Ngo Dinh Diem,** who came to be identified as "America's Mandarin," as he sought to replace French influence with close American ties.[55] Moreover, President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles believed that Ngo Dinh Diem represented the best prospect for developing a noncommunist Vietnam. Between 1955 and 1961 the United States provided $1 billion in aid to Diem, and by 1961, South Vietnam was the fifth largest recipient of U.S. foreign assistance.[56] Even so, the stability of the Diem government remained precarious throughout the late 1950s.

On taking office in 1961, President Kennedy expanded this military and economic assistance and contemplated sending in American military forces to prevent the fall of South Vietnam. He did not quite take that step, but instead incrementally enlarged the number of American military "advisors" from 685 when he took office to about 16,000 by the time of his assassination.[57] By one account, Kennedy did not give an "unqualified commitment to the goal of saving South Vietnam from Communism."[58] Nonetheless, his actions took the United States

further down the path to military involvement, and Kennedy may well have con-
tinued in that direction had he lived to remain in office.[59]

American Military Involvement, 1964–1975

It was President Lyndon Johnson who fully transformed U.S. involvement in
South Vietnam from a political to a military one. He both broadened and deep-
ened America's commitment to preserve a noncommunist South Vietnam, and it
was ultimately he who decided to send in American combat forces.

As the stability of the South Vietnamese government worsened (some nine
changes of government occurred from the time of the coup against President
Ngo Dinh Diem, in November 1963, until February 1965) and as North Viet-
namese and Vietcong successes increased, the Johnson administration sought a
new strategy.[60] At least as early as February 1964, American clandestine operations
were under way against North Vietnam; these operations ultimately led to at-
tacks by the North Vietnamese on two American destroyers, the *Maddox* and the
C. Turner Joy in the Gulf of Tonkin in North Vietnam in August 1964. These at-
tacks were quickly used by the Johnson administration to seek congressional ap-
proval of an American military presence in Southeast Asia.[61] In a matter of hours,
Congress approved the **Gulf of Tonkin resolution,** which authorized the presi-
dent to take "all necessary measures" in Southeast Asia (see Chapter 7).

For the Johnson administration, this resolution became the equivalent of a
declaration of war, and U.S. retaliatory air strikes were quickly ordered. By De-
cember 1964, air attacks against North Vietnamese infiltration routes through Laos
had begun, and by February 1965, **"Operation Rolling Thunder,"** a bombing
strategy to weaken North Vietnam's resistance and bring it to the negotiating
table, was initiated. By March 1965, the first American ground troops had landed,
and a rapid buildup in these forces was ordered in July.[62] Indeed, the number
of forces continued to escalate until they ultimately reached over a half million
American soldiers by late 1968.

Despite this vast commitment of personnel and matériel, the war went badly
for the South Vietnamese and the United States. The **Tet offensive** (named for
the lunar New Year) perhaps more than any other event brought this home to
Americans. Tet consisted of widespread attacks by the North Vietnamese and the
Viet Cong (or the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam) over a six-month
period beginning at the end of January 1968. It was ultimately a military failure
for the North, costing it tens of thousands of lives, but it was a political success
in that it demonstrated the continuing vulnerability of South Vietnam through
many years of war. Moreover, Tet's impact within the United States was immedi-
ate, causing a sharp drop in American optimism.[63] Indeed, the political pressure
on President Johnson became so severe that, in March 1968, he voluntarily with-
drew from consideration as a candidate for reelection.

President Richard Nixon, elected as Johnson's successor in part on a com-
mitment to change Vietnam policy, adopted a different strategy. He began to de-
crease American military involvement through a policy of **"Vietnamization"**—
whereby the South Vietnamese military would replace American soldiers—and

he pursued peace negotiations (begun originally in mid-1968 in Paris) through both open and secret channels.

With Vietnamization, American forces in Vietnam were reduced from about 543,000 shortly after Nixon took office to about 25,000 by the end of his first term.[64] As part of this strategy, the United States invaded Cambodia in April 1970 with the expressed purpose of wiping out its North Vietnamese sanctuaries and safe havens. To many Americans, this action appeared to be a widening of the war. Protests erupted across the country, and tragedy struck Kent State University in Ohio and Jackson State University in Mississippi when students were killed during campus protests. Further opposition to the war resulted.

After a North Vietnamese offensive in the spring of 1972 had been repulsed and after further American bombing of the North near the end of the negotiations, a cease-fire agreement, formally called **"The Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring the Peace,"** was signed on January 27, 1973—following continuous involvement by the United States since 1965 and the loss of more than 58,000 American and countless Vietnamese lives.[65]

The cease-fire called for the withdrawal of all American troops and the return of prisoners of war. In addition, it allowed the North Vietnamese to keep their military forces in South Vietnam, and it left open the question of South Vietnam's future. On balance, it was less a "peace with honor," as it was portrayed at the time, than a mechanism for enabling the United States to extricate itself from Vietnam.[66]

Although the cease-fire reduced the level of fighting and provided a way for the United States to bring its troops home, it did not totally end the war or America's involvement. The end actually came two years later, during the Ford administration, with the fall of Saigon and the final evacuation of all American personnel on **April 30, 1975.** The fall of Saigon was a humiliating defeat for a policy based on preventing communist success in South Vietnam. This defeat produced searching policy reflection at that point, but not before the basic premises of Vietnam had come under scrutiny and become the subject of intense debate.

Lessons from Vietnam

Several political and military explanations have been offered for America's defeat. Some have focused, for example, on U.S. military tactics and the very nature of "limited war."[67] They believe that the **policy of "graduated response"** did not allow the United States to take maximum advantage of its military capabilities. Others point to the failure to adjust military strategy to the unconventional nature of the war and to the futility of "search-and-destroy" against the adversary.[68] Still others point to the political problems associated with the war. The "legitimacy" of the South Vietnamese government remained a problem, and its shaky domestic support weakened the war effort.[69] By contrast, the determination and will of the North Vietnamese were much greater than many policy makers had thought. Even under the pressure of intensive bombing and high casualties, they continued to fight. Other explanations fault the loss of support for the war back home and the nature of American leadership.[70] Neither the American public nor Congress was willing to sustain its support for the war—some because they believed

that it was not being prosecuted fully; others because they no longer believed that the conflict was either moral or ethical.

For all of these reasons, the Vietnam foreign policy defeat, and various explanations for it, produced a significant reexamination of the Cold War consensus and contributed substantially to its undermining (or at least its revision). Indeed, there were several domestic consequences for foreign policy from the Vietnam War that had a profound effect on the direction of future American actions abroad.

Consequence One: The U.S. Role The Vietnam War led to **the questioning of the U.S. role in the world.** Should it be responsible for political activity everywhere—especially in a country half a world away with only the most tangential relationship to American national security? Was the American public willing to support and legitimize such responsibility? Was the public willing to support a policy that had only the most lofty goals in international affairs?

Americans' response to these questions, by the early 1970s, was generally a resounding no. There were limits to American power; there were limits to America's responsibility; and there were limits to how much globalism the American public would tolerate. The future scope of the U.S. role in global affairs would have to be much more limited.

Consequence Two: Questions of Strategy Vietnam created a greater hesitancy in fighting limited war and a belief that a different strategy would be needed if such a war were to be pursued. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the U.S. military leadership became increasingly uneasy about quickly deploying American forces abroad and came to demand from their political leaders clearer missions, adequate resources, and reasonable "exit" strategies. This **"Vietnam Syndrome"** was most dramatically played out during the Persian Gulf War of 1991, when General Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and General Norman Schwartzkopf, commander of American forces in the Middle East, sought and obtained an overwhelming force level to drive the Iraqis from Kuwait. More recently, this syndrome was in the minds of policy makers as they contemplated actions in the Balkans in the mid-1990s, in Afghanistan after September 11, 2001, and in Iraq in 2003.

Consequence Three: Open Public Debate Because of Vietnam, **foreign policy goals now became a ready source of public debate.** Public opinion challenged its leadership's policies on the war, and, by 1968 and early 1969, a majority of Americans viewed it as a "mistake."[71] (See the public opinion data in Figure 3.1.) Moreover, after the Tet offensive of 1968, the number of "hawks" declined, although the public still did not favor immediate withdrawal. That would come by late 1969, however, when support for withdrawal rose to almost 70 percent.[72] In Congress, too, divisions were apparent between "liberals" and "conservatives" and between "hawks" and "doves" on foreign policy.[73] Such divisions are in sharp contrast to the philosophies of just a few years earlier, when liberals and conservatives, despite their domestic differences, often stood together on foreign policy. After the Vietnam experience, no such harmony was evident.
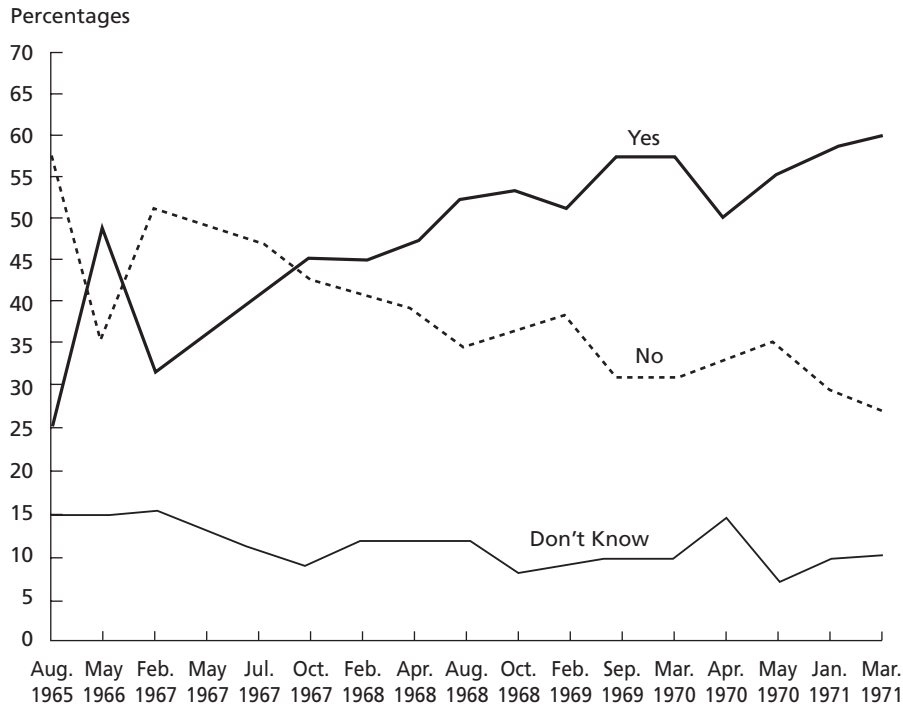
Percentages

Percentage of responses to the question: "In view of the developments since we entered the fighting in Vietnam, do you think the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?" (Gallup Organization data)

FIGURE 3.1 The "Mistake" Question on Vietnam

Source: Adapted from a portion of Table 3.3 in John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973), pp. 54–55.

Consequence Four: The Collapse of the Cold War Consensus Following from the first three consequences is the shattering of the values and beliefs consensus that had guided the conduct of foreign policy since the end of World War II. No longer could the American foreign policy elite depend on general public support for their foreign policy goals and actions. They were equally divided among themselves about the role of the United States in world affairs.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

More than any other event, the Vietnam War appears responsible for the ultimate destruction of the Cold War consensus and for the reassessment of America's approach to international affairs. Moreover, the public, not just policy makers, had seemingly changed its views from what it had embraced in the 1950s. In the

post-Vietnam era, the threat of communism remained real to most Americans, but they were no longer as enthusiastic about using economic and military aid or American soldiers to combat it. Furthermore, the public was much more favorable to greater accommodation with the Soviet Union and less inclined to confront it.[74]

Thus, Vietnam, coupled with the other Cold War challenges that we have discussed in this chapter, produced a foreign policy vacuum. However, the nation's readiness to accept new ideas in dealing with the rest of the world offered a unique opportunity for succeeding presidents to develop new foreign policy approaches. Thus, each new administration for the next two decades attempted to initiate a change of direction. In the following chapters, we survey the realist and idealist approaches of the Nixon and Carter administrations, the modified Cold War approach of the Reagan administration, and the pragmatic approach of the Bush administration And we evaluate the relative success of each in shaping a new direction in U.S. foreign policy for the remaining Cold War years.

NOTES

1. Lincoln P. Bloomfield, *In Search of American Foreign Policy: The Humane Use of Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

2. J. William Fulbright, *The Arrogance of Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), p. 77. His conclusion on American policy choice in this dilemma is at p. 78.

3. See the Rusk-McNamara Report to President Kennedy in Neil Sheehan, Hedrick Smith, E. W. Kenworthy, and Fox Butterfield, *The Pentagon Papers as Published by the New York Times* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 150, for a statement of American objectives in Southeast Asia.

4. Barry M. Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan, *Force Without War* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1978), p. 12. The examples are at p. 13. Emphasis in original.

5. *Ibid.,* p. 517. Their skepticism over the long term is at p. 532.

6. The use-of-force data for mid-1975 through late 1984 were taken from Philip D. Zelkow, "The United States and the Use of Force: A Historical Summary," in George K. Osborn, Asa A. Clark IV, Daniel J. Kaufman, and Douglas E. Lute, eds., *Democracy, Strategy, and Vietnam* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1987), pp. 34–36; the data for 1985–1988 were generously

supplied by James Meernik of the University of North Texas from his research on this topic.

7. As Ernest May points out, however, American policy makers have often used historical analogies inappropriately by preparing for the last war. See *"Lessons" of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), especially the discussion of the Korean War and Truman's use of the 1930s as the analogue for U.S. policy, pp. 81–86.

8. On this "skills thinking" in the American approach to foreign policy, see Stanley Hoffmann, *Gulliver's Troubles, or the Setting of American Foreign Policy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), pp. 148–161.

9. See, for example, the discussion of polling results from the early Cold War period in Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). I am also indebted to Eugene Wittkopf for sharing some public opinion poll results with me and allowing their inclusion here. A more complete analysis of some of the public opinion data from the Cold War years discussed here is presented in Eugene R. Wittkopf and James M. McCormick, "The Cold War Consensus: