



## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Kevin J. Fuller for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in History, Political Science, and Philosophy presented on November 17, 2015.

Title: Frank and Friendly Pressure: U.S. Liberal Interventionism in the Early Cold War.

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Christopher M. Nichols

U.S. foreign policy during the period between World War II and the Vietnam War has been described as part of a “nation-building” or “liberal” grand strategy. This thesis contends that understanding U.S. efforts to influence the internal affairs of sovereign states through the spread of liberal values and institutions during this period as reflecting a grand strategy of containment shaped by a liberal interventionist strategic culture is a more useful framework of interpretation. Study of documentary evidence of U.S. State Department policy formulation on post-World War II Italy (1945-1948), post-French Indochina War South Vietnam (1954-1955), and Latin American neighbors Cuba and Venezuela (1958-1959) provides critical insights to support this claim.

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Frank and Friendly Pressure: U.S. Liberal Interventionism in the Early Cold War

by  
Kevin J. Fuller

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APPROVED:

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Major Professor, representing History

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Director of the Interdisciplinary Studies Program

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Dean of the Graduate School

I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Kevin J. Fuller, Author

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## Introduction

As the Geneva Conference of 1954 wore on, it became increasingly clear that two Vietnams would emerge from the aftermath of the long, bloody French Indochina War. One, under Ho Chi Minh, would align with the communist East, while the other, ruled by Emperor Bao Dai, would remain a client of the capitalist, democratic West. Each side hoped eventually to unify the country under its own system. As it did in many parts of the world during the period following the Second World War, the United States became the Bao Dai government's primary patron and the guarantor of South Vietnamese security in an effort to establish a liberal democracy and prevent the spread of communism. In the face of the highly organized and disciplined Viet Minh in the north, Bao Dai's government seemed to have little chance of rallying the people of Vietnam to the anticommunist cause.

Frustrated with this situation, a senior U.S. diplomat in Saigon named Robert McClintock believed he had a solution. What the South Vietnamese needed, McClintock thought, might be greater political autonomy, rather than less. In a conversation with French General Paul Ely in June 1954, McClintock stated his conviction that

both French and we had been much too nice to our Vietnamese clients and if they were to be made independent they should be made to act like independent people. The time had come to sever the umbilical cord and to make the baby grow up. I thought we should have to put frank and friendly pressure on [the] Vietnamese to pull themselves together if there was going to be a government on this side comparable to that on the other side.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> McClintock to State Department, June 15, 1954, U.S. Department of State,



This opinion, expressed during the Geneva Conference that would ultimately result in the French exit from Southeast Asia, bluntly encapsulated the problems that the U.S. government would face regarding South Vietnam for the next two decades: determining not only how best to aid the new nation-state, but also when to cut the umbilical cord and how to apply the frank and friendly pressure that would force the South Vietnamese government to stand on its own against the communist threat. This problem, and the mindset that McClintock represented in framing it as he did, was emblematic of a liberal interventionist strategic culture that had a profound impact on U.S. engagement with the postwar world.

In their approach to the global problems of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, U.S. officials embraced the ballot and the market as pillars of international liberalism. Convergences and divergences of the liberal interventionist strategic culture and the containment grand strategy centered on the internal political and economic issues faced by the client states that American leaders attempted to guide. In particular, efforts to influence the electoral processes of clients played a major role in U.S. liberal interventionism. Along with this, identification and support of the “right leader” to bring about the necessary changes and developments in client states were crucial. Importantly, these interactions primarily occurred on a bilateral basis, despite the proliferation of international organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization of American States during this period. The frank and friendly pressure of liberal interventionism was exerted by the United States upon its client states through diplomatic mechanisms meant to achieve political and economic ends.

Textual analysis of primary source documents is the most useful methodology for evaluating the liberal interventionist strategic culture in action. The records of the federal agency directly responsible for conducting the country's foreign affairs, the U.S. State Department, are crucial to this study. The department's running compendium of official policy documents, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, provides unparalleled insight into its inner workings. In it are thousands of diplomatic cables of particular utility between Washington and embassies in client states around the world. Access to primary source documents and language barriers limit the scope of this study to the documentary record left by American policymakers. Although access to distant archives and foreign language materials would enrich the analysis, these limitations are helpful in providing focus. The resources available more than allow for thorough examination of the prevailing strategic culture in U.S. foreign policymaking circles during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations from 1945 to 1961, as demonstrated by the thoughts and actions of responsible officials of the U.S. State Department.

Interpreting the record of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century policymaking, scholars have sought to answer broad questions about the efforts of the United States to support imperiled new governments during the early Cold War in terms of grand strategy. According to G. John Ikenberry, "The American promotion of democracy abroad in the broadest sense, particularly as it has been pursued after World War II, reflects a pragmatic, evolving, and sophisticated understanding of how to create a stable international political order and a congenial security environment: what might be

called an American ‘liberal’ grand strategy.”<sup>2</sup> Ikenberry describes this liberal grand strategy as operating in parallel with the more widely recognized Cold War grand strategy of containment. Jeremi Suri goes even further in asserting, across U.S. history, “Nation-building is the American grand strategy.”<sup>3</sup> To understand the impulse among U.S. policymakers to seek peace through the establishment of an international order of like-minded liberal governments as a grand strategy in this way is deeply problematic. During the period between World War II and the Vietnam War, a strategic culture of liberal interventionism combined with the containment grand strategy significantly to influence U.S. engagement with the world. This understanding replaces notions of a “nation-building” or “liberal” grand strategy.

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<sup>2</sup> G. John Ikenberry, “America’s Liberal Grand Strategy: Democracy and National Security in the Post-war Era,” ed. Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi, *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 103.

<sup>3</sup> Jeremi Suri, *Liberty’s Surest Guardian: American Nation-Building from the Founders to Obama* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 8.

## Intellectual Framework

To interpret the early enactment of the Cold War's containment grand strategy as it developed within a strategic cultural context, a deep understanding of these concepts must first be explicated. This will clearly illuminate the shortcomings of previous scholarship. Once grand strategy and strategic culture are understood independently, their relationship to each other will then be analyzed. With these ideas integrated, a final framework discussion will lay out the core lens of interpretation for this study's historical episodes, termed "the liberal interventionist strategic culture."

### Grand Strategy

Charles N. Edel, in keeping with what might be called the Yale school of strategic thought, defines grand strategy as "a comprehensive and integrated plan of action, based on the calculated relationship of means to large ends.... For a nation, it involves not only defining long-term objectives, but also integrating the military, diplomatic, economic, political, and moral resources of a nation to accomplish its goals."<sup>4</sup> Taking this definition into account, Suri's assertion that nation building was the U.S. grand strategy across many presidential administrations, including those of Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower during the early Cold War period, becomes implausible. There is scant evidence that the United States sustained an extended, global campaign of nation building as an instrument of a decades- or centuries-long grand strategy aimed at achieving democratic peace. In fact, there is

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<sup>4</sup> Charles N. Edel, *Nation Builder: John Quincy Adams and the Grand Strategy of the Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 5.

abundant evidence to the contrary, such as the cases of Latin America throughout much of the of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Iran during the reign of Reza Pahlavi, South Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem, sub-Saharan Africa during the 1960s, and others. The idea of a nation building grand strategy is not entirely satisfactory in understanding the history of U.S. foreign policy.

John Lewis Gaddis reflects the broad consensus of scholars of the Cold War in identifying U.S. grand strategy during this period as centered on the concept of containment of the spread of communism generally, and the influence of the Soviet Union specifically. For him, the purpose of containment was “to prevent the Soviet Union from using the power and position it won as a result of [World War II] to reshape the postwar international order.”<sup>5</sup> Survival in the face of a perceived existential threat constituted by Soviet geographic and ideological expansionism provided the touchstone for defining U.S. national interest during the early Cold War. To counter this threat, the grand strategy of containment was formulated, its most prominent early articulation coming from the American diplomat George Kennan.

In his famous “long telegram” from Moscow in 1946, Kennan described the Soviet government as being impervious to the logic of reason, but highly sensitive to the logic of force. “For this reason it can easily withdraw – and usually does – when strong resistance is encountered at any point. Thus, if the adversary has sufficient

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<sup>5</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 4.

force and makes clear his readiness to use it, he rarely has to do so.”<sup>6</sup> The United States could thus wield its political, economic, and military power to check Soviet aggression without starting a war between the emerging superpowers. Kennan typified the realist school of international relations among mid-20<sup>th</sup> century American policymakers. The realist view, that international politics is inextricably centered upon competition among states in pursuit of their interests, rejected the notion of a liberal grand strategy. Such a strategy’s aim, peace in a world of democracies, was a fairy tale. Containing communism was the essential grand strategic goal of the United States because this would secure a vital strategic interest. Striving for the type of liberal international order of like-minded states described by Ikenberry was an important aspect of this grand strategy. It was not, however, its own grand strategy, but rather a reflection of the prevailing strategic culture that characterized contemporary U.S. policymakers.

### **Strategic Culture**

A supplemental understanding of the concept of strategic culture is more useful than grand strategy on its own in explaining U.S. policy during the early Cold War period because it allows for evaluation of policymakers’ preferences and biases. Jack Snyder coined the term in the 1970s, providing the original definition: “the body of attitudes and beliefs that guides and circumscribes thought on strategic questions, influences the way strategic issues are formulated, and sets the

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<sup>6</sup> George F. Kennan, “Attaché George F. Kennan Critiques Soviet Foreign Policy in His ‘Long Telegram,’ 1946,” ed. Dennis Merrill and Thomas G. Paterson, *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations, Volume II: Since 1914*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Wadsworth, 2010), 194.

vocabulary and perceptual parameters of strategic debate.”<sup>7</sup> As a starting point, this definition of strategic culture provides a convenient understanding of the concept as an indicator of a common perspective from which problems were approached.

Colin S. Gray places great emphasis on distinguishing culture from behavior, and centers his analysis on culture’s role in influencing the use of force. He defines strategic behavior as “behavior relevant to the threat or use of force for political purposes.”<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, “Culture...comprises the persisting (though not eternal) socially transmitted ideas, attitudes, traditions, habits of mind, and preferred methods of operation that are more or less specific to a particular geographically based security community that has had a necessarily unique historical experience.”<sup>9</sup> Given these definitions, it can then be said that a certain strategic culture characterized the U.S. national security policy community of the early Cold War period. This culture shaped the behavior of decision-makers within that community. Gray’s idea of strategic behavior can also usefully be extended to other actions not closely related to force, particularly the employment of other features of national power, including economic and political clout.

An intimate and intricate bond exists between strategic culture and the decisions made by those in positions of responsibility within a security community, argues Gray. “Strategic culture should be approached both as a shaping context for

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China’s Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press), 156.

<sup>8</sup> Colin S. Gray, “Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (January 1999), 50.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

behavior and itself as a constituent of that behavior.”<sup>10</sup> It “can be conceived as a context out there that surrounds, and gives meaning to, strategic behavior, as the total warp and woof of matters strategic that are thoroughly woven together, or as both.”<sup>11</sup> According to Gray, “Everything a security community does, if not a manifestation of strategic culture, is at least an example of behavior effected by culturally shaped, or encultured, people, organizations, procedures, and weapons.”<sup>12</sup> The shaping influence of strategic culture is often subtle, but virtually ubiquitous, in this formulation.

Two basic principles characterize the theory of strategic culture for Gray. This theory hypothesizes “that different security communities and subcommunities (1) tend to exhibit in their strategic thought *and behavior* patterns that could be collectively termed cultural, and that (2) strategic culture finds expression in distinctively patterned styles of behavior.”<sup>13</sup> The thematic recurrence of nation building and the promotion of democracy and liberal institutions in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy may arguably be ascribed to a feature of American strategic culture more plausibly than to a notion of a consistent grand strategy. This strategic culture, in turn, can be usefully identified as one of “liberal interventionism,” a concept that will require further definition.

Political scientist Joshua Muravchik’s view of American thinking on foreign policy has important insight for defining an early Cold War U.S. strategic culture. Muravchik identifies a shift during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century from a traditional stance

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 53.



on the role of the United States in the world traceable to George Washington's Farewell Address, which he calls Washingtonian, to a new perspective he names Wilsonian, after Woodrow Wilson. For Muravchik, Wilsonians share with Washingtonians "the premise that the world is full of conflict. But President Wilson learned from the bitter experience of World War I how difficult it is to keep America aloof from foreign broils. His solution was that America try to shape and guard the peace, keeping itself safe by making the world a safer place."<sup>14</sup> Muravchik argues that Wilson recognized the 20<sup>th</sup> century world as increasingly dangerous to the United States, and saw the global spread of liberal values and institutions as critical in reversing a potentially catastrophic trend. Furthermore, according to Muravchik, "Wilsonians argue that self-defense is completely harmonious with sound morality. They tend toward Jefferson's view that 'with nations as with individuals our interest soundly calculated will ever be inseparable from our moral duties.'"<sup>15</sup> The zenith of the Wilsonian approach for the conduct of U.S. foreign policy came during the early Cold War period, when the United States "embarked on the most Wilsonian of policies" in countering the perceived global Soviet threat.<sup>16</sup> Widespread belief in Wilsonian international liberalism marked the culmination of an important shift in American strategic culture that had a tremendous impact on foreign policy during the years following the Second World War.

Promotion of democracy and liberal institutions during the early Cold War can most usefully be viewed as an aspect of the contemporary U.S. strategic culture.

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<sup>14</sup> Joshua Muravchik, *The Imperative of American Leadership* (Washington, D.C.: The AEI Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 23.

This helps not only to explain its importance for this period, as seen in Ikenberry's work, but also the pervasiveness throughout American history noted by Suri. The German-American scholar, diplomat, and strategist Henry Kissinger once observed, "The convictions that leaders have formed before reaching high office are the intellectual capital they will consume as long as they continue in office."<sup>17</sup> These convictions are related to the psychological concept of a schema in individuals.<sup>18</sup> They also relate importantly to the notion of a "security imaginary" articulated by Jutta Weldes. This is "a structure of well-established meanings and social relations out of which representations of the world of international relations are created."<sup>19</sup> To the extent that the convictions of which Kissinger spoke were shared widely within the U.S. national security decision-making community, they contributed to a strategic culture as described by Gray. Liberal interventionism, as manifested in U.S. nation building and democracy promotion efforts, was an important aspect of American strategic culture during the early years of the Cold War.

### **Strategic Culture's Relationship to Grand Strategy**

In order to understand the relationship between containment and liberal interventionism, the ideas of grand strategy and strategic culture must be made to cohere. Hal Brands, who received his graduate training at Yale, defines grand strategy as "the highest form of statecraft." It is "the intellectual architecture that

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in John Lewis Gaddis, "What is Grand Strategy?" Karl von der Heyden Distinguished Lecture given at Duke University, February 26, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> For more on this concept, see Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 26.

<sup>19</sup> Jutta Weldes, *Constructing the National Interest: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 10.

lends structure to foreign policy; it is the logic that helps states navigate a complex and dangerous world.”<sup>20</sup> Grand strategy encompasses the military, diplomatic, political, and economic aspects of national policy. Drawing from military theorist Basil Liddell Hart, according to Brands, “The essential purpose of grand strategy was to achieve equilibrium between means and ends.”<sup>21</sup> This is consistent with the rest of Brands’s generation of the Yale school of grand strategic thought, as exemplified by Charles Edel and Jeremi Suri. Their understanding reflects in many ways that of their teachers, John Lewis Gaddis and Paul Kennedy, the latter of whom describes grand strategy as the integration of political, economic, and military aims in order to preserve long-term interests.<sup>22</sup>

Brands argues further that grand strategy “is a purposeful and coherent set of ideas about what a nation seeks to accomplish in the world, and how it should go about doing so.”<sup>23</sup> This muddles the issue somewhat conceptually. Grand strategy should be thought of as the definition and explication of the coherent ideas of which Brands speaks in order to accomplish goals based on them. The basis of the ideas and their coherency, on the other hand, derives from the strategic culture in which they are formulated. Through this interpretive lens, strategic culture focuses upon theoretical understanding of a security community, while grand strategy centers

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<sup>20</sup> Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Kennedy, *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), ix.

<sup>23</sup> Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?*, 3.

upon putting theory into practice. Strategic culture constitutes the milieu in which grand strategy is created and evolves.

This dovetails with Bradley S. Klein's somewhat narrower view of the concept of strategic culture. To him, "Strategic culture refers to the way in which a modern hegemonic state relies upon internationally deployed force."<sup>24</sup> When thought of at the level of grand strategy, strategic culture encompasses all of the means at the disposal of the state, not just military force, but also its political, diplomatic, and economic power. Thinking of grand strategy within a strategic cultural milieu also accords with the understanding of Carnes Lord, who identifies the most important influences on strategic culture: "the geopolitical setting in which a nation finds itself; its international relationships; its political culture and social structure; its military culture – military history, traditions, and education; military and security organizations and their relationship to civilian authority; and weapons and technology."<sup>25</sup> For Klein, strategic culture "is based upon the political ideologies of public discourse that help define occasions as worthy of military involvement."<sup>26</sup> Again, at the grand strategic level, this can involve other than military means of intervention. "Strategic culture has much to do with the geopolitical status of a particular country and of its relations with allies and adversaries. Thus a nation's strategic culture emerges from a web of international practices, both diplomatic and

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<sup>24</sup> Bradley S. Klein, "Hegemony and Strategic Culture: American Power Projection and Alliance Defence Politics," *Review of International Studies* Vol. 14, No. 2 (April 1988), 136.

<sup>25</sup> Carnes Lord, "American Strategic Culture," in *Legal and Moral Constraints on Low-Intensity Conflict*, ed. Alberto R. Coll, James S. Ord, Stephen A. Rose (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1995), 266.

<sup>26</sup> Klein, 136.

economic, that implicates the country abroad and that constrains the range of activities comprising the political economy of domestic society,” Klein argues.<sup>27</sup> The web of which he speaks is not woven tightly, but “embedded in a looser set of cultural relations that infuse any society and that play a constitutive role in the making of political-military strategy.”<sup>28</sup> This organic process creates the environment in which strategic priorities are set, and grand strategy is formulated to achieve those priorities.

As Klein relates, postwar American strategic culture was profoundly influenced by the fact that the United States “not only was spared the immediate horrors of the Second World War[,] but...emerged as the strongest post-war power in terms of industrial output, economic growth and ideological self-confidence.”<sup>29</sup> His next point relates importantly to the assertion that liberal interventionism characterized strategic culture during this period. “Both as a specific military strategy and as a more general cultural orientation, the United States erected a security framework for post-war economic and political reconstruction and the internationalization of liberal capital under multilateral terms.”<sup>30</sup> This was an important part of U.S. grand strategy in the early Cold War period, focused on establishing hegemony in the free world and containing the spread of communism and Soviet expansion.

Carnes Lord attempts to identify the inherent and permanent features of U.S. strategic culture. Foremost among these, he believes, is the democratic nature of its

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 140.

system of governance. Additionally, he sees the United States as “heir to powerful traditions of political liberalism – limited government and the rule of law – and of religious enthusiasm and moralism. Finally, Americans are a pragmatic people, with a tendency to seek technical solutions to isolated problems and a preoccupation with the here and now at the expense both of the past and the future.”<sup>31</sup> The religious enthusiasm and moralism of which Lord speaks reflects the broad and deep influence of what Walter Russell Mead (paralleling Muravchik) terms the Wilsonian school of American foreign policy, which existed even before Wilson’s presidency.<sup>32</sup> The pragmatism and search for technical solutions were also furthered and deepened through the leadership of Wilson and his successors, as exemplified by the creation of institutions such as the League of Nations and the United Nations, the Bretton Woods system and Marshall Plan, and nation building efforts throughout the early Cold War. Liberal interventionism also took on a certain paternalistic air that reflected the previous global hegemon, Great Britain. “Just as the ‘white man’s burden’ had imposed upon the British the obligation to bring Anglo-Saxon civilization to the backward and often barbaric ‘natives’ residing within its empire, so global leadership conferred upon the U.S. the burden of preserving and promoting freedom, democracy, and order,” according to Jutta Weldes.<sup>33</sup> The elements of the liberal interventionist strategic culture that shaped postwar grand strategy had deep roots in American and, more broadly, Western engagement with the rest of the world.

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<sup>31</sup> Lord, 265.

<sup>32</sup> Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001), 89.

<sup>33</sup> Weldes, 200.

Establishing hegemony in the free world and containing the spread of communism and Soviet influence were the key elements of American Cold War grand strategy. Democracy promotion and nation building inspired by an increasingly dominant liberal interventionist strategic culture can be seen as important tactics for accomplishing that strategy. As tactics, and not central elements of the grand strategy, they could be employed in situations to which they seemed well suited. Their use in various instances reflects leaders' understanding of, and response to, the strategic landscape with which they had to contend. In addition to confronting the Soviet Union on the plain of Europe, policymakers always had to bear in mind the consequences of their actions for U.S. influence in the developing and non-aligned worlds. The foundation of the prevailing liberal interventionist strategic culture can be most succinctly expressed in the idea that the world would be a safer place for the United States and its citizens if the rest of the world were "more like them." In making this argument, it is imperative to heed Carnes Lord's warning to be wary of determinism in strategic culture. As he explains, "Individuals and individual leadership really can play a decisive role in overcoming cultural patterns in organizations and, indeed, entire nations."<sup>34</sup> Taking this into account, it will subsequently be demonstrated that, when contrasted with Ikenberry's liberal grand strategy or Suri's nation building grand strategy, viewing nation building efforts and promotion of liberal values and institutions by the United States during the early Cold War period as reflections of an increasingly

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<sup>34</sup> Lord, 267.

prevalent liberal interventionist strategic culture is the most useful way to understand them.

### **Liberal Interventionism**

Before making a historical case for its intellectual predominance during the early Cold War, a clearer understanding of what is meant by “liberal interventionism” must be established. Policymakers in the executive branch of the U.S. federal government responsible for setting priorities and establishing commitments as the country engaged with the world did so within the context of a specific strategic culture. Strategic engagement with the world primarily took the form of ideological competition with the Soviet Union. As historian Melvyn Leffler states, “Marxism-Leninism and democratic capitalism shaped the visions of policymakers” on both sides of the Cold War.<sup>35</sup> According to historian John Lewis Gaddis, for all their differences, the United States and the Soviet Union approached the world in similar ways. “Both the United States and the Soviet Union had been born in revolution. Both embraced ideologies with global aspirations: what worked at home, their leaders assumed, would also do so for the rest of the world.”<sup>36</sup> According to a Yugoslav communist, Marxism-Leninism’s state control of the means of production and central direction of all aspects of society represented “the most rational and most intoxicating, all-embracing ideology for me and for those...who so

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<sup>35</sup> Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 8.

<sup>36</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), 7.



desired to skip over centuries of slavery and backwardness.”<sup>37</sup> Although in total disagreement on the means to accomplish it, both sides of the Cold War would have agreed that the ultimate goal was, as Vladimir Lenin put it, “the complete well-being and free all-around development of all members of society.”<sup>38</sup> As the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the world’s preeminent superpowers following the Second World War, their ideologies profoundly shaped the competition that arose. Each side believed that its own system of government and ordering of society held the promise of peace and prosperity if propagated around the globe.

Behavior on both sides of the conflict, then, was shaped by a strategic culture based on belief in principles that placed them on the right side of a progressive view of human history. Harry S. Truman, president during the formative years of the Cold War, in calling for aid to Greece and Turkey in 1947, stated that the United States promoted a way of life “distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression.”<sup>39</sup> Promotion of this way of life became a key part of the so-called Truman Doctrine, alongside containment of the spread of communism by the Soviet Union. The strategic culture that encompassed these values and the worldview of Truman and his advisers can be described as liberal interventionism. Under Truman and his successors, the United States followed a global pattern of intervening in other states in order to advance liberal

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<sup>37</sup> Milovan Djilas, quoted in John Lewis Gaddis, “Two Cold War Empires: Imposition vs. Multilateralism,” in Merrill and Paterson, 227.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Leffler, 459.

<sup>39</sup> Harry S. Truman, “The Truman Doctrine Calls for Aid to Greece and Turkey to Contain Totalitarianism, 1947,” in Merrill and Paterson, 200.

values and institutions in hopes of achieving peace and prosperity around the world. This began in Greece and Turkey in 1947. It continued around the world: in Italy in 1948; in South Vietnam following the French Indochina War; in Cuba and Venezuela at the time of the Cuban Revolution, to name but a few times and places.

The liberal interventionist aims of the United States, as described by Truman, included the promotion throughout the world of democracy, self-determination, freedom of the seas, open trade, and global economic cooperation.<sup>40</sup> Soviet Ambassador Nikolai Novikov correctly identified a widely held view among Americans that they had “the right to lead the world” following World War II.<sup>41</sup> If the United States hubristically aspired to global hegemony in the wake of the war, it was at least willing to back this aspiration financially. Along with the formation of the Bretton Woods system, U.S. liberal interventionism inspired the expenditure of billions of dollars in Europe under the Marshall Plan in order to bring about “the establishment of sound economic conditions, stable international economic relationships, and the achievement by the countries of Europe of a healthy economy independent of extraordinary outside assistance.”<sup>42</sup> This perceived right to world leadership during the early Cold War also impelled American leaders to military intervention in Korea and Vietnam, as well as support for undemocratic, but anticommunist, forces in places like Iran and Guatemala during the early 1950s. The peace and prosperity in a liberal world that these actions pursued were tied to a

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<sup>40</sup> Leffler, 47.

<sup>41</sup> Nikolai Novikov, “Soviet Ambassador Nikolai Novikov Identifies a U.S. Drive for World Supremacy, 1946,” in Merrill and Paterson, 197.

<sup>42</sup> “The Marshall Plan (Economic Cooperation Act) Provides Aid for European Reconstruction, 1948,” in Merrill and Paterson, 202.

desire on the part of the United States for stability, as well as an ideological and ethical sense of mission as a global leader. Leadership was a matter of both practicality and of principle, which were often in tension.

To assess strategic ideas about democracy promotion will require a specific definition to relate this concept to the various episodes that will make up the narrative bulk of this study. In introducing their edited volume on the subject, Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi aver,

It is easy to be cynical about motives, but men and women, and countries as well, have to have a political faith, and increasingly in the modern world that faith has come to be based upon the now self-evident truth that democracy, however defined, is not only ethically preferable but increasingly the only legitimate means by which we can manage our political affairs effectively.<sup>43</sup>

Actions abroad on the part of the U.S. government motivated by this mindset shall be referred to hereafter as democracy promotion. Therefore, democracy promotion can come in many forms. These include military assistance (in combat, training, or power projection); economic aid; alliance structures; educational exchanges; institutional support; diplomatic backing; propaganda; and many others. Theorists and practitioners of democracy promotion almost universally acknowledge that it is an incremental, evolutionary process that does not achieve results overnight. It must be tailored to the state of democratic development that the patron state evaluates the client state to have achieved. Nation building can be, but is not necessarily, conducted in support of a policy of democracy promotion, and thus deserves separate treatment.

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<sup>43</sup> Cox, Ikenberry, and Inoguchi, 2.

International relations scholar Andrea Talentino defines nation building as “the process of creating a stable, centralized, and cohesive state that represents a definable community.”<sup>44</sup> She acknowledges that this definition is imprecise and ambiguous, but reasonably argues that such is the nature of the concept. She ascribes two parallel objectives to the function of nation building toward which patron and client aim their efforts: state building and identity building.<sup>45</sup> Amitai Etzioni posits an additional leg to this in his definition of nation building: economy building.<sup>46</sup> When analyzing this final leg, it is imperative to consider not only the economic impact on the client, but also the expected benefit for the patron. Economy building by an external patron may be geared toward acquiring new markets for the patron’s industry, or more favorable trade status. Sanguine espousal of free market economics suffused the rationales behind both containment and liberal interventionism. These ideas of state, identity, and economy building are all useful to evaluate, as they are interrelated. Assessing these various aspects provides a means to categorize nation building efforts during the period of interest into those that focused more on one objective than others, whether consciously or otherwise.

Nation building by the United States during the early Cold War was a feature of democracy promotion. It occurred at times without a committed attempt immediately to bring about democracy, as in the case of U.S. actions with respect to South Vietnam in the aftermath of the French Indochina War. Episodes of

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<sup>44</sup> Andrea Talentino, “The Two Faces of Nation-Building: Developing Function and Identity,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (2004), 559.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 559.

<sup>46</sup> Amitai Etzioni, “A Self-Restrained Approach to Nation-Building by Foreign Powers,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (January 2004), 2.

democracy promotion and nation building, along with deliberate choices in some cases not to engage in the same, will be assessed in order to elucidate the extent to which a liberal interventionist strategic culture predominated among U.S. policymakers during the early Cold War period.

The philosophical basis for discussions about the imperative of democracy promotion and nation building derives from the concepts of democratic peace theory. This theory has its roots in the work of Immanuel Kant. Its basic precept is along lines described by recent proponent Michael Doyle: “Liberal states... founded on such principles as equality before the law, free speech and other civil liberties, private property, and elected representation are fundamentally against war. When the citizens who bear the burdens of war elect their governments, wars become impossible.”<sup>47</sup> This claim is widely disputed on philosophical and historical grounds by realists, and Marxists as well. Empirical evidence appears to support democratic peace theory to an extent, but is limited due to the relatively brief global prevalence of democracy, which has primarily been among states enjoying relative prosperity.<sup>48</sup> Although only assigned its name fairly recently, democratic peace theory is by no means a new idea. It was a mainstream conviction for liberal interventionists during the early Cold War, and a basic assumption underlying much of their strategic thought. Assessing the extent to which decision-makers subscribed to what would have been characterized later as democratic peace theory is critical in determining the prevalence of liberal interventionism as an influencer of national policy.

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Doyle, “Peace, Liberty, and Democracy: Realists and Liberals Contest a Legacy,” in Cox, Ikenberry, and Inoguchi, 22.

<sup>48</sup> Randall L. Schweller, “US Democracy Promotion: Realist Reflections,” in Cox, Ikenberry, and Inoguchi, 52.

The documentary record of distinct episodes of U.S. foreign relations during the early Cold War must provide evidence of a liberal interventionist strategic culture interacting dynamically with the containment grand strategy for this study to hold weight. For the purposes of this study, the early Cold War period is understood as bounded in time by the end of the Second World War and the large-scale escalation of U.S. involvement in Vietnam under John F. Kennedy and his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson. In order to illustrate the prevailing strategic culture in a meaningful way, the episodes assessed must span this time period. Importantly, this period includes the administrations of two presidents, Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower, of opposing political parties. Liberal interventionist strategic culture was not inherently Republican or Democratic: it was bipartisan. To shed light on the degree to which liberal interventionism shaped thinking about national policy at its most basic level, the episodes considered must also be global in scope, rather than simply focusing on direct interactions among the great powers.

Analysis of U.S. involvement in the governmental transitions of Italy in the aftermath of World War II, and of South Vietnam following the French Indochina War, help to fulfill these criteria. Both of these cases are examples of American aid to a new government to promote security and stability motivated at least as much by fear of the spread of communism as desire to see that government succeed. In Italy, liberal interventionism played a vital role in aiding the formation and solidification of an enduring republic by 1948. The imperative to contain communism in South Vietnam, however, led to tension between self-determination and anticommunism that severely strained the liberal interventionist strategic culture between 1954 and

1955. The American ideas about elections and governance being promoted proved much more readily adaptable to a developed European country than they did to a newly independent colony with an agrarian economy in a part of the world that U.S. policymakers could hardly have regarded as more foreign.

These episodes demonstrate American activities in regions of the world in which the United States had little previous involvement in the internal government affairs of other sovereign states. Examination of liberal interventionism in Latin America, a region with a long history of U.S. imposition, provides increased understanding of this phenomenon. The additional understanding provided about how the U.S. role in the internal politics of the region changed (rather than developed for the first time, as in Europe and Southeast Asia) justifies assessing relations with multiple countries. The approach of the Eisenhower administration to regime changes in Cuba and Venezuela during an overlapping interval from 1958 to 1959 demonstrates how the liberal interventionist mindset led the administration effectively to scale back U.S. interference in Latin American politics. Liberal interventionism alongside containment under Truman and Eisenhower constituted a global approach to a challenge on a scale unprecedented in the history of the United States.

Together, these episodes that took place around the world, across over a decade of history and two presidential administrations, provide a clear and important picture of U.S. liberal interventionism and its relationship with the containment grand strategy. They form a narrative of a consistent cultural preference by American policymakers to advance liberal values and institutions

globally, and an effort to accord this predilection with the containment grand strategy. At times, these priorities clashed as a result of tension between the liberal interventionist values of self-determination and anticommunism. Attempts to resolve these conflicts centered on identifying and throwing U.S. support behind leaders in client states that opposed communism, and also espoused American democratic ideals. Such leaders could not always be found. When they were not, despite great effort and expense, liberal interventionism had little prospect for success from the very outset of U.S. involvement. Investigation of the Truman administration's insertion into Italian politics in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War provides the foundation to elaborate these developments, and the starting point for this narrative.



## Italy

Following the overthrow of Benito Mussolini's fascist regime and many devastating months of fighting and German occupation on the peninsula, the nation of Italy lay in a political, economic, and social shambles. The liberal interventionist strategic culture that emerged alongside the U.S. grand strategy of containment provided the foundation for the rebirth of Italy after fascism as a democratic member of an integrated European community. American support for the Christian Democratic government of Italy during the pivotal months leading up to national elections in April 1948 ensured that the Communist Party would not achieve a position of power in the new republic. The effort by the United States to shape the democratic future of Italy began even before the Second World War was over. Initially, as a result of a deal engineered by the United States and Great Britain, Marshal Pietro Badoglio, the leader of Mussolini's army, succeeded *Il Duce*. This allowed the Italian army to be turned quickly against its former German allies in support of the Allied war effort. Once the Germans were driven from the peninsula, calls for elections began in earnest.

A consensus exists in the historiography of U.S. involvement in Italy in the late 1940s that the period signaled a critical change in the new superpower's approach to the world at large. James E. Miller calls the American intervention in the 1948 Italian elections "a watershed in the development of U.S. foreign policy."<sup>49</sup> In his history of the State Department's cooperation with the American labor

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<sup>49</sup> James E. Miller, "Taking Off the Gloves: The United States and the Italian Elections of 1948" *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 7 (Winter 1983), 35.

movement to sway Italy toward liberalism, Ronald L. Filippelli calls this episode the United States's first encounter with "the responsibilities and complexities of being a great power."<sup>50</sup> With this new role came uncertainty.

Uncertainty, in turn, begat fear. U.S. leaders feared, writes Miller, that a communist victory "would signal the collapse of democracy in Europe."<sup>51</sup> Filippelli agrees, saying, "It is clear that American policymakers feared that a left government friendly to the Soviet Union might emerge from the social, political, and economic havoc wreaked by fascism and war."<sup>52</sup> As an outgrowth of this fear, Kaeten Mistry argues that the United States engaged in what he calls "political warfare" on behalf of the pro-democracy forces in Italy during the period leading up to the national elections in April 1948. This political warfare involved instruments "not traditionally associated with peacetime – psychological warfare, propaganda, covert action – [that] were now essential tools in the post-war struggle for Europe."<sup>53</sup> Uncertainty in the United States's newfound responsibility and fear of Soviet expansion into Europe deeply influenced the liberal interventionist strategic culture as the containment grand strategy was formulated and initially put into action.

The political turmoil left in Mussolini's wake deeply concerned the United States. "Italy was divided between an energetic and militant Communist Party and a

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<sup>50</sup> Ronald L. Filippelli, *American Labor and Postwar Italy, 1943-1953* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 1.

<sup>51</sup> Miller, 36.

<sup>52</sup> Filippelli, 3.

<sup>53</sup> Kaeten Mistry, *The United States, Italy, and the Origins of Cold War: Waging Political Warfare, 1945-1950* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 96.

somewhat obscurantist Christian right,” writes Walter Russell Mead.<sup>54</sup> Bolstering the Christian Democratic Party ahead of general elections ultimately held in June 1946 was a top U.S. priority in the region. The antifascist interim leaders, eager to prove their country’s dedication to the Allied cause and to secure vital aid for recovery, sought to contribute to the fight in any way they could. Even if it proved of negligible military value, Under Secretary of State Joseph C. Grew believed allowing the Italians to fight against Japan in the Far East “would contribute to the prestige of the Italian Government during this difficult period and to the support of the moderate elements in it.”<sup>55</sup> Legitimizing antifascists who sought to create a permanent capitalist democratic government in Italy became a matter of policy, reflecting the early influence of liberal interventionism. This supported a developing view that the spread of communism into Europe constituted a grave threat to U.S. security. The Soviet Union and its ideology could not be allowed to achieve regional hegemony; this came to be perceived a vital strategic imperative.

Alexander C. Kirk, serving as ambassador to the transitional governments of Ivanoe Bonomi, Ferruccio Parri, and Alcide de Gasperi, was the key U.S. political operative on the ground in Italy. A thirty-year veteran of the diplomatic corps and independently wealthy *bon vivant*, Kirk was extremely able and a leading American expert on Italian affairs. King Victor Emmanuel III had promised a referendum on the future form of government following the fall of Mussolini. Acting as Secretary of State in the absence of Edward Stettinius, Joseph Grew instructed Kirk that the

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<sup>54</sup> Mead, 164.

<sup>55</sup> Grew to Winant, May 9, 1945, *FRUS* 1945, Vol. IV (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1968), 958.

policy of the United States was to entrust “the Italian Government with an increasing control over its own domestic affairs.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore, insisting on a referendum rather than the more popular option, a constituent assembly along the lines of the U.S. constitutional convention, was unwise. The State Department, using language from the Moscow Declaration on Italy of 1943, related its position to the British embassy in Washington thus: “The United States Government considers it a solemn obligation to see that the Italian people are given a truly free and untrammelled choice of their permanent form of government.”<sup>57</sup> Yet the U.S. government still felt inclined to voice its opinion “that reconstruction of local government should logically precede the establishment of the permanent national government of Italy.”<sup>58</sup> The United States was very keen to ensure Italy would be democratic, and freely offered unsolicited advice toward this end, an early example of the frank and friendly pressure of liberal interventionism.

This was tempered somewhat by British influence. Based on the advice of George VI’s government, according to Grew in a cable to Kirk, the State Department did “not contemplate any formal step in advising and suggesting to the Italian Government the adoption of a program of regional decentralization but instead will make its studies regarding local government in Italy available to the Italian Government on an informal basis.”<sup>59</sup> Grew included documents for Kirk to forward to the Italians for this purpose. Yet Under Secretary (and later Secretary) of State Dean Acheson, a future staunch Cold Warrior, felt that the Italians must be pushed

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<sup>56</sup> Grew to Kirk, May 1, 1945, *FRUS* 1945, Vol. IV, 970.

<sup>57</sup> State to British Embassy, May 26, 1945, *FRUS* 1945, Vol. IV, 973.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 974.

<sup>59</sup> Grew to Kirk, July 31, 1945, *FRUS* 1945, Vol. IV, 981.

along by September 1945. Acting for the secretary, Acheson directed Kirk to call on the Italian prime minister, Ferruccio Parri, to relate that the U.S. government was “unimpressed by arguments cited for postponement of elections,” and to reiterate the American insistence that “local elections demonstrating workable electoral machinery should precede [the] call for national elections and should begin immediately.”<sup>60</sup> Apparently, the British admonition to stay out of it did not carry sufficient weight to counter the liberal interventionist predisposition.

Economic aid was seen as vital to ensuring the Italian political stability necessary to prevent a communist electoral victory, nearly three years before the initiation of the Marshall Plan. Provision of aid to Italy importantly reflected the predominant view that it was a “mature” state. Electoral guidance notwithstanding, American leaders saw the Italians as a previously democratic society that had been led down the wrong path by Mussolini as a result of the economic upheaval of the preceding decades. Grew wrote to Truman shortly before the Potsdam Conference of July 1945:

In accordance with your and President Roosevelt’s directives with regard to Italy, our objective is to strengthen Italy economically and politically so that the truly democratic elements of the country can withstand the forces that threaten to sweep them into a new totalitarianism. Italian sympathies naturally and traditionally lie with the Western democracies, and, with proper support from us, Italy would tend to become a factor for stability in Europe. The time is now ripe when we should initiate action to raise Italian morale, make a stable representative government possible, and permit Italy to become a responsible participant in international affairs.<sup>61</sup>

Italy, unlike other nations in which the United States would later attempt to sow the seeds of democracy, was seen as fully developed and ready for popular rule.

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<sup>60</sup> Acheson to Kirk, September 6, 1945, *FRUS* 1945, Vol. IV, 987.

<sup>61</sup> Grew to Truman, June 30, 1945, *FRUS* 1945, Vol. IV, 1009-1010.

This readiness notwithstanding, ensuring hungry mouths were fed was tremendously important in cultivating Italy's reincarnated democracy. In a published letter to the Chairman of the War Production Board, the War Food Administrator, the Solid Fuels Administrator for War, and the Chairman of the Foreign Shipments Committee, Truman stated to these leaders, "A chaotic and hungry Europe is not fertile ground in which stable, democratic and friendly governments can be reared."<sup>62</sup> For this reason, it was U.S. policy to supply recovering northwestern European countries in peacetime, accepting "this responsibility as far as it is possible to do."<sup>63</sup> Referencing this letter, Italian Ambassador to the United States Alberto Tarchiani stated that his country was in a similar situation. He wrote to Stettinius's special assistant in May 1945 that he feared "the political consequences that may arise also in Italy out of the present disruptive economic conditions."<sup>64</sup> The U.S. response was somewhat delayed, and significantly less generous than Tarchiani hoped.

After much debate, in October 1946 the first significant cash flow from the United States to the Italian government was authorized. Secretary of State James F. Byrnes informed the *chargé d'affaires* in Italy, by way of the ambassador in Paris, where he was attending peace treaty negotiations, that a \$50 million reimbursement would be made for lire that had been furnished to the occupying U.S. Army as a first measure of economic aid. Byrnes wrote, "The American people are

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<sup>62</sup> Truman letter, May 22, 1945, in Leland M. Goodrich and Marie J. Carroll, eds., *Documents on American Foreign Relations*, Vol. VII (Boston, MA: World Peace Foundation, 1948), 922.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 923.

<sup>64</sup> Tarchiani to William Phillips, May 28, 1945, *FRUS* 1945, Vol. IV, 1257.

happy to recognize the part that the Italian people have taken in liberating their country from the yoke of Fascist tyranny and in reestablishing a democratic government worthy of their finest traditions.”<sup>65</sup> Although willing to help, at this juncture the Truman administration largely expected Italy to stand on its own feet.

A visit to the United States in early 1947 by De Gasperi proved an important opportunity to discuss forthcoming assistance to the prime minister’s nascent republic. The State Department’s Director of the Office of European Affairs John D. Hickerson anticipated in a memorandum to Secretary Byrnes just before the visit that a pending Export-Import Bank loan might come up during discussions. According to Hickerson, the subject “has become a barometer of American confidence in Italy.... De Gasperi feels that the loan has now acquired an importance far beyond its financial significance, and is therefore the greatest single factor in what we do for Italy.”<sup>66</sup> While in Washington, De Gasperi did bring up the pending loan, as well as requests for a larger wheat allocation by the United States for Italy, Liberty ships to rebuild his country’s merchant fleet, and more coal shipments to support industrial growth. The prime minister “said it was a source of great encouragement to the Italian people to see the friendly attitude displayed by the American Government toward Italy. He said he hoped his visit would result in assistance to Italy as that country was now in the throes of an economic as well as a

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<sup>65</sup> Caffery for Byrnes to Key, October 10, 1946, *FRUS* 1946, Vol. V (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1969), 937.

<sup>66</sup> Hickerson to Byrnes, January 6, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 837.

political crisis.”<sup>67</sup> Byrnes assured De Gasperi that cash for U.S. Army wartime purchases in Italy would be forthcoming and that additional aid would be provided as possible. The \$100 million loan from the Export-Import Bank was approved just days later.

De Gasperi’s visit to Washington included a consultation with Truman himself. The president “reaffirmed the American Government’s sympathy and full faith in Italy’s ability to rehabilitate herself.” Truman continued that it was “because of its faith in Italy that America has extended aid in the past and will do what it can in this present critical situation of the Italian people.”<sup>68</sup> The effort to shore up the Italian leader and his government appeared to work. The new ambassador to Rome, James Clement Dunn, reported that the De Gasperi government won a vote of confidence from the Constituent Assembly in early March.<sup>69</sup> De Gasperi proved himself a leader of national stature with the democratic and anticommunist credentials worthy of full U.S. backing. Dunn, another career diplomat assigned to the highly sensitive Rome post, had previously served as chief adviser to former Secretary of State Cordell Hull. Reporting on his appointment, *The New York Times* portrayed him as unafraid of controversy, having supported non-intervention in the Spanish Civil War, a position that alienated him in the liberal Franklin D. Roosevelt

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<sup>67</sup> Memorandum of conversation with Byrnes and De Gasperi, January 6, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 838.

<sup>68</sup> Memo of conversation of Truman with De Gasperi, January 7, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 850.

<sup>69</sup> Dunn to Marshall, March 4, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 870.



administration.<sup>70</sup> Dunn would not prove similarly deterred from interposition in Italian affairs.

The unequivocal expressions of support from the Truman administration drew further requests from the Italians. As Congress considered a \$350 million international relief bill, Tarchiani wrote to Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs William L. Clayton that he understood State was attempting to figure out how much each country to be assisted should receive. Tarchiani sought to bring to Clayton's attention a United Nations Special Technical Committee report that estimated Italy's needs as \$106.9 million, and forwarded to Clayton a study his embassy had drawn up on the report.<sup>71</sup> Requests came from Rome as well. In response, Acting Secretary of State Dean Acheson suggested to Dunn that he point "out to De Gasperi that although [the] amount of funds which US can allocate to Italy from \$350 million may be substantially below \$200 million we are hopeful that it will be sufficient to permit procurement of such part of essential supplies as are available in US which Italy itself cannot finance from other resources." Acheson recommended that other sources of money be sought.<sup>72</sup> Notably, there was no reproach; there simply was not sufficient money at this juncture to go around for all the states the liberal interventionists wished to support.

In a cable to Dunn in May 1947, recently appointed Secretary of State George C. Marshall expressed deep concern about the deterioration of political and economic conditions in Italy that was strengthening the extreme left and weakening

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<sup>70</sup> "James Dunn Named Our Envoy to Italy," *The New York Times*, July 23, 1946.

<sup>71</sup> Tarchiani to Clayton, March 8, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 874.

<sup>72</sup> Acheson to Dunn, March 15, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 874.

the center. He sought Dunn's opinion of these developments, and to know whether the situation might improve if De Gasperi stepped down or attempted to form a government without the extreme left "in hope [of] improving [the] Christian Democrat's chances in October elections." Marshall also asked Dunn for his take on what, if any, political and economic steps the Truman administration "should and could take towards strengthening democratic, pro-US forces."<sup>73</sup>

In response, Dunn reported that lack of confidence in the coalition government indeed made its prospects bleak. He thought governing without the Italian Communist Party was possible, and that the United States should provide direct relief to the Italian people. Food and coal, however, were "of real importance as hunger and unemployment are fertile soil for Communism."<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, an expression of support by Marshall or Truman in the press could be most helpful. They should state "that the US has deep and friendly interest in the growth of real democracy in Italy; that we have been happy to assist in the reestablishment of economic stability and will be happy to continue to lend our support to those elements here who have deep and abiding faith in the democratic processes and the preservation of the freedom and liberty of the Italian people." The United States stood by to assist Italy to develop an economy based on individual rights and liberties, and was confident that the people of Italy would not choose totalitarianism and thus "break down the close ties that bind together the Italian and American

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<sup>73</sup> Marshall to Dunn, May 1, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 889.

<sup>74</sup> Dunn to Marshall, May 3, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 890.

people.”<sup>75</sup> This show of support also contained a veiled threat: if Italy were to turn to communism, U.S. aid would quickly end.

This sort of frank and friendly pressure emerged again in a conversation Dunn had with De Gasperi just days later. When De Gasperi spoke of possible assistance, Dunn replied that the United States was “deeply interested” in helping Italy. First, however, “it was necessary for us to see some effective measures taken by the Italians themselves to put their house in order before we could give consideration to aid for Italy other than direct relief.” The Italians had to take the initiative in recovering from the devastation of years of fascism and war. As Dunn explained to De Gasperi, “it was quite impossible for the US to take the entire burden of assisting Italy to recovery and that it was necessary for the Italians to apply themselves to the solution of their own problems and to take the steps necessary to improve the situation before we convince our people and Congress that we could render effective aid here.”<sup>76</sup> Italy could not rely wholly on the United States to reestablish itself as a financially stable liberal democracy.

In Washington, Ambassador Tarchiani persisted in seeking guarantees by the Truman administration for the support of his country. Meeting with State Department official H. Freeman Matthews, the ambassador read aloud part of a message he received from De Gasperi. In it, the prime minister asked directly whether he could rely on moral and financial support from the United States. Given the state of crisis prevailing in Rome, Tarchiani thought obtaining an expression of support was urgent. Matthews phoned Marshall that day and received the following

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 891-892.

<sup>76</sup> Dunn to Marshall, May 6, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 894.

message to send to De Gasperi via Tarchiani: "You may count on the strong moral support of the United States and that we will make a serious effort to assist Italy in meeting her essential financial needs."<sup>77</sup> This was a firm liberal interventionist commitment from the United States that had little precedent in the history of its relations with Europe.

The external security of Italy was another issue on which the De Gasperi government sought direct U.S. assistance. In a conversation with Marshall in Washington, Tarchiani requested that any U.S. statement following the ratification of the peace treaty with Italy in June 1947 specifically reference Italy's "disarmed frontiers" and provide a "moral guarantee" of these borders by the United States. According to Tarchiani, "Opinion in Italy is very sensitive to the fact that Italy has been effectively disarmed by the treaty in the face of an aggressive and well-armed Yugoslavia."<sup>78</sup> Here, the ambassador encountered a limit of American commitment. There would be no unilateral guarantee of the physical security of Italy made by the U.S. government. This did little to discourage Tarchiani and his government from making future requests, however.

Marshall's State Department formulated a response to the pleas of the Italian officials. In order to ensure the success of democratic elements in the forthcoming national elections, visible economic improvement and Western support were essential, Marshall cabled Dunn in late May 1947. He outlined the steps to be taken by the U.S. government to show this commitment: a general, public pledge of U.S.

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<sup>77</sup> Memorandum of conversation of Matthews with Tarchiani, May 20, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 908.

<sup>78</sup> Memorandum of conversation of Marshall with Tarchiani, May 16, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 907.

support; consultations with Great Britain and France to encourage similar pledges from them; utilization of “every available source” of economic assistance; sale of surplus military equipment to Italy at the lowest possible cost; and “public relations efforts” in Italy to encourage the people.<sup>79</sup> Dunn enthusiastically agreed with these measures, believing they could “turn the tide now strongly favoring the Communists and bring about an increase in the parliamentary representation of the center and left of center, thus strengthening the democratic forces in their development here in Italy.”<sup>80</sup>

Assistance for Italy fit into the wider plan to help Europe rebuild in the wake of World War II. Secretary Marshall’s June 1947 commencement address at Harvard University outlined the new European Recovery Program, which became popularly known as the Marshall Plan, to hearty approval from Italian audiences. Dunn wrote the secretary that the people of Italy were “most happy as to both substance and timing. It is what is needed to rally the Cabinet and the majority of the country to support unpleasant restrictions and sacrifices against opposition of special interests.”<sup>81</sup> Ambassador Tarchiani told the State Department that Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti’s “mild and reluctant support for the ‘Marshall Plan’ was rather clear evidence that the enthusiasm for the ‘Plan’ in Italy made it difficult for the Communists to oppose it openly.”<sup>82</sup> Liberal interventionism was already helping to contain the spread of communism.

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<sup>79</sup> Marshall to Dunn, May 20, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 909-910.

<sup>80</sup> Dunn to Marshall, May 28, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 912.

<sup>81</sup> Dunn to Marshall, June 8, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 920.

<sup>82</sup> Memorandum of conversation of H. Freeman Matthews with Tarchiani, July 9, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 935.

As 1947 wore on, the De Gasperi government faced additional difficulty while its people continued to experience privation. For humanitarian reasons, as well as potential political gains, Dunn argued to the State Department that it was imperative to ship additional wheat to Italy. He pointed out that responsible officials of the Truman administration, including himself, “would be poor managers indeed of [the] relief program if Russia, by timing rather than generosity, were afforded the opportunity to make good the Italian deficit at a critical political moment,” such as weeks before the national elections, which had been moved to April 1948.<sup>83</sup> The Italians were encouraged by the prospect of Marshall Plan assistance, but Dunn feared that the country could not hold out until it became available in mid-1948. As he pointed out, “While the Marshall plan is still a light of hope on the dismal road Italy walks, it is a dim and distant one for the weary traveller.”<sup>84</sup> The need for food and cash was immediate.

By the fall of 1947, a memorandum by George F. Kennan’s Policy Planning Staff delivered to State leadership an unequivocal statement of U.S. policy on Italy: “the support of a friendly, democratic regime in that country in order to safeguard US security aims in the Mediterranean.”<sup>85</sup> Toward this end, the Vatican became an important ally in the United States’s liberal interventionist campaign. In December 1947, J. Graham Parsons, the State Department assistant of Truman’s personal envoy to Pope Pius XII, Myron J. Taylor, acquired key political intelligence from senior cardinals in Rome. Cardinals Domenico Tardini and Giovanni Battista Montini

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<sup>83</sup> Dunn to Marshall, September 17, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 973.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 974.

<sup>85</sup> Memorandum by Policy Planning Staff, September 24, 1947, *FRUS* 1947, Vol. III, 977.

(the future Pope Paul VI) informed Parsons that the Catholic Church supported a twofold course of action: “first a strong stand by [the Italian] government as in France wherever strikes and disorders take on rebellious character, and second, organization of reliable elements for service in negating expected Communist efforts to paralyze [the] nation.”<sup>86</sup> They also indicated to Parsons that the Church was pressuring De Gasperi’s government to request additional assistance from the United States. Furthermore, Tardini told Parsons that Italy’s noncommunist majority would “welcome any necessary US intervention in Italian internal affairs because [the] majority’s interest in this crisis is identical to that of US.”<sup>87</sup>

During the winter of 1948, the U.S. intelligence community painted an increasingly dire picture of the situation in Italy. A National Security Council (NSC) report generated on March 8 stated that American security interests were “immediately and gravely threatened” by the prospect of significant electoral gains by the Italian Communist Party in the legislature.<sup>88</sup> Such an electoral success would lead to the Eastern European pattern of governmental transformation and, ultimately, to subservience to Moscow. The United States had to continue backing De Gasperi and his government. His party’s “strength is derived from the active support of the Church and from popular identification with U.S. aid, without which the Italian economy would collapse.”<sup>89</sup> Political action was essential, to include:

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<sup>86</sup> Parsons to Marshall, December 11, 1947 in *FRUS* 1948, Vol. III (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), 745.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 745-746.

<sup>88</sup> National Security Council report, “Position of the United States With Respect to Italy in the Light of the Possibility of Communist Participation in the Government by Legal Means,” March 8, 1948, *FRUS* 1948 Vol. III, 775.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 776.

urging public statements by members of Congress that they would work to cut aid to Italy following a Communist victory (enlisting the legislative branch to exert frank and friendly pressure); pledges of territorial incentives; and an Italian-American letter-writing campaign to friends and relatives in Italy, among other propaganda efforts.

In a speech at the University of California at Berkeley in early March 1948, Secretary Marshall stated that European Recovery Program aid would not continue if the Communists were successful in the April elections. The United States would not cut off aid, but every "European nation which is under the influence of the Communists has been prevented from participation in the European Recovery Program. Some have been deprived of the right to participate, clearly against their own wishes."<sup>90</sup> The Soviet Union would deprive the Italian people of that right as well, Marshall implied with little subtlety. If the Italians voted the communists into power, the United States could only conclude that they were opting out of the Marshall Plan. There could scarcely have been a more overt application of the frank and friendly pressure of liberal interventionism from the highest levels of the U.S. government.

The Truman administration's liberal interventionist campaign of what Kaeten Mistry terms political warfare also involved one of the earliest covert operations by the newly created Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). F. Mark Wyatt, one of the CIA's men on the ground in Italy in early 1948, claimed that the operation was George Marshall's brainchild. In his role as a CIA operative, Wyatt personally

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<sup>90</sup> Marshall address March 14, 1948 in *Department of State Bulletin*, Vol. XVIII, No. 456 (March 28, 1948), 424.



delivered bags of cash on behalf of the U.S. government to Italian politicians to fund their campaigns.<sup>91</sup> This operation helped lay the groundwork for many future covert missions to support, and undermine, governments around the world throughout the duration of the Cold War.

The effort to aid the anticommunist Christian Democratic Party in the Italian elections of April 1948 ultimately succeeded. Ambassador Dunn sent Washington a summary of assistance provided to the Italians. Among other efforts, his embassy cooperated with the De Gasperi government to use U.S. funds to distribute 10 million prayer cards to St. Frances Xavier Cabrini. Italians were to pray that Mother Cabrini, an Italian-born nun who in 1946 became the first U.S. citizen elevated to sainthood by the Roman Catholic Church, would intercede on their behalf to ensure the continuation of U.S. aid to their country. Dunn congratulated his colleagues in Washington for making “possible whatever we may have achieved in supporting and helping the forces of democracy in Italy.”<sup>92</sup> Religion, political warfare, and liberal interventionism by the United States came together to form a potent mixture in Italy in 1948.

Aid in the democratic development of Italy, along with the other former major Axis powers, was a key outgrowth of the prevailing postwar liberal interventionist strategic culture. As Walter Russell Mead argues, “An important factor in the growth of Wilsonian determination to spread democracy was the startling success of American post-World War II policy in Germany, Italy, and

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<sup>91</sup> National Security Archive, F. Mark Wyatt interview, February 15, 1996, found at <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/coldwar/interviews/episode-3/wyatt1.htm>

<sup>92</sup> Dunn to Marshall, June 16, 1948, *FRUS* 1948, Vol. III, 879-882.

Japan.”<sup>93</sup> Efforts to bolster Italian democracy did not end after the general election and constitutional referendum of 1946. Fear of a Communist victory in the general election of April 1948 led Truman and Marshall to press Congress for emergency relief legislation.<sup>94</sup> The CIA secretly funded the Christian Democrats, and the Truman administration sponsored a letter-writing campaign by Italian-Americans to friends and relatives in the old country.

These measures critically enabled the success of De Gasperi’s government and, along with the Marshall Plan, aided in securing the future of the republic that still governs the country. James Miller is correct in his assertion that the United States achieved its geopolitical objective: “to block a Communist triumph in Italy and stabilize its Western European sphere of influence.”<sup>95</sup> This success was attributable to the liberal interventionist strategic culture as a complement to the containment grand strategy. Italy later joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and was an original member of the European Community. U.S. assistance inspired by a liberal interventionist strategic culture, although at times high-handed and stingy, positively contributed to Italy’s rise from what might have been catastrophe following nearly two decades of totalitarianism and defeat in World War II. Uncertainty in the realization of their new global power and responsibility, and fear of Soviet expansion had combined in the collective strategic imagination of American policymakers to bring about a major early manifestation of liberal interventionism. They identified and threw their country’s political and

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<sup>93</sup> Mead, 164.

<sup>94</sup> Leffler, 68.

<sup>95</sup> Miller, 53.

economic power behind a credible democratic, anticommunist national movement. During the years that followed, the liberal interventionist strategic culture and the containment grand strategy did not always interact in such a complementary, and successful, manner. The consequences of tension between liberal interventionism and containment would come to a head as the next American president contended with the aftermath of the long, bloody French Indochina War.

## South Vietnam

Perhaps nowhere was tension between the containment grand strategy and the prevailing liberal interventionist strategic culture more evident than in South Vietnam during Dwight D. Eisenhower's first term as president. Eisenhower and his administration renewed the commitment made by his predecessor, Harry S. Truman, to contain the global spread of communism, by military (and even nuclear) means if necessary. The coexistence of the liberal interventionist strategic culture with the containment grand strategy placed a tremendous strain on the conduct of U.S. foreign affairs during this period, in no situation more than in dealing with South Vietnam following the signing of the Geneva Accords of 1954. In search of a leader to support who embraced democracy and anticommunism, U.S. policymakers found they had to choose between these values. There was no figure comparable to Alcide de Gasperi to combine national stature, commitment to democracy, and resistance to communism. As a result, effectively prioritizing anticommunism over democracy through U.S. backing of Ngo Dinh Diem illuminated the problematic nature of the liberal interventionist strategic culture's set of values.

Over the intervening years, a degree of historical consensus has developed about American involvement in Vietnam. Brian VanDeMark articulates a mainstream historiographical view that U.S. policymakers "misread an indigenous, communist-led nationalist movement as part of a larger, centrally-directed challenge to world order and stability; tied American fortunes to a non-communist regime of slim popular legitimacy and effectiveness; and intervened militarily in the

region far out of proportion to U.S. security requirements.”<sup>96</sup> Frank Ninkovich, in his history of what he terms the “Wilsonian century” of U.S. foreign relations, characterizes American efforts on behalf of South Vietnam as a flirtation with a strongman regime that “presupposed the universalization of modern democracy.”<sup>97</sup> Such presupposition was a significant potential pitfall of the liberal interventionist mindset that interestingly paralleled Marxist historical materialism’s presupposed world communism. Presupposing the universalization of liberal values and institutions made it easier to prioritize containment over liberal interventionism.

More recent Vietnam scholarship highlights the effort to build a stable and democratic South Vietnam as a Cold War focal point for the Eisenhower administration. This focus emerged from the French Indochina War, which Frederik Logevall argues was “simultaneously an East-West and North-South conflict, pitting European imperialism in its autumn phase against the two main competitors that gained momentum by mid-century – Communist-inspired revolutionary nationalism and U.S.-backed liberal internationalism.”<sup>98</sup> Citing the “simultaneous growth of American power and vulnerability in the Cold War,” Jeremi Suri characterizes U.S. nation building efforts, including the one in South Vietnam, as “far too rigid, too self-centered, and too counterrevolutionary.”<sup>99</sup> This was attributable to the narrow focus they placed on security. As Logevall demonstrates, “The vast bulk of American

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<sup>96</sup> Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), xiv.

<sup>97</sup> Frank Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy since 1900* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 193.

<sup>98</sup> Frederik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America’s Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012), xvi.

<sup>99</sup> Suri, 198.

assistance to South Vietnam was military. This accorded with Diem's own preference, and with [U.S. Secretary of State] John Foster Dulles's view, expressed already in the summer of 1954, that a strong and effective South Vietnamese army would be an essential prerequisite to achieving political stability."<sup>100</sup> Adherents of liberal interventionism failed to balance effectively the competing priorities of containing the spread of communism and building a viable democratic state in South Vietnam.

As the conclusion of the Vietnamese war for independence from France indicated the potential for the rise of a new communist power in Southeast Asia, U.S. policymakers explored their options. Extremely reluctant to come in on the side of a losing European ally in Indochina, the United States under Eisenhower did not intervene militarily. In the aftermath of the Geneva Accords of July 1954, it did, however, commit to strengthening the newly formed state of South Vietnam, in hopes of aiding the formation of a future bastion of democracy in the region. The Eisenhower administration identified key security interests at stake in Southeast Asia. Access to rubber and other resources from the region was critical. Even more important, however, was the imperative of what became known as the domino theory. Charles C. Stelle of the State Department Policy Planning Staff provided an early articulation: "The importance of Indochina derives primarily from the impact which its loss would have on non-communist countries of Southeast Asia. Strategically, Communist conquest of the Tonkin Delta would open to the Communists the most feasible routes for any massive southward advance toward

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<sup>100</sup> Logevall, 669.

Southern Indochina and Thailand.”<sup>101</sup> In order to prevent triggering a chain reaction through the fall of Indochina, security and stability had to be established. This ultimately precluded U.S. backing of nationwide elections aimed at unification to be held in 1956 under the Geneva Accords. The liberal interventionist streak in the U.S. strategic culture that came to light during the Truman administration continued to flourish under Eisenhower, but it did not supersede the priority to contain the spread of communism.

As outlined at an NSC meeting in January 1954, months before the siege of Dien Bien Phu, the U.S. objectives in Southeast Asia were: to prevent the fall of the region to communism; to persuade its countries “that their best interests lie in greater cooperation and stronger affiliations with the rest of the free world; and to assist them to develop toward stable, free governments with the will and ability to resist communism from within and without and to contribute to the strengthening of the free world.”<sup>102</sup> In order to accomplish this, the South Korean model was viewed as a worthy example. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles asserted at an NSC meeting that Vietnam really needed a leader resembling the authoritarian South Korean Syngman Rhee. This prompted Eisenhower, unwilling to eschew democracy yet, to wonder aloud about the possibility of finding a Buddhist national leader, since most Vietnamese were Buddhist. In a response that caused laughter throughout the room, and highlighted the political and religious misunderstandings of the region on the part of those present, one of the attendees “pointed out to the

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<sup>101</sup> Stelle memorandum, March 23, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), 1146.

<sup>102</sup> Report to NSC by Executive Secretary James S. Lay, Jr., January 16, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 973.

President that, unhappily, Buddha was a pacifist rather than a fighter.”<sup>103</sup> Unlike Italy, Vietnam did not have the strong connection to the Western liberal and martial tradition required to assert and maintain its independence, American decision-makers believed. The nation would require more than the right elected leaders to ensure stability. A political system would have to be created nearly from the ground up.

Eisenhower aide James Hagerty highlighted this belief further, reporting in his diary that Dulles believed France should grant political sovereignty to Indochina. Ambassador to the United Nations Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., asked if Indochina could be turned into another Greece, referring to U.S. efforts under Truman to bolster anticommunist forces. As Hagerty related, Eisenhower said this was different: “Greeks were sturdy people with will to win,” while the Vietnamese were “‘backward people’ who don’t think [France] sincere in granting them freedom.”<sup>104</sup> Dulles came around to this position, stating to French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault, “As of this moment Vietnam and other Associated States were not in a position to assume, safeguard, and protect their own independence. They did not have effective and trained personnel to man the governmental machinery, they obviously were not alone capable of carrying on the war to protect their freedom, and they were not yet very experienced in self-government.”<sup>105</sup> He continued in this vein in a meeting with Eisenhower and other political and military leaders,

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<sup>103</sup> Memorandum of discussion at the 183<sup>rd</sup> NSC meeting, February 4, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 1014.

<sup>104</sup> Diary of James Hagerty, March 26, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 1173.

<sup>105</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Dulles and Bidault, April 14, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 1335.



declaring his reservations about supporting complete independence for the peoples of Indochina. Dulles argued, "They did not have the trained personnel necessary to administer their respective countries and the leadership was not good. In a sense if the Associated States were turned loose, it would be like putting a baby in a cage of hungry lions. The baby would rapidly be devoured."<sup>106</sup> As the military situation in Indochina became increasingly dire, and the war became less popular in Metropolitan France, it became clearer to American officials that if the baby were to be saved, it would fall to them to save it.

The diplomats responsible for operationalizing the foreign policy formulated in Washington were less than sanguine about their government's prospects in accomplishing this, despite recognizing the imperative of containing communism by spreading democracy. American *chargé d'affaires* Robert McClintock in Saigon related to the general commanding the U.S. military advisory force there "that once as a little boy I had seen a water snake in a creek which had swallowed a catfish. The spines of the fish had pierced the snake's throat and he could get the fish neither down nor up. We do not want to get ourselves in a similar position here."<sup>107</sup> In light of the future of the U.S. adventure in Vietnam, McClintock's words seem prescient. A veteran diplomat with strong opinions and linguistic flair, McClintock would go on to serve as ambassador to Lebanon during another episode of Eisenhower era liberal interventionism in 1958, and in other important posts. From Paris, U.S. ambassador C. Douglas Dillon expressed his concurrence with the decision to

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<sup>106</sup> Memorandum of conversation of Eisenhower, Dulles, et al., May 10, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 1528.

<sup>107</sup> McClintock to State Department, May 22, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 1600-1601.

support Emperor Bao Dai, the French puppet ruler. A functional nationalist government would require, he believed, a “superior authority to serve as conciliator of the vastly different regional and political groups which would have to be represented in such a government if it were to be truly representative of [the] country as a whole.”<sup>108</sup> Though they might be someday, the Vietnamese were simply not ready for real democracy. The present monarchy was an asset for uniting the country that needed to be exploited.

In light of this, Dillon “retained reservations acquired as a result of past experience with ‘congresses’ and ‘assemblies’ in Vietnam and, therefore, hope[d] that the functions of the national assembly will, for some time and at least until the Vietnamese Government is firmly established, be limited to constituent and consultative, rather than legislative powers.”<sup>109</sup> Dillon took encouragement from indications that Ngo Dinh Diem, the Roman Catholic anticommunist leader living in exile in France, would return to Vietnam to serve as prime minister. “Even with his personal limitations, he is [a] step in [the] right direction and diametric change from prototype of suave Europeanized money-seeking dilettante represented by Buu Loc, Tran Van Huu and General Xuan, all of whom have failed so miserably.”<sup>110</sup> Even though the ascetic nationalist Diem might not bring democracy with him from France, his appointment would be a positive measure.

It was in this context during the Geneva Conference that McClintock made his observation to General Ely that it was time to apply “frank and friendly pressure” in

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<sup>108</sup> Dillon to State Department, May 26, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 1616.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 1617.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 1617-1618.

order to cut the umbilical cord and make the Vietnamese baby grow up. The central problem was enabling and inspiring the client state to take the initiative, while still providing support against the ever-present communist threat. It was a necessary experiment in state building in which the leaders of the United States believed their country could not afford to fail. This was the principal dilemma for the liberal interventionist outlook in the Cold War milieu, not only in Southeast Asia, but throughout the world: promoting democracy in the face of a seemingly ever-present communist menace.

Somewhat ironically, following their agreement at Geneva to quit Indochina, the French were among the primary advocates for immediate instantiation of democratic values among the Vietnamese. Guy La Chambre, the Minister for the Associated States, told Dillon in Paris that he thought it “most important to make every effort possible to impress the Vietnamese with the virtues of democracy prior to the elections, and that this would require substantial U.S. economic assistance to Vietnam which he hoped [the United States] would be willing to undertake.”<sup>111</sup> In providing talking points to Dillon for discussion with the French government, Secretary Dulles demonstrated that the Eisenhower administration had largely come to agree with this assessment. The U.S. objective would be to reinforce a government in South Vietnam “whose strength derives from popular support and whose appeal extends beyond [the] line of demarcation into North. We would not wish to give aid to [a government] which did not enjoy support and confidence of

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<sup>111</sup> Dillon to State Department, July 27, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 1880.

[the] Vietnamese people.”<sup>112</sup> Although the South Vietnamese were not yet ready for Western democracy, this was, along with unification, the ultimate aim.

The idea of free nationwide elections, to take place after two years as agreed to at Geneva, brought with it the distasteful understanding that they would favor the Viet Minh, the strongest and most effective nationalist government in the newly divided country. Political tutelage, economic aid, and military development in South Vietnam were necessary before national elections could be considered. Ambassador Donald R. Heath in Saigon argued, “There should be of course free elections in South Vietnam and I am fairly confident that present government or good successor one could win them, given time and opportunity to prepare proper conditions, and would be willing to have them staged under U[nited] N[ations] supervision.”<sup>113</sup>

Heath was a career Foreign Service officer with significant state building experience as a senior official in the American reconstruction of West Germany. The illusion that the South Vietnamese government was conducting elections primarily by its own initiative must be furthered for psychological purposes in order to prevent anticolonial stirrings against American influence. The “Vietnamese Government must convince its people that it is in a position of leadership rather than that it is being led and influenced too much by US or any other foreign government.”<sup>114</sup>

Supporting the nascent nation-state of South Vietnam, and eventually helping it to become truly democratic soon came to be viewed as national security imperatives for the United States.

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<sup>112</sup> Dulles to Embassy in France, July 28, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 1889.

<sup>113</sup> Heath to State Department, July 30, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 1893.

<sup>114</sup> Heath to State Department, August 3, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 1901.

A National Intelligence Estimate issued by the U.S. intelligence community early in August 1954, mere days after the signing of the Geneva Accords, made this clear. The estimate stated:

The political survival of the Indochinese states is endangered not only by the threat of external Communist attack and internal Communist subversion, but also by their own inherent inexperience, immaturity, and weakness. We believe that without outside support the Indochinese states cannot become strong enough to withstand Communist pressures.... If they are given opportunity, guidance, and material help in building national states, they may be able to attain viability. We believe that the energy and resourcefulness necessary for this achievement will not arise spontaneously among the non-Communist Indochinese but will have to be sponsored and nurtured from without.<sup>115</sup>

This task of sponsorship and nurturing would be assigned to the patron country's national security apparatus, with its military in many ways taking the lead in applying the frank and friendly pressure of liberal interventionism.

Military assistance by the United States grew dramatically following the French exit. General John W. O'Daniel, commander of the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group in South Vietnam, in a communiqué to his superiors in Washington, identified his command's mission as establishing "political, psychological, military [and] economic courses [of] action for adoption by US to insure Free Vietnam survival as [a] nation," and to develop "Vietnam as [an] effective barrier [to] continued Communist expansion."<sup>116</sup> The ultimate goal was to develop South Vietnam into a "strong democratic state oriented toward West."<sup>117</sup> Given the perceived threat from the North Vietnamese under Ho Chi Minh, and the potential

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<sup>115</sup> National Intelligence Estimate, "Post-Geneva Outlook in Indochina," August 3, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 1909.

<sup>116</sup> O'Daniel to Army Department, August 8, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 1925.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 1926.

for communist insurgency in the South, O'Daniel regarded the situation as emergent, believing hostilities to be imminent. He stated in August 1954, eleven years before major combat operations by the United States in Southeast Asia, "I feel this is war in every sense. Wartime methods, therefore, are in order [in] all fields until emergency passed."<sup>118</sup> Establishment of a strong, stable government in the new state was predicated on the prevention of communist infiltration from North Vietnam, and subversion from within.

Reporting preconditions for American assumption of the South Vietnamese army's training, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff stated, "It is hopeless to expect a U.S. military training mission to achieve success unless the nation concerned is able effectively to perform those governmental functions essential to the successful raising and maintenance of armed forces, to include the provision of adequate facilities, drafting and processing of personnel, pay of troops, etc."<sup>119</sup> As early as 1954, South Vietnam was turning into a Catch-22 for Americans making and executing foreign policy; the South Vietnamese could not secure their country without government, but could not govern without security. Containing the spread of communism and the proliferation of liberal values and institutions had in this case become overlapping, but competing, priorities.

Secretary of State John Foster Dulles stated as much in a letter to his counterpart at the Pentagon. He argued that the most effective way to enable the government of South Vietnam was to reorganize and train its army. He referred to this as the "familiar hen-and-egg as to which comes first," but submitted that the

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 1927.

<sup>119</sup> Wilson to Dulles, August 12, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 1939.

United States must take two steps: “one, to strengthen the government by means of a political and economic nature and the other, to bolster that government by strengthening the army which supports it.”<sup>120</sup> The United States would have to attempt to achieve both of these major objectives in parallel. Democratic development in South Vietnam would have to take a back seat to establishing stable, centralized authority and military power.

This was necessary, U.S. policy makers believed, due to the internal and external threat posed to Diem’s government by the communist Viet Minh. La Chambre, the French minister in Southeast Asia, told Dulles in September 1954, “The Vietminh is forming political cells throughout retained Vietnam and is undertaking a systematic policy of intimidating the population so that they can win the elections in 1956.”<sup>121</sup> Reports such as this contributed to a belief that there was no chance of free and fair elections throughout the country due to subterfuge and coercion by the Viet Minh. In a meeting in October 1954, when asked about U.S. policy on the 1956 elections, Dulles “noted that there was no possibility of fair elections in the North and that, when the time came, we would have ample grounds for postponing or declining to hold them in the South. The problem is not one of getting ready for a political election but combating subversion and infiltration in the immediate future.”<sup>122</sup> Dulles and others began laying the groundwork for the

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<sup>120</sup> Dulles to Charles E. Wilson, August 18, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 1955.

<sup>121</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Dulles and La Chambre, September 6, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 2007.

<sup>122</sup> Summary of meeting in Dulles’s office, October 8, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 2123.

indefinite postponement of elections as early as the fall of 1954, with the ink barely dry on July's Geneva Accords.

The Eisenhower administration's stance was unclear to its representatives overseas, in part because it was still developing. When asked about U.S. intentions by the commander of French forces in Vietnam, General Paul Ely, *chargé d'affaires* Randolph A. Kidder reported he was forced to admit, "I did not know what US position is regarding elections, but I was aware of US fear that single countrywide election would deliver country to Viet Minh."<sup>123</sup> Dulles responded with a directive to remain opaque. The administration continued to believe, he stated, that discussion of potential elections with the French or Vietnamese must be "avoided for time being until trend of security development in Free Viet-Nam is more clearly defined." If questioned further, Kidder should simply answer that he had no instructions on this point.<sup>124</sup> The nation building and democracy development projects in Vietnam became increasingly open-ended as stability and strength continued to prove elusive.

A delicate balance had to be struck. In conference with Dulles, French Premier Pierre Mendès France emphasized the importance of not providing the Viet Minh a pretext for recommencing hostilities. Presumably, this might include denunciation by the United States or South Vietnam of the 1956 elections agreed to at Geneva. Dulles stated his agreement that the armistice should be followed, despite the United States not being a signatory. He believed, however, that "in

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<sup>123</sup> Kidder to State Department, November 16, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 2256.

<sup>124</sup> Dulles to Embassy in Vietnam, December 9, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 2357.



certain aspects the agreement was vague and ambiguous and that we were not aware what, if any, agreements as to its interpretation might have been reached in meetings to which we have not been a party.”<sup>125</sup> Dulles left his government room to maneuver. The United States, as a leading promoter of liberal values in the world, could not be seen as holding back democratic processes governed by a multilateral international agreement.

Solutions were sought in order to undermine the potential for elections in Vietnam that would likely lead to a communist victory. The CIA representative on the Special Operations Coordinating Board Working Group on Indochina, Richard M. Bissell, Jr., was an early formulator of such a solution. Bissell, who had recently been involved in the CIA’s overthrow of the Guatemalan government, and would later play a key role in the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, believed that the United States must work with its allies that had signed the Geneva Accords to circumvent the elections by compiling evidence that the Viet Minh were not holding up their end of the bargain. He wrote, “It seems apparent that a fresh and serious effort to present the evidence of Viet Minh violations must be made in order to create a more favorable climate of world public opinion and to build up a case for postponing or cancelling the 1956 elections.”<sup>126</sup> A field coordinator with a dedicated staff should be assigned responsibility for gathering this evidence and publicizing it around the world. Although this was not the tactic ultimately employed, it exemplified the

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<sup>125</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Dulles and Mendès France, November 17, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 2266.

<sup>126</sup> Memorandum by Richard M. Bissell, Jr., December 20, 1954, *FRUS* 1952-54, Vol. XIII, 2407.

mindset prevalent in the Eisenhower administration that elections must be prevented by any means necessary, and that the communists must be blamed for it.

The question of the eventuality of all-Vietnam elections in July 1956 was finally raised at an NSC meeting, chaired by President Eisenhower, at the end of January 1955. Dulles declared “that it was altogether illusory to imagine that the United States could possibly succeed in getting any agreement by the Communists for calling off these elections, which were part of the Geneva Accord.” He believed, however, that there were “other techniques, many of which were very familiar to the Soviets, for preventing the holding of these elections.”<sup>127</sup> These techniques, presumably, included obstinately making demands that it was known beforehand the other side would never accept, and then renouncing the possibility of free and fair elections, thus shifting the blame in the eyes of the world to the communists.

Dulles spelled out the State Department’s proposal in a cable to Saigon on April 6, 1955. It was based on British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden’s plan for elections in Germany laid out at the Berlin Conference of 1954. Essentially, South Vietnam should insist upon electoral safeguards to which it knew the Viet Minh would not agree. Along with conditions of “genuine freedom” before, during, and after the elections, Dulles argued that the South Vietnamese should call for a litany of guarantees. These included: “freedom of movement; freedom of presentation of candidates; immunity of candidates; freedom from arbitrary arrest or victimization; freedom of association and political meetings; freedom of expression for all;

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<sup>127</sup> Memorandum of discussion at the 234<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NSC, January 27, 1955, *FRUS* 1955-1957, Vol. I (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985), 68.

freedom of the press, radio, and free circulation of newspapers, etc...; secrecy of the vote; security of polling stations and ballot boxes.”<sup>128</sup> None of these conditions existed in the territory controlled by the Viet Minh, and it seemed highly unlikely that Ho Chi Minh and his party would loosen their grip. These demands were also sufficiently vague and broad to give the United States and its South Vietnamese clients room to call off the elections should the Viet Minh accept. To accuse the Viet Minh of violating the agreed upon conditions for elections would allow the balloting to be put off indefinitely. This would prevent a victory for the Viet Minh, while also placing blame squarely on North Vietnam for failing to meet the Geneva Accords.

Once the conditions were rejected, as Dulles was sure they would be, Diem’s government would declare, “No further discussions are possible regarding the type of elections, the issues to be voted on or any other factors.”<sup>129</sup> A similar course of action had recently been successful at the Berlin Conference of 1954 in tabling indefinitely the issue of nationwide elections in Germany. Dulles reasoned that the French had agreed to such a scheme for Germany, and thus were likely also to endorse it for Vietnam. More importantly, the Soviet-led international communist bloc had already rejected such a proposal before. For Dulles, this seemed a foolproof method of ensuring that elections would not occur in 1956, while maintaining the blameless image of the United States as the international protector of liberalism. Since the Vietnamese were not yet ready for democracy, in his view, given the likelihood of a communist electoral success, this served their interests as well.

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<sup>128</sup> Dulles to the Embassy in Vietnam, April 6, 1955, *FRUS* 1955-1957, Vol. I, 211.

<sup>129</sup> Dulles to the Embassy in Vietnam, April 6, 1955, *FRUS* 1955-1957, Vol. I, 209.

Dulles's proposal was adopted by an NSC report drafted in May 1955. The NSC staff asserted, "Free Vietnamese strength is essential to any effective approach to the election problem. If Free Vietnam is to cope adequately with national elections it will have to be strong enough to deter or defeat Vietminh insurrections in its territory, to impose and sustain order in its territory, and to win a free election limited to its own zone and held under its own auspices and control."<sup>130</sup> Although Dulles himself moved in June 1955 for formal adoption of this policy by Eisenhower to be delayed pending the reaction of Diem's government, the British, and the French, this stance essentially became the *de facto* position of the United States in the months to come.<sup>131</sup>

Diem's reaction provided the main impetus for the solidification of this position by the United States. His view was communicated by Foreign Minister Vu Van Mau to the United States through the new ambassador in Saigon, G. Frederick Reinhardt. The government under Diem stood first and foremost for unification of Vietnam, to be achieved democratically through free elections with safeguards akin to those proposed by Dulles. However, Mau emphasized, "This position was not of [the] Geneva Agreement which [the Diem] Government did not recognize but was an expression of [its] earnest desire for unification of [the] country through democratic process."<sup>132</sup> This was a position from which Diem would not back down.

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<sup>130</sup> NSC report, "Draft Statement of U.S. Policy on All-Vietnam Elections," May 17, 1955, *FRUS* 1955-1957, Vol. I, 411.

<sup>131</sup> Memorandum of discussion at the 251<sup>st</sup> meeting of the NSC, June 9, 1955, *FRUS* 1955-1957, Vol. I, 443.

<sup>132</sup> Reinhardt to State Department, June 29, 1955, *FRUS* 1955-1957, Vol. I, 470.

As the only anticommunist nationalist that the United States believed capable of consolidating authority to provide strength and stability to South Vietnam, the Eisenhower administration stood by Diem despite his authoritarian streak. In a radio broadcast on July 16, 1955, Diem effectively ended the debate over consultations with the Viet Minh to set the conditions for the elections to take place in a year's time. "We do not reject the principle of free elections as peaceful and democratic means to achieve unity. However, if elections constitute one of the bases of true democracy, they will be meaningful only at the condition that they are absolutely free," Diem declared. It was "out of the question for us to consider any proposal from the Vietminh, if proof is not given us that they put the superior interests of the national community above those of communism." The mission of reunification fell, therefore, to "us nationalists...in conditions that are most democratic and most effective, to guarantee our independence."<sup>133</sup> Essentially, unless the Viet Minh renounced communism, Diem would not allow nationwide elections to take place. He knew this would not occur. The country would remain divided. By the summer of 1955, the prospects for all-Vietnam elections while Diem remained in power were virtually nonexistent.

Eisenhower and Dulles were unwilling to push Diem any further on the 1956 elections, as the result he brought about was close enough to their preferred outcome. The South Vietnamese under Diem were not ready to negotiate with Ho and his followers to set conditions for elections, and felt no obligation to do so since

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<sup>133</sup> Ngo Dinh Diem, "Broadcast Declaration by President Diem on the Geneva Agreement and Free Elections," in Gareth Porter, *Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions*, vol. 1 (Stanfordville, NY: Earl M. Coleman Enterprises, 1979), 707.

they had not participated in the Geneva Accords. U.S. leaders feared that nationwide elections in Vietnam would result in a communist victory, which could lead to catastrophe throughout the region. Containing communism outweighed the immediate promotion of liberal values and institutions in this case. The former was seen as a precondition for the latter. As Ninkovich intimates, presupposing the universalization of liberalism allowed it to be placed on the back burner in preventing the fall of Vietnam to communism. This contrasted markedly with the case of Italy, in which liberalism was used as a weapon against communism.

Frank and friendly pressure prevailed upon Diem to make a stand on his own against communism by rejecting the elections. The United States, its leaders believed, preserved its image as the world's leading patron of liberalism. Democracy in South Vietnam would come eventually, although likely not under Diem. Containment of the spread of communism, at least for now, overrode democracy promotion in determining U.S. security priorities in South Vietnam. It would continue to do so as American commitment to the new state deepened. Liberal interventionist values had come starkly into conflict. Fear of a catastrophe resulting from a communist electoral success, as in Italy, had motivated an intervention in the internal affairs of a distant state with little precedent in U.S. history. Having established itself in the strategic culture as a framework for beginning involvement in the politics of sovereign nations far afield, liberal interventionism would turn closer to home, to nations only too familiar with U.S. imposition, during the waning years of Eisenhower's presidency.

## Latin America

Somewhat paradoxically, the liberal interventionist strategic culture in which containment was enacted called for U.S. involvement in the internal affairs of Latin American countries to be scaled back in some instances. This was not, of course, the case in Guatemala in 1954, when the Central Intelligence Agency played a key role in overthrowing a democratically elected government. In attempting to shape the democratic potential of Cuba and Venezuela in the later years of Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidency, the United States sought to employ a lighter touch than it had during much of the previous century under the Monroe Doctrine. The military interventions that characterized U.S. involvement in Central America and the Caribbean during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were, it was hoped, a thing of the past. Even so, the Eisenhower administration would again have to contend with critical choices of leaders to support, as well as values to prioritize.

The promotion of democracy and liberal economic institutions, without behavior that would draw accusations of imperialism, were critical elements of U.S. efforts to maintain peace and keep communism out of the Western Hemisphere. When this approach appeared to fail in Cuba as Fidel Castro rose to power, the Eisenhower administration refocused its liberal interventionist efforts on Venezuela. Relations with these countries during the late Eisenhower years demonstrated that to align more closely with the U.S. liberal interventionist approach alongside containment developing on a global scale, intervention in Latin America was actually scaled back relative to much of the preceding century. In this way, liberal interventionism shaped strategic behavior not only in parts of the world

experiencing U.S. influence for the first time, but also in a region in which the United States had been dominant for many decades.

According to George C. Herring, the shift in U.S. Latin American policy that took place late in Eisenhower's presidency resulted from hemispheric economic distress causing widespread political instability, the attack on Vice President Richard Nixon in Caracas in 1958, and the Cuban Revolution.<sup>134</sup> This change in attitude constituted "the most active approach to the hemisphere since the Good Neighbor policy" of the 1930s.<sup>135</sup> Liberal interventionism in Latin America transformed the older heavy-handed (and often quietly antidemocratic) U.S. approach to hemispheric politics. Stephen G. Rabe argues that the Eisenhower administration in the late 1950s "gradually concluded that military dictators could no longer be counted on to keep their countries secure, stable, and responsive to U.S. will, and it therefore began to spurn tyrants and to encourage and assist democratic reformers."<sup>136</sup> Some leaders rejected such assistance, but others did not.

Those Latin American leaders that embraced the Eisenhower administration often had their own agenda. As Hal Brands points out, "Latin America's shrewder statesmen were as likely to manipulate as to be manipulated by the United States. For these leaders, it was relentless opportunism more than anything else that guided Latin American diplomacy during the Cold War."<sup>137</sup> Attempting to contain

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<sup>134</sup> George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 686-687.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 688.

<sup>136</sup> Stephen G. Rabe, *Eisenhower and Latin America: The Foreign Policy of Anticommunism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 174.

<sup>137</sup> Hal Brands, *Latin America's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 257-258.



communism while promoting liberal values and institutions within the Western Hemisphere brought about a major shift in the power dynamics characterizing the relationships of the United States with its southern neighbors.

## **Cuba**

The island nation of Cuba was central to the Cold War in Latin America. By early 1958, the government of Fulgencio Batista, in power since a 1952 coup, was seriously challenged by a revolutionary movement under Fidel Castro. His 26<sup>th</sup> of July faction, believed to be significantly influenced by communists, threatened American business interests on the island. Sugarcane, fruit, and other ventures faced the prospect of redistribution, or even nationalization, of land and resources. Even more troubling was the potential for the emergence of a government aligned with the Soviet Union barely over the horizon from the mainland United States.

U.S. Ambassador to Cuba Earl E. T. Smith, giving a press conference while recalled to Washington for consultations in January 1958, gave voice to a vote of at least marginal confidence in the Batista regime. Born to a wealthy New York family in Newport, Rhode Island, Smith had a successful career in business in New York and Florida, and was divorced from a Vanderbilt prior to his diplomatic appointment. Notably, he served at one point as director of the U.S. Sugar Corporation.<sup>138</sup> Although certainly sympathetic to the interests of his former business associates, Smith displayed a sound strategic sense and represented the Eisenhower administration skillfully and dutifully. He stated to the press, “The

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<sup>138</sup> “Earl Smith, 87, Ambassador to Cuba in the 1950’s,” Obituaries, *The New York Times*, February 17, 1991.

United States recognizes the present Government of Cuba and deals with it as a constituted government of a friendly sister American Republic. We maintain a policy of objectivity and nonintervention in the internal affairs of Cuba.”<sup>139</sup> Smith further expressed his hope that the Batista government would fully restore constitutional guarantees, including freedom of speech and assembly, to the Cuban people.

Although he was clearly no democrat, U.S. officials initially took Batista at his word that he would allow elections in order to avoid a bloody civil war. Smith communicated to the State Department in February 1958 that Batista was sincerely determined to hold honest elections, and was receptive to outside monitoring by the United Nations.<sup>140</sup> Hopefully, with encouragement from the Eisenhower administration, he would fulfill his commitment.

The enigmatic character of Castro and his movement complicated relations with the Cuban government immensely. Oscar H. Guerra, the U.S. consul at Santiago, reported, “Castro is, at the same time, the most loved, the most hated and the most controversial person on the Cuban political scene at the present time, depending on how the individual Cuban feels about him.”<sup>141</sup> He went on, “Fidel Castro and his 26 of July Movement appear to have grown from an annoying thorn in the side of the Batista Government to a slowly spreading cancerous tumor.”<sup>142</sup> Uncertain of his political philosophy, but knowing that his movement included communists, the

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<sup>139</sup> Press statement by Earl E. T. Smith, January 16, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1991), 12.

<sup>140</sup> Smith to State Department, February 20, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 28.

<sup>141</sup> Guerra to State Department, February 21, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 30.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

United States was reluctant to throw its support behind Castro's violent faction. The Eisenhower administration found itself caught in Cuba between an unsavory dictator and a bloody revolutionary. As in South Vietnam, the liberal interventionist strategic culture did not provide a ready solution to this problem.

In response to Secretary Dulles's request for information about opposition to the Batista regime in Cuba, in late February Ambassador Smith reported that he and his staff were now "doubtful Batista will hold honest elections," a reversal of a previous report. Based on the U.S. policy of "non-intervention," Smith did not see what could be done to help ensure the elections would occur. Contradicting this policy in the same paragraph, however, Smith stated that with State approval he could pressure Batista to hold free and open elections with international monitoring.<sup>143</sup> He concluded, "We do not maintain that coming elections will solve underlying political problems. Yet we believe that continuing efforts to achieve free and open elections, in as favorable [an] atmosphere as possible, is only course open to us."<sup>144</sup> This is the course that the U.S. government would follow for the most part during the coming months.

Elections scheduled for March 1958 were postponed after political parties complained that Batista's suspension of liberties prevented effective campaigning. These suspended liberties included freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of movement, what a senior U.S. official in Cuba called "indispensable elements for the establishment of a proper climate for uninhibited political

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<sup>143</sup> Smith to State Department, February 26, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 37.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

campaigning.”<sup>145</sup> This directly resulted in the cessation of arms shipments to Cuba by the United States. Resumption of these shipments that would aid in putting down Castro was used repeatedly thereafter as a carrot to entice Batista to hold elections.

In a cable to the embassy in Havana, Assistant Secretary of State Roy R. Rubottom, Jr., told Smith that he shared the ambassador’s doubts about the sincerity of Batista’s repeated promises to hold free and honest elections. Rubottom was a Texan who rose through the ranks of the diplomatic corps to receive an appointment as the senior official in the State Department responsible for hemispheric affairs. He was so dedicated to assisting the development of his country’s southern neighbors that he once implored his compatriots in a public speech to increase their coffee consumption by twelve beans per cup. This, Rubottom calculated, would raise overall production by some 600 million pounds, “enhancing stability and prosperity in coffee-growing nations.”<sup>146</sup> The assistant secretary wrote to Smith in Cuba, “From here [it] appears that Batista regime has utterly failed to convince Cuban people and certainly US public of its intention [to] carry out free elections.”<sup>147</sup> Back in Havana, Batista argued to Smith, “If I were to step down now from office, as many people want, my country would be torn apart in bloodshed. The solution is honest elections, and I give my word we will have honest elections. I gave Cuba honest elections in 1944 and Cuba will have honest elections

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<sup>145</sup> Daniel M. Braddock to State Department, September 26, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 219.

<sup>146</sup> Douglas Martin, “R. Richard Rubottom, Who Helped Shaped Cuban Policy, Dies at 98,” *The New York Times*, December 19, 2010.

<sup>147</sup> Rubottom to Embassy in Cuba, March 12, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 56.

again in 1958.”<sup>148</sup> Smith and other U.S. officials were not convinced of Batista’s commitment, but saw few options other than to give him the opportunity to live up to his word. A candidate with national stature committed to democracy and anticommunism behind whom the United States might throw its support could not be identified. Even if such a figure were found, an endorsement by the United States might have a negative effect on a public wary of northern imperialism.

Smith believed the United States would be blamed for either Batista’s fall or survival, because it had armed the regime. Therefore, “In my opinion we should continue [to] use our influence to bring about favorable atmosphere for elections—postponement of elections will make this possible—and to ensure elections are free and open. This we may continue to do without giving either side opportunity to accuse us of intervening,” he argued.<sup>149</sup> That is, the United States should intervene on behalf of the democratic process, not a particular side in the emerging civil war. This was a position Smith would reiterate later. John Foster Dulles himself weighed in with his feeling that if Castro refused to negotiate, Batista should isolate the rebels, and declare unequivocally his objective to ensure a “propitious climate for [a] constructive solution.” This solution must include elections that would satisfy the majority in Cuba. He contrasted this strategy with the “apparently sterile repetition of determination to hold honest elections which [the Batista regime was] obviously bound to win with opposition hamstrung by conditions it considers prevent it from participating.”<sup>150</sup> Ironically, although inappropriate in Cuba, this was

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<sup>148</sup> Smith to State Department, March 14, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 58.

<sup>149</sup> Smith to State Department, March 16, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 62.

<sup>150</sup> Dulles to Embassy in Cuba, March 31, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 74.

almost the exact approach Dulles had recommended in Vietnam three years earlier. Liberal interventionism was delicate business that demanded adaptation to individual situations.

A May 1958 conversation between Rubottom and Cuban Ambassador to the United States Nicolas Arroyo highlighted the tensions at work throughout Latin America. Recent demonstrations in South America during Richard M. Nixon's visit, which had nearly cost the vice president his life, were, according to Batista's envoy, "an integral part of a hemisphere-wide Communist plan." Arroyo "cited the need for promoting internal stability in these countries and without strong internal security measures democracy could not flourish."<sup>151</sup> As in Italy and South Vietnam, those who sought U.S. support in Latin America understood the linchpin that American leaders saw connecting democracy, stability, and containment of communism in order to achieve peace. They were willing to use this understanding of the U.S. strategic culture's basic assumption about what would later be called democratic peace theory to advance their own goals.

Following a trip to Cuba in the summer of 1958, State Department official C. Allan Stewart wrote to a colleague, "Batista's regime is unpopular and he has not succeeded in convincing the public that he will provide honest elections."<sup>152</sup> The longer Batista put off the elections, the less likely it seemed that they would eventually occur. As a result of continued fighting between the forces of Batista and Castro, the suspension of constitutional guarantees by the Cuban government was

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<sup>151</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Rubottom and Arroyo, May 22, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 97.

<sup>152</sup> Stewart to William P. Snow, July 24, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 167.

extended into September, providing two months before the November election in which free and open campaigning could occur. According to a memorandum prepared in the U.S. State Department's Office of Middle American Affairs, this precluded "optimism concerning the possibility of 'adequate' preparations for Presidential or congressional elections."<sup>153</sup> The office went on to report that there was an informed consensus that Batista's rule would end, likely violently, by February 1959. Therefore, the author recommended: "Continued non-intervention in the internal affairs of Cuba. To throw our support at this time in favor of the expiring Batista regime would, it is believed, destroy the last remaining faith which the majority of the Cuban people have in U.S. protestations of support for the cause of democracy in a free world."<sup>154</sup> Despite uncertainty about the intentions of the movement likely to take power following the anticipated fall of Batista, it would simply be too hypocritical to prop up the failing regime in light of the image U.S. officials desired their country to project.

Ambassador Smith, on the other hand, saw what he considered an alternative to non-intervention: "To do everything possible to promote free and open elections and to discreetly encourage political opposition to unite behind one candidate."<sup>155</sup> The interests of the United States, he believed, were aligned with the desires of the Cuban majority for a moderate government that could restore normalcy with U.S. support. He recommended, therefore, a reversal of policy in order to resume selling

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<sup>153</sup> U.S. State Department Office of Middle American Affairs, "Preliminary Memorandum on Considerations for Policy Recommendations for Cuba," July 25, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 169.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>155</sup> Smith to State Department, July 25, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 173.

arms to Batista in exchange for a restoration of constitutional guarantees and freedom of the press in advance of elections to help establish “a proper atmosphere under which free and open elections may be held.”<sup>156</sup> The United States should not take Batista’s side, but rather that of the Cuban people, applying frank and friendly pressure on the regime. The implication, of course, was that the U.S. government understood the interests of the Cuban people better than they did themselves.

Smith’s staff reiterated that the net result of the United States’s current “neutral” position in Cuba was to please no one. What was needed was to intervene not on behalf of a particular party, but on the side of democracy itself. They argued that their government should push for unification of the Cuban opposition behind a single ticket that would serve as an interim government, which would then establish the proper atmosphere for the free and open elections for which Smith called.<sup>157</sup> His staff acknowledged that the chances of this occurring were slight, but held out hope. Neutral intervention in Cuba by the United States on behalf of democracy eventually fell into the liberal interventionist pattern seen before: frank and friendly pressure exerted on the government in power through consultations with U.S. diplomats, along with political, economic, and military support.

Minister-Counselor Daniel M. Braddock, writing on behalf of Ambassador Smith, summed up the situation in Cuba with the scheduled elections only weeks away. A highly experienced career diplomat, Braddock served as Smith’s right-hand man. Free and open elections were virtually impossible, he wrote. The rebels under

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>157</sup> Policy paper prepared by the U.S. Embassy in Cuba, August 8, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 191.



Castro charged that any balloting would be fraudulent, and opposed elections that would weaken their revolutionary momentum. In order to put down the insurrection, meanwhile, Batista resorted to limiting freedoms to an extent that effectively prevented elections from being truly democratic. Braddock believed that they would be held in any event as scheduled, with liberties suspended. The balloting would be honest in the sense that people would be able to vote without fear, but they would not be representative because many would decline to vote out of distrust of the regime. Braddock concluded, "Though the coming Cuban elections will not meet all the standards of an ideal democratic election, they are the best that can be had under the circumstances now prevailing. They are in the Embassy's view infinitely better than a violent overthrow of Batista and far better than no elections at all. It is therefore in the interest of the United States to encourage them."<sup>158</sup> The November 1958 elections, it was hoped, would be a first step toward the eventual achievement, with U.S. assistance, of a free and democratic Cuba.

The November elections ultimately took place, and Andrés Rivero Agüero was chosen to be president. A protégé of Batista, Rivero faced an uphill battle in dealing with the ongoing insurrection. In a meeting in Washington with Ambassador Smith after the election, Assistant Secretary Rubottom expressed his government's view of events. "The United States is sincerely sympathetic to Rivero Agüero in all constructive efforts which he may make designed to bring peace to Cuba. Nevertheless, we view the problem as a Cuban internal matter for which only the Cubans, in the end, can provide the solution. The initiative must be theirs,"

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<sup>158</sup> Braddock to State Department, September 26, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 217-221.

Rubottom stated. If the whole country, save Castro and his movement, got behind Rivero, only then would the U.S. government “be disposed to show its good will and support for him.”<sup>159</sup> Secretary Dulles confirmed this in a cable to the embassy in Havana following Smith’s visit. The United States, Dulles wrote, “would not commit [it]self on support unless and until Rivero has taken positive steps to restore peace in Cuba and there is evidence that his program has support of major segments [of] Cuban populace (exclusive if necessary of Castro movement) including civic organizations, the Church and the Armed Forces.”<sup>160</sup> This support from the United States might take the form of resumed arms shipments, but that would have to be determined at a later date based on Rivero’s accomplishments. In any event, however, Rivero never succeeded to the office of president, as Batista fled the country on January 1, 1959, and Castro’s 26<sup>th</sup> of July movement subsequently took power.

Events in December 1958 quickly overtook interested observers in the U.S. government. A Special National Intelligence Estimate dated December 16 stated that the Batista regime’s position had “deteriorated even more rapidly than was anticipated.” It went on that there existed in Cuba “mounting apprehension that Castro may soon come to power with bloody and disastrous consequences.”<sup>161</sup> At an NSC meeting on December 18, the president was briefed that Batista would likely not be strong enough to remain in power until the inauguration of Rivero, and that

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<sup>159</sup> Memorandum of conversation of Rubottom, Smith, et al., November 22, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 263.

<sup>160</sup> Dulles to the Embassy in Cuba, November 26, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 270.

<sup>161</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate, “Developments in Cuba since Mid-November,” December 16, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 295.

Castro would emerge as the new leader of the country. Eisenhower related that his Latin American friends told him at a recent dinner that in this event it was likely that another revolutionary leader would attempt to oust Castro, initiating a cycle of violence and instability. If this was the case, the president wondered, should the United States induce Batista to relinquish power at once? CIA director Allen Dulles, brother of John Foster, believed that such a move would be portrayed as a coup instigated by the United States against Batista. Eisenhower agreed, and for the moment the subject was dropped.<sup>162</sup>

Debate resumed at the next NSC meeting the following week, sections of the notes of which remain redacted. The president wondered aloud whether there was any figure in Cuba the United States could support. Allen Dulles argued that effort was required to prevent a victory by Castro. Eisenhower responded that this was the first time he had heard such a recommendation in the NSC. He rejected this notion, holding out hope for the emergence of a figure other than Batista or Castro to support, which ultimately never materialized.<sup>163</sup> This reflected the U.S. tendency to attempt to find the “right leader” to throw its weight behind, as in Italy and South Vietnam, and was the last serious consideration given by the administration to preventing Castro from assuming power in Cuba.

The new regime in Cuba quickly sought to establish relations with its northern neighbors. Secretary Dulles recommended immediate recognition of the provisional government, saying that it “appears free from Communist taint and

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<sup>162</sup> Memorandum of discussion at the 391<sup>st</sup> NSC meeting, December 18, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 300.

<sup>163</sup> Memorandum of discussion at the 392<sup>nd</sup> NSC meeting, December 18, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 303.

there are indications that it intends to pursue friendly relations with the United States.”<sup>164</sup> Eisenhower approved this step, and the two governments began conducting business promptly. Due to his close work with Batista while he was in power, it quickly became apparent that Ambassador Smith in Havana would need to be replaced. The bilingual career Foreign Service officer Philip Bonsal, whose father was a war correspondent in Cuba in 1898, was selected to fill Smith’s post due to the volatility of the local political climate. A January 1959 profile of the new ambassador in *The New York Times* declared him “a foe of dictatorships,” citing his previous service as ambassador to Colombia, during which he had dined with dissidents to the rule of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. The new envoy to Havana did “not strive to conceal his strong preference for democratic governments.”<sup>165</sup> President Eisenhower’s new representative stood ready to continue the liberal interventionist campaign in Cuba.

The Eisenhower administration immediately sought to predict the likely nature of the nascent Castro regime. A note from the State Department to the White House stated that although his movement certainly included communists, Castro himself seemed “to be nationalistic and somewhat socialistic; and although he has criticized alleged *US* support for Batista, he cannot be said to be personally hostile to the *US*.... Castro says he wants only to return Cuba to the path of democracy.”<sup>166</sup> Meanwhile, disturbing reports of revolutionary justice came in from Cuba. The new Cuban authorities also questioned the presence of U.S. military missions in their

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<sup>164</sup> Dulles to Eisenhower, January 7, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 347.

<sup>165</sup> “A Foe of Dictatorships: Philip Wilson Bonsal,” *The New York Times*, January 22, 1959.

<sup>166</sup> White House Special Staff Note, January 13, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 356.

country.<sup>167</sup> The promise of the revolution was already beginning to fade in the eyes of some Cubans. As Ambassador Smith reported, “An air of frustration and increasing disillusionment is apparent among several responsible people either associated with [the new] government or originally favorably disposed to it.”<sup>168</sup>

There were doubts from the start about Castro’s Cuba as a candidate for American liberal interventionism. Daniel Braddock served as the *chargé d’affaires ad interim* before Bonsal arrived in Havana, and reported that it was becoming increasingly apparent that Castro was “not anti-American but also not friendly.”<sup>169</sup> He later cabled that Castro in a speech in February was “reported as attributing Cuba’s perennial economic troubles to dictation by US Ambassadors.”<sup>170</sup> Rubottom’s special assistant, John C. Hill, Jr., had a more nuanced take on the new regime. He wrote, “There is no question that Castro and especially some of his rebel lieutenants bitterly resent what they consider to have been the hostile attitude of the US Government, and they have publicly attacked this Government and fomented anti-American feeling.”<sup>171</sup> The primary U.S. objective in Cuba, according to Hill, was therefore to strengthen moderate influences on Castro and the government. Effective moderating influences proved difficult to identify.

By mid-February, in addition to controlling the military, Castro had assumed premiership of the government. Braddock recommended provision of exchange

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<sup>167</sup> Consul at Santiago Park F. Wollam to the State Department, January 14, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 360.

<sup>168</sup> Smith to State, January 19, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 367.

<sup>169</sup> Braddock to the State Department, January 23, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 383.

<sup>170</sup> Braddock to the State Department, February 5, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 395.

<sup>171</sup> Memorandum by Hill, February 6, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 396.

stabilization funds requested by the Cuban government as an emergency measure because the Cuban economy might rapidly deteriorate if these funds were not promptly made available. He wrote, "Withholding this assistance will be widely interpreted as [a] 'reactionary' attack on revolution and will strengthen anti-American sentiment and play into hands of Communists. Castro anti-Americanism [is] not yet sufficiently proved to justify conclusion we should allow his regime to collapse under growing economic problems."<sup>172</sup> To solidify the partnership of the two countries, Braddock argued that a condition of granting this aid should be public acknowledgement of it by the Cuban government. Long-term economic aid should be withheld for the time being, however. This would provide a "salutary warning" that the Castro regime's attitude "must take [a] constructive turn before full cooperation will be forthcoming."<sup>173</sup> Such a move would be a classic example of frank and friendly liberal interventionist pressure.

Rubottom's subordinate William A. Wieland recommended equivocal support along similar lines to Braddock in a memorandum to the assistant secretary. He argued, "With respect to the question of United States assistance to Cuba, we should follow a cautious and restrained policy. On the one hand, we should sympathetically and expeditiously consider requests directed at stabilizing the immediate situation."<sup>174</sup> On the other, the Eisenhower administration must not give the impression that anti-U.S. statements by Latin American leaders would be

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<sup>172</sup> Braddock to the State Department, February 17, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 400-401.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

<sup>174</sup> Wieland to Rubottom, February 19, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 406.

rewarded with subsidies and favorable policies. A very fine line needed to be walked.

In the meantime, according to U.S. diplomats in Havana, prospects did not look favorable for democracy and the rule of law in Cuba. A “Fundamental Law” replaced the 1940 constitution, reportedly limiting individual rights and liberties, particularly that of habeas corpus, in some ways more repressively than under Batista. The press, Braddock told Washington, was censoring itself in hopes of not antagonizing the popular new regime. No active, open opposition to Castro’s movement or the provisional government existed. Ominously, the Cuban Communist Party also appeared to be aligning itself with the successful 26<sup>th</sup> of July movement.<sup>175</sup> By the end of March 1959, CIA director Allen Dulles claimed at an NSC meeting, “The Castro regime is moving toward dictatorship and Castro already has practically all power in his own hands. Having no administrative experience whatever, Castro is compelled to resort consistently to demagoguery in order to whip up popular support.”<sup>176</sup> The effects of the Cuban Revolution continued to worsen from the perspective of the Eisenhower administration as the island nation’s government stood by.

State Department officials attempted to salvage an effective position for their own government. According to his staff assistant, Rubottom thought that “the time had come when we could no longer passively accept irresponsible statements about

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<sup>175</sup> Braddock to State, February 25, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 416.

<sup>176</sup> Memorandum of discussion at the 400<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NSC, March 26, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 440.

the United States by Fidel Castro.”<sup>177</sup> Ambassador Bonsal and his staff in Havana held out hope in mid-April that should Castro remain in power, opportunities would arise discreetly to influence his “choice of courses of actions and of bringing him to a closer understanding of political and economic conditions to which he is subjected.”<sup>178</sup> In a cable the same day, Braddock expressed optimism that Castro’s upcoming trip to Washington to address a group of newspaper editors could help reduce the Cuban leader’s anti-Americanism. “If he comes back a little less anti-American and a little more disposed to see more realistically Cuba’s place in the international scheme of things, this may well create a point of friction with the Communists, a situation of which we should take full advantage.”<sup>179</sup> There was still some hope for liberal interventionism to bring around the new leader.

Rubottom agreed with the embassy in Cuba, stating to Acting Secretary of State Christian Herter, “I feel that our opportunity to talk with Castro during your luncheon and his visit with Vice President Nixon may be our last opportunities to influence favorably his current thinking and deter him from leading Cuba into a position of nationalistic neutralism, which the communists will exploit to the fullest.”<sup>180</sup> Rubottom’s deputy proposed making clear to Castro that the U.S. government and its people “have always been sympathetic to the development of representative democracy and economic and social progress in Cuba ever since the

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<sup>177</sup> Memorandum by Frank J. Devine, April 8, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 453.

<sup>178</sup> Bonsal to the State Department, April 14, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 457.

<sup>179</sup> Braddock for Bonsal to the State Department, April 14, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 466.

<sup>180</sup> Rubottom to Herter, April 15, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 468.



US aided Cuba to gain its independence. They realize that the Cuban people supported the revolution to attain these objectives.”<sup>181</sup> The anti-American, communist tone the revolution was taking on was new and, the Eisenhower administration believed, contrary to the wishes of the Cuban people, the majority of whom desired friendship with the United States. U.S. officials largely adopted this tone in their interactions with Castro while he was in Washington.

The State Department undertook to make “a tentative evaluation” of the outcome of Castro’s visit. A memorandum with an unidentified author divulged the departmental consensus that Castro had been “a man on his best behavior,” and obviously followed the advice of his ministers and an American public relations expert. His success with the U.S. public and media should “therefore be considered as contrived.” On communism and in terms of the broader Cold War, Castro “cautiously indicated” Cuba’s continued alignment with the West, though this remained “uncertain.”<sup>182</sup> The U.S. State Department sustained serious doubts about supporting a government in Cuba led by Castro.

These doubts virtually eliminated Cuba as a candidate for liberal interventionism. As the report continued, “While we certainly know him better than before, Castro remains an enigma and we should await his decisions on specific matters before assuming a more optimistic view than heretofore about the possibility of developing a constructive relationship with him and his

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<sup>181</sup> John C. Hill to Rubottom, April 16, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 469.

<sup>182</sup> Author unidentified, “Unofficial Visit of Prime Minister Castro of Cuba to Washington – A Tentative Evaluation,” April 23, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 482.

government.”<sup>183</sup> Castro was not a leader like Alcide de Gasperi, or even Ngo Dinh Diem, willing to establish a patron-client relationship based on aid and dedication to liberalism (even if only lip-service was to be paid to liberalism, as in South Vietnam). The application of frank and friendly pressure seemed unlikely to work on Castro; it might drive him toward communism and into the arms of the Soviet Union.

Rubottom had the opportunity to meet with Castro while both attended a conference in Buenos Aires in early May 1959. He told Castro that he agreed with some of his points about U.S.-Cuba relations, but told him “that he had been unduly critical of the United States. The United States can supply only a small part of what is needed for the economic development of a country.” Hard work by the Cuban people and adherence to sound policies by their government were necessary. Furthermore, Rubottom declared, “The United States, more than 25 years ago, voluntarily forsook its special status in Cuba, and embarked upon the policy of non-intervention in all of Latin America. This policy has paid rich dividends for the entire hemisphere.”<sup>184</sup> Castro and his advisers listened to this admonishment carefully, and Castro himself seemed “slightly injured” by Rubottom’s words, but said little in response.<sup>185</sup> The U.S. government did not want to invest in a government that would not espouse its values, and Castro refused to make his country dependent on American largesse; there was not sufficient ground in the middle to meet. Prospects for U.S.-Cuba partnership appeared bleak.

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 483.

<sup>184</sup> Memorandum of conversation of Rubottom with Castro, May 2, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 501.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 502.

Rubottom made clear as much in his remarks at a conference of U.S. chiefs of Latin American missions in Santiago, Chile, later on the same trip. Over the last few months, he said, it had become “painfully evident that Castro lacked any real understanding of the problems with which he must cope in governing Cuba. The emergence of Communists in key Governmental, labor and educational posts provides continuing cause for concern regarding the future of the Castro Government.” During his April visit to the United States, “his replies to questions relating to Communism, elections and democratic practices left much to be desired.”<sup>186</sup> Although the United States was not yet at the point of pushing to oust Castro from power, due to a desire to project an image of non-interference, Cuba was obviously no longer a candidate for liberal interventionism.

The rise of Castro would lead eventually to Cuba’s alignment with the Soviet Union, the severance of diplomatic ties between the United States and Cuba, the 1961 fiasco at the Bay of Pigs in an attempt to overthrow his regime, and a U.S. embargo of the tiny island nation that would last for decades. The abortive attempts begun while Batista was still in power at liberal interventionism that did not smack of hemispheric imperialism by the United States ultimately failed. If frank and friendly pressure were to be used to make gains for democracy and liberal values in the Western Hemisphere, this would have to happen elsewhere.

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<sup>186</sup> Summary of Rubottom remarks at meeting with U.S. chiefs of mission, May 7, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. VI, 506.

## Venezuela

American policymakers soon turned their focus to Venezuela, which went through its own period of governmental transition largely contemporaneous with that of Cuba. The liberal interventionist (but self consciously non-imperialist) strategic culture also influenced the U.S. approach to Venezuela, which proved a much more promising and receptive candidate. An important strategic partner as a major producer of oil in the Western Hemisphere, Venezuela had a history with the United States as long, though not quite as fraught, as that of Cuba. For all the assertions of the Monroe Doctrine by the United States from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, U.S. troops never occupied Venezuelan territory. As the U.S. relationship with Cuba deteriorated following Castro's rise to power, Venezuela emerged as an alternative candidate for liberal interventionism in the region.

In his capacity as head of the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Roy Rubottom was also responsible for policy on Venezuela following the ouster of military leader Marcos Pérez Jiménez. The U.S. embassy in Caracas was informed on January 25, 1958, that a military junta had been formed "in accordance with the universal desires of the nation, in defense of the supreme interests of the republic, and in order to move toward a legally constituted democratic form of government." The interim government under the junta appeared to be popular. Rubottom recommended to Under Secretary of State Herter, acting at the time on Dulles's behalf, that the United States recognize the junta as the provisional government, citing its "receptivity to foreign investment" and anticommunist stance. President

Eisenhower approved this move, and the United States would remain deeply interested in Venezuelan politics in the coming years.<sup>187</sup>

As the U.S. government considered import controls to boost its oil industry during the recession of 1958, the State Department was highly sensitive to the likelihood that this would impact the new Venezuelan government. For this reason, Rubottom argued in the early spring of 1958, it was essential that “every effort should be made to explain to the Venezuelans the nature of the U.S. problem and to make this consultation meaningful rather than simply informative.”<sup>188</sup> The Venezuelans needed to be shown that they were partners in a joint venture with the United States.

There were significant bumps in the road early in the new partnership. In a conversation with Rubottom, Venezuelan Ambassador Hector Santaella expressed his confidence “that, despite temporary setbacks, Venezuela would attain an orderly, democratic form of government.” According to Santaella, Vice President Nixon’s brush with death in Caracas took place “in a politically effervescent atmosphere resulting from ten years of repressive dictatorship. [Santaella] recognized that freedom implies responsibility if complete chaos is to be avoided, and thought it imperative that such responsibility be developed.”<sup>189</sup> The anti-United States demonstrations, he said, reflected the sentiments of a very small minority. They should not obstruct the two countries’ cooperation.

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<sup>187</sup> Memorandum from Rubottom to Acting Secretary of State Herter, January 28, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. V, Microform Supplement.

<sup>188</sup> Rubottom, “Consultation with Venezuela on Petroleum Imports Problem,” undated, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. V, Microform Supplement.

<sup>189</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Rubottom and Santaella, undated, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. V, Microform Supplement.

Although the Eisenhower administration wanted to see democracy take hold in Venezuela, its commitment only went so far. In a meeting with Venezuelan Minister of Mines and Hydrocarbons Carlos Perez de la Cova, Secretary of State Dulles took a somewhat hard line against Venezuelan pushback on U.S. petroleum import restrictions. When Perez de la Cova proposed Dulles make a statement that the United States did not intend to restrict imports further, Dulles claimed in response, “No nation has taken as enlightened an attitude toward trade as the United States, nor has any other nation ever shown as much concern for the well being and the interests of its trading partners as has the United States.” Furthermore, the government of the United States had “shown just as much consideration for the Venezuelan oil industry as it has shown for its own.”<sup>190</sup> The sort of assurance that Venezuela wished was simply not possible.

A 1958 U.S. intelligence estimate highlighted the importance of Venezuelan democracy to hemispheric security interests. The authors wrote, “Venezuela’s present political situation reflects the strains inherent in a transition, in one generation, from an oligarchic social order toward a democratic welfare state.” These strains were to be expected, and the United States must do what it could in order to ease them. “A democratic Venezuela will continue to side generally with the West against the Soviet Bloc, in the UN and elsewhere, but this support will not be dependable in situations in which Western imperialism in underdeveloped countries is alleged.” The situation in Venezuela was believed to be fundamentally different from that in Guatemala in 1954, in which the Eisenhower administration

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<sup>190</sup> Memorandum of conversation of Dulles and Perez de la Cova, undated, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. V, Microform Supplement.

had felt compelled to oust the democratically elected leader Jacobo Árbenz. In this case, the intelligence community believed that, although they leaned left, current Venezuelan leaders saw communists as rivals, and were thus unlikely to succumb to subversion. At any rate, "If the present regime in Venezuela or an elected successor should be overthrown by a military coup, the event would be widely interpreted, in Venezuela and throughout Latin America, as the result of US connivance and as confirmation of the supposed US preference for dictatorships in the area."<sup>191</sup> It was viewed to be in the interest of the United States to help the new democratic government of Venezuela succeed.

This assistance took the form of working with the new president, Rómulo Betancourt. A left-leaning but strongly anticommunist politician, Betancourt understood the fine line that the Eisenhower administration felt that it needed to walk, and sought to use this to the advantage of his country, as well as his own. During a meeting in December 1958, just a week after his election, Betancourt had an initial encounter with the American ambassador, Edward J. Sparks, a career diplomat with extensive experience in Latin America. The ambassador congratulated Betancourt on his victory "and also expressed on behalf of the Department its satisfaction over the important contribution of the election to Latin America's democratic institutions in general."<sup>192</sup> Betancourt displayed great confidence in himself and his party, and emphasized his anticommunist stance and his friendship with the United States. The relationship had a cordial beginning.

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<sup>191</sup> Intelligence estimate, "The Venezuelan Situation and Prospects," undated, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. V, Microform Supplement.

<sup>192</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Betancourt and Sparks, December 14, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. V, Microform Supplement.

This initial warmth was tested quickly. Reports reached Washington that the Venezuelan government was raising its income tax, as well as increasing its share of oil revenues above the 50-50 split with producers that had been agreed upon previously. This would have an immediate impact on U.S. business interests in the country. State Department official C. E. Bartch lamented to his colleague Maurice Bernbaum that despite the United States's "overriding interest in matters affecting Venezuela's oil industry, we were neither consulted nor given any advance notification."<sup>193</sup> This lack of notice was particularly surprising because Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs Thomas C. Mann was in Caracas at the time the announcement was made. When questioned about this move by Mann, the Venezuelans responded that they had acted as a sovereign power. Mann rejoined that actions taken on such sensitive issues that affected substantial business and security interests were "inconsistent with Venezuela's insistence on consultation before U.S. unilateral action affecting Venezuela's interests. Consultation... is a two-way street."<sup>194</sup> The two governments were feeling each other out. The Venezuelans asserted determination to be treated as partners, even if they required the assistance of the United States. Eisenhower's State Department, meanwhile, was assessing Betancourt's susceptibility to frank and friendly pressure.

Shortly following his inauguration, Betancourt told Rubottom that one of his top priorities was to raise in the Organization of American States (OAS) the issue of expelling members ruled by dictatorships, specifically the Dominican Republic

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<sup>193</sup> Bartch to Bernbaum, December 24, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. V, Microform Supplement.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*



under Rafael Trujillo. In reply, Rubottom diplomatically “stated our policy of supporting the basic principles of the OAS, including non-intervention, and my conviction that this is fully compatible with the encouragement and growth of democracy.” He also questioned whether other members of the OAS would support such an initiative. Rubottom continued on a different tack: “I asked [Betancourt] what he thought of the Haitian exiles’ open call from Habana for the overthrow of [François] Duvalier who, whether or not a ‘good’ President, had been freely elected by the Haitian people after a year of chaos. Here was Cuba, in the first flush of victory over a tyrant, permitting attacks on a nearby government. Did he approve?” Betancourt replied that he did not have a position on this, but would look into it. He then turned to financial matters. With the large national debt inherited from Pérez Jiménez, Betancourt hoped to purchase military and other equipment from the United States at “token” prices. This apparently meant essentially at cost, if not cheaper. He said this was a “tangible way of helping and supporting his government.” Rubottom did not provide an immediate answer on behalf of his own government, but the stage had been set for another episode of liberal interventionism on the part of the United States.<sup>195</sup>

In a meeting with Ambassador Sparks, Betancourt proposed a cultural exchange program to foster closer relations between his country and the United States. He again requested bargain deals on military supplies. According to embassy records, “The President said that his military officers have told him that other Latin American countries, specifically Colombia and Brazil, are able to make purchases of

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<sup>195</sup> Rubottom report on Betancourt inauguration, February 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. V, Microform Supplement.

materiel in the United States on the basis of more or less token payments.” He was unfamiliar with these arrangements, but wanted to learn more. Betancourt admitted that his country had struggled in the past, but he hoped to solve its problems with the help of the United States. Finally, he requested that the recently proposed Inter-American Bank be based in Caracas. This was to be a liberal international financial institution with a development emphasis under the auspices of the OAS. In what would become a recurring theme, Sparks stated that he would forward these requests to his superiors in Washington for consideration.<sup>196</sup> There was little doubt, however, that Betancourt was turning out to be a promising partner for liberal intervention.

During the spring of 1959, the Eisenhower administration decided after negotiations with Ottawa to exempt Canada from the petroleum import controls rolled out the previous year. The State Department was immediately sensitive to the impact that this would have on Venezuela’s economy, as well as the potential effect on its nascent democracy. When Betancourt expressed concern about this development, Sparks was ready with a response. He explained that this step had been necessary because the administration could not satisfy the Canadians that they would be subject to the import restrictions while at the same time “our security plans are so completely and indistinguishably intertwined.”<sup>197</sup> Sparks also claimed that this step actually protected Venezuela’s market in Canada as it reduced the likelihood of the construction of an oil pipeline from Alberta to Montreal, the

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<sup>196</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Sparks and Betancourt, March 10, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. V, Microform Supplement.

<sup>197</sup> Memorandum of conversation between Sparks and Betancourt, April 27, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. V, Microform Supplement.

primary Canadian destination of Venezuelan oil. Betancourt accepted this, but believed it would require a tough sell to his people, who were used to their leaders protesting against such restrictions. He was also anxious to improve living conditions for his armed forces, and repeated his wish to make “token payments,” as he understood Brazil and Uruguay did, on military purchases from the United States in order to facilitate this.

With the objective of aiding Betancourt and Venezuelan democracy in the face of serious political, social, and economic issues, the State Department proposed to President Eisenhower in September 1959 the liberalization of residual fuel oil imports by the United States. Residual oil, heavy oil used for electrical generation and heating, constituted some 40 percent of Venezuelan exports to the United States. Following the introduction of import controls in 1958, and the exemption of Canada from those controls, the State Department hoped that such a step would be a sufficient boon for Venezuela to quiet calls there for nationalization of the oil industry. American diplomats hoped to maintain a free market economy in Venezuela to the extent possible, in the interest of U.S. business concerns as well as of Venezuelan democracy.<sup>198</sup>

At the same time, the U.S. International Cooperation Administration (ICA) sought to discontinue its activities in Venezuela because the country was wealthier than its Latin American neighbors, and therefore less needy. Rubottom pushed back against this, arguing that it was “contrary to the best interest of the United States.”

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<sup>198</sup> Memorandum from Acting Secretary of State Robert Murphy to Eisenhower (drafted by Thomas Mann), “Venezuela: Imports of Residual Fuel Oil,” September 10, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. V, Microform Supplement.

Although Venezuela's per capita income was higher than that of its neighbors, it had a similar standard of living and state of development in health, education, agriculture, and public administration. It had a one-product economy (petroleum) that required diversification. This had been neglected by the dictatorship, but was a top priority of the Betancourt government. For Rubottom, these circumstances indicated "that Venezuela's need for outside technical assistance is likely to be greater in the immediate future than has been the case in the past. The opportunity for the United States to participate in a sound and meaningful program is correspondingly greater."<sup>199</sup> Conditions were ripe for liberal intervention.

Furthermore, inability or unwillingness to respond favorably to requests by the Betancourt government would serve to confirm the widespread Latin American belief that the United States preferred dictators in the region. Therefore, it was "in the best interests of the United States to support the present Venezuelan Government insofar as possible and to maintain and improve our relations with it, as a bulwark against a recurrence of military dictatorship on the one hand or the establishment of a far left-wing regime on the other." For one reason or another, the United States had had to say "no" to many of Betancourt's requests. According to Rubottom, it needed to look for opportunities to say "yes."<sup>200</sup> Economic aid for development had the potential to be a primary liberal interventionist tool in Venezuela.

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<sup>199</sup> Memorandum from Rubottom to the ICA Deputy Director for Operations, "Mutual Security Program for Venezuela," September 25, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. V, Microform Supplement.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

This firmly aligned with the principal policy objectives for Venezuela that the embassy in Caracas submitted to Washington. The first: "To strengthen and support the present freely-elected democratic government as an ally of the Free World." Assistance to Venezuela under the Mutual Security Act, a continuation of the Marshall Plan, provided "concrete evidence of our continued interest in and support for Venezuela in these critical years of her democratic development following the overthrow of the dictatorship." The United States, *chargé d'affaires* Charles Burrows argued in Sparks's absence, must make "every reasonable effort to keep Venezuela friendly, politically stable, and economically prosperous."<sup>201</sup> The principal challenge lay, as in other cases of liberal interventionism, in determining what constituted a reasonable effort when U.S. involvement in the world during the post-World War II period took on a scope that surpassed anything in previous experience.

Deciding how to intervene in Latin America without appearing to seek empire was particularly challenging. In Cuba, much as in South Vietnam, the Eisenhower administration determined that a leader who espoused both democracy and anticommunism could not be found. Unlike in South Vietnam this led, at least temporarily, to effective discontinuation of an attempt to shape Cuba's political future. Venezuela's Betancourt, on the other hand, proved the sort of leader that policymakers believed to be receptive to the frank and friendly pressure of liberal interventionism to align with U.S. priorities. In part, as Brands argues, this resulted in Betancourt and others manipulating the United States even as their northern neighbors manipulated them.

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<sup>201</sup> Burrows to State Department, October 16, 1959, *FRUS* 1958-1960, Vol. V, Microform Supplement.

Balancing grand strategy against strategic cultural preference within the Western Hemisphere was a delicate issue with which the Eisenhower administration grappled until John F. Kennedy took office in 1961. This would remain extremely sensitive as the new president established the Alliance for Progress. Containment of communism and liberal interventionism were exceedingly precarious propositions in Latin America due to the United States's history in the region. The prevailing strategic culture, interacting with the containment grand strategy and influencing national policy, struggled to contend with widespread distrust of the United States resulting from decades of perceived imperialism in Latin America. Liberal interventionism under Eisenhower utterly failed in Cuba, and met with no more than moderate success in Venezuela.

## Conclusion

Although when viewed individually the episodes of liberal intervention in Italy, South Vietnam, and Latin America are distinct, together they provide a picture of a consistent strategic cultural context in which U.S. foreign policy decisions were made during the early Cold War. The liberal interventionist strategic culture helped to produce in Italy a vibrant republic and U.S. ally after 1948. Following the French Indochina War, the decision in 1955 not to support nationwide elections in Vietnam revealed the severe strain the containment grand strategy placed on liberal interventionism. Finally, this strategic cultural preference shaped an effort between 1958 and 1959 to make a break from the United States's imperialist past in the Western Hemisphere, as reflected by its government's response to the Cuban Revolution and the emergence of Venezuela from military dictatorship.

Promotion of liberal values and institutions grew out of a cultural preference that heavily influenced the enactment of the containment grand strategy. This cultural preference had its basis in democratic peace theory, uncertainty about how best to use the new global power of the United States, and fear of Soviet geographic and ideological expansion. In some cases during the early Cold War, the U.S. government under Truman and Eisenhower supported new (at least nominally) democratic governments. In others, most notably the cases of Iran and Guatemala, it did not. This was due to the perceived grand strategic imperative to contain communism. Democracy and liberal economies could only flourish in areas untainted by Soviet influence, according to the liberal interventionist paradigm. Containment came first in almost every instance of conflict. The established grand

strategy had the power to override the instinctive preferences of the strategic culture.

This conclusion accords well with the body of scholarship that examines the history of the Cold War on a macroscopic scale. Drawing from the work of Alexander George, John Lewis Gaddis suggests “that there exist for presidential administrations certain ‘strategic’ or ‘geopolitical’ codes, assumptions about American interests in the world, potential threats to them, and feasible responses, that tend to be formed either before or just after an administration takes office, and barring very unusual circumstances tend not to change much thereafter.”<sup>202</sup> These codes, understood as precepts of the strategic culture, remained remarkably consistent across presidential administrations during the early Cold War. As Odd Arne Westad argues, for U.S. leaders, behind complex strategic and alliance issues “lay a conviction that what had worked for the United States would also work for the world.... It was clear to American observers that just as trade carries products, products carry ideas.”<sup>203</sup> Liberal interventionism laid the political and economic foundations for this global transmission of ideas and values.

Yet if communism prevailed, there was no chance for this transmission. The key to understanding 20<sup>th</sup> century foreign policy, according to Frank Ninkovich, is to recognize “that it was continually haunted by the fear of terrible failure.”<sup>204</sup> During the early Cold War period, there could be no failure more terrible than to prevent Soviet geographic and ideological expansion around the world. Finally, the

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<sup>202</sup> Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, ix.

<sup>203</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 32.

<sup>204</sup> Ninkovich, 13.



understanding of the containment grand strategy operating in a liberal interventionist strategic cultural context fits squarely with Melvyn Leffler's assertion that U.S. officials, along with their Soviet counterparts, "intermittently grasped the consequences of the Cold War... and yearned for peace, but they could not escape their fears or relinquish their dreams."<sup>205</sup>

Challenging the concept of strategic culture itself provides the strongest argument against the assertion that nation building and democracy promotion by the United States during the early Cold War resulted from the prevailing strategic culture. It is by no means a straightforward concept. Attempting to define the attributes of a cultural setting that has explanatory power for the decisions of dozens or even hundreds of actors across a broad scope of time is a difficult and tenuous task. A plausible argument may be made that a nation building or liberal grand strategy existed alongside containment during the early Cold War that eliminates the need to evaluate strategic behavior as influenced by its cultural setting. This argument cannot explain, however, how one grand strategy could be prioritized over another. If multiple strategies coexist they would seem to have to be encompassed by a higher-order strategy, in which case they cannot really said to be "grand" strategies in the first place. Interpreting grand strategic behavior as influenced by a culture that can be defined, however roughly, provides the most effective means for clearly depicting the thought of a collective decision-making body such as the community of officials responsible for the national security of the United States during the early Cold War.

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<sup>205</sup> Leffler, 8.

There is great potential for further study of the early Cold War liberal interventionist strategic culture, and its relationship to the containment grand strategy. Episodes within the same period that might profitably have been added to this study include efforts to support South Korea after partition in 1948, the U.S. role in securing the independence of Indonesia under Sukarno in 1949, and involvement in the 1958 insurrection in Lebanon, to name but a few. With access to archives around the world in various languages, the frank and friendly pressure on display here could be understood through the eyes of Italians, Vietnamese, Cubans, and Venezuelans. Mining of additional primary source documents from other departments and agencies of the U.S. government, such as the Department of Defense and forerunners of Kennedy's Agency for International Development including the Mutual Security Agency, could provide an even richer view of the strategic culture in action than the records of the State Department on their own. There is also room for incisive study of the development of liberal interventionist preference from its antecedents, including the thinking and policy of Woodrow Wilson and the American missionary experience. Finally, scholarship on how the liberal interventionist strategic culture fared in the aftermath of the disastrous U.S. war in Vietnam holds great promise.

At its most basic level, the liberal interventionist strategic culture that prevailed among U.S. policymakers was normatively problematic. It was based on a narrow, often inflexible conception of liberal values and institutions. Policymakers' preferences and biases (both Western generally, and American specifically) shaped liberal interventionism profoundly. This contributed greatly to its inconsistent

success in the execution of policy. Crucially, the liberal interventionist values of democratic self-determination and anticommunism were frequently at odds. Although those influenced by the strategic culture espoused liberal values, they only favored self-determination if the people of the client state desired a liberal democratic government with an economy integrated in the global, U.S.-dominated market. Any action or preference that might be construed as potentially leading toward communism could not be tolerated. The bilateral nature, severely unbalanced in power terms, of liberal interventionist patron-client interactions in the era of international organizations is primarily attributable to the desire of U.S. policymakers to wield their country's strategic clout unchecked by the United Nations and other entities. This understanding sheds light on the drastically unequal nature of these relationships.

As time passed following World War II, any inkling that a foreign people might vote a communist government into power increasingly meant to U.S. policymakers either that the will of the people had been subverted, or they were not yet ready for self-government. Early on, as in the Italian elections of 1948, for example, the people of a client state might have wrongheadedly but legitimately elected a communist government. Later, this was unthinkable, as evidenced in Vietnam by 1955. This development had a crucial impact on U.S. searches for the "right leader" to support in each of the episodes studied. Italy's Alcide de Gasperi served as an early prototype. Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam, authoritarian though he might have been, was seen as the only suitably anticommunist leader who could unite and stabilize the country. Therefore, the Eisenhower administration stood

behind him. Once it became clear that Fulgencio Batista would fall from power, and subsequently that Fidel Castro could not be counted upon, the U.S. government essentially threw up its hands and walked away from Cuba. Finding an avowed democrat and anticommunist in Rómulo Betancourt created an opportunity productively to leverage frank and friendly pressure in Venezuela, but mistrust engendered by the imperialist past of the United States proved difficult to overcome.

The liberal international order that was the end goal of democratic peace theory was a pipe dream so long as liberal interventionist interactions were based upon radically unequal partnerships that stifled the democratic voice of the client state's citizenry. Failure on the part of American policymakers to recognize that they could not inject stature and political legitimacy into a leader or movement from outside led to excessive optimism about their ability to bring about the developments they sought. Sober assessment of the political and economic situation in potential client states, and evaluation of candidates who might be partners in a flexible and contingent effort were absolutely essential for liberal interventionism to succeed. This was often precluded in practice by the fear and uncertainty among policymakers endemic to the period. The imperatives of the containment grand strategy in the Cold War context meant that Italy, South Vietnam, Cuba, and Venezuela would remain dependent upon the United States for defense from Soviet expansion, whether ideological or territorial. In the end, no amount of frank and friendly pressure proved capable of transforming new governments into allies that could stand alongside the United States as real partners in the global struggle against the Soviet Union.

An understanding of the liberal interventionist strategic culture in which the containment grand strategy was enacted has great explanatory power for analysis of U.S. engagement with the world during the early years of the Cold War. It permits the rejection of notions of a nation building or liberal grand strategy that coexisted with containment on an unclear plane of priority. This analysis helps make sense of the inconsistency that caused the United States to embrace both democrats and authoritarians, and helped both to build and to topple newly formed democratic governments during this period. Frank and friendly pressure in promoting democratic governments and liberal economies was wielded by American leaders fearful of the postwar world in which they found themselves. Unsure of how to execute their nation's new global role, they were nevertheless determined to advance the interests of their country and to do good in the world.

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