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**WAS THE DOMINO THEORY WRONG?
COMMUNIST INTERNATIONALISM AND THE VIETNAM WAR**

BY

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WAS THE DOMINO THEORY WRONG?

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ABSTRACT

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In the spring of 1995, former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara said he now believes that the domino theory was wrong. The domino theory was the basis for the United States' national strategy of containment and the reason for entering the Vietnam War. This study will examine issues that support the concern for the domino theory and the need for the containment strategy. Topics that are developed include the situation of Southeast Asia, communist ideology, capability and investment, and the views of the leadership of North Vietnam. This analysis of the domino theory and the containment strategy includes an explanation on why the domino theory, although initially true, lost credibility in the 1970s.

The Vietnam War brings many vivid and painful images to the American people. Some see it as the war we lost. Many see it as the military effort that the politicians lied to us about. The famous quote that war is hell would surely fit our efforts in Vietnam. This terrible questioning feeling about Vietnam was not just for the military actions but for the political efforts as well. The reason for involvement in the Vietnam war was seriously challenged by the American people as the United States became more actively involved. Yet the war was part of the U.S. national strategy for providing security to our nation. National strategy, as defined in Joint Chiefs of Staff Publication 1, identifies the use of armed forces together with the political, economic, and psychological powers of a nation to secure national objectives. David Jablonsky, in his work, Time Cycle and National Military Strategy, talks about the "mission" of national strategy and states "even in the vast complexities of the modern world, the primary responsibility for achieving that mission still belongs to the military."¹ What was this national strategy?

The Vietnam War was a result of the national strategy of containment. The national strategy of containment demanded the U.S. stop communist aggression into the countries of Southeast Asia. This strategy was developed from a belief in the domino theory. The domino theory basically stated if one new country went communist in Asia then it would begin a chain reaction that would cause several more Southeast Asian countries becoming communist. The domino theory could then be seen as the instigator of significant U.S. policy and actions. The U.S.

national strategy of containment in Indochina was lived from 1950 until 1975 with firm commitment at first, then self doubt about objectives, ways, and means.

Was the domino theory correct? Did the U.S. need the national strategy of containment? How critical was the war in Vietnam in respect to the national strategy? Then Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara says now, "I think we were wrong. I do not believe that Vietnam was that important to the communists. I don't believe that its loss would have lead - it didn't lead - to Communist control of Asia."² So many lives were lost in the Vietnam War. To what extent did the domino theory lead us to failure?

It is important to explore former Secretary McNamara's views concerning the domino theory and North Vietnam. To understand the domino theory this paper will first examine the situation the U.S. was in that gave birth to the domino theory and the national strategy of containment. The ideology of communism must then be developed to understand the pressures on North Vietnam's political structure. Additionally the paper will review the communist efforts supporting North Vietnam during the war. How were the Communists countries helping North Vietnam and how would the North Vietnam leadership react to communist pressure as a result of this help? This study will examine several writings from the leaders of North Vietnam. With this analysis the work will address the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

This study will not evaluate U.S. actions in the Vietnam

War. The U. S. used its military as a significant tool to contain the spread of communism in Vietnam because of the belief in the domino theory. This paper will show the Marxist-Leninist dogma and the period (the situation of the 1960s to early 1970s) would have led to a stronger communist movement in Southeast Asia if not for the use of the U.S. military to uphold the national strategy of containment. This military action together with the political changes of the 1970s in the world had a critical impact on the domino concept. This paper will conclude that the domino theory was accurate for its time and this potential for major regional communist advances required the United States' national strategy to oppose the spread of communism.

The 1950's and 60's were violent times as the growth of communism was progressing and the superpower status of the United States emerged. A series of actions lead the way to the U.S. being intensely concerned about the spread of communism.

Communism, already established in the strong, military-oriented Soviet Union, was maturing in China in 1949. In this same year the Soviets acquired the atomic bomb and it seemed now communism was even stronger after World War II and "poised for further expansion."³ What would this potential expansion mean to the United States?

The United States' focus had been on the prevention of communism in Europe after WWII. The fall of Eastern European countries to the Soviet-lead communist machine required the United States' intense overwatch. With the rise of China and a

potential combined USSR/China threat in the east there emerged an interest in communist expansion in Indochina. The "long telegram" from George Kennan which argued for a containment policy against the Soviet Union would become policy.⁴ "The loss of Indochina, it was perceived could mean a chain reaction of communist takeovers in Southeast Asia - the domino principle espoused by Acheson and later by Eisenhower."⁵ This new combination of communist power, the Soviet Union and China, was serious. The National Security Council 68 document, which articulated the containment policy, begins, "The issues that face us are momentous, involving the fulfillment or destruction not only of this Republic but of civilization itself."⁶ How the U.S. leadership reacted would be critical.

The United States' concern for the growth of communism in Asia saw an initial U.S. military action. The U.S. helped the French in Vietnam as President Truman sent in a military advisor group to Saigon in May, 1950.⁷ President Eisenhower accepted the views of the domino theory and containment and stated the "Vietninh [sic] were an instrument of international communism."⁸ The movement for the United States to stop communism and develop a containment national strategy had begun and it was strongly tied to the 1950's combination of the two communist powers in the east.⁹ Vietnam, identified by these two presidents, seemed the likely next step for the spread of communism.

General Maxwell Taylor, President Eisenhower's Chief of Staff of the Army (CSA) (later CSA and Chairman, Joint Chiefs of

staff for President Kennedy and special consultant for President Johnson), sees the starting point of U.S. intervention in Vietnam as the granting of military and economic support to the French in 1950.¹⁰ This marks the beginning of the U.S. containment policy as well. With the establishment of the containment policy in Asia there were several actions that supported its growth during the 1950's and 60's. The Korean War demonstrated communist power in Asia. Independent of the Korean War, several Asian countries showed instability and movement towards communism. Finally, the technology advancement of the world would cause concern for the capabilities of the U.S. to stop the potential growth of communism. Each of these developments would give strength to the need for a national containment policy as a means to address the domino theory.

The Korean War was a key event concerning the U. S. understanding communism and the need for a containment policy. Although the U.S. threatened China with military action close to their border during the war, China's response with massive troop action was an indicator of their intent and capability. With the support and intervention of Communist China in North Korea in the later stages of the Korean War, the communists demonstrated the initial signs that they were prepared and willing to sacrifice to ensure the communist philosophy remained in the smaller countries of Asia. The U. S. understood the Chinese actions had repercussions in Indochina. US economic assistance to Vietnam grew "especially after China intervened there [Korea] in the fall

of 1950."¹¹ Although North Korea is not geographically part of Southeast Asia, China's involvement in the war was an indicator they were interested and capable of spreading communism and they would not be bullied by the United States. China's actions to protect their inroads with North Korea would support the need for the U.S. to maintain its containment policy in line with the domino theory.

There were several communist activities and movements also going on in the 1950's that gave support to the potential of the domino theory. Would China work to protect and support communist growth in South Vietnam as they did in Korea? Burma, Indonesia, Malaya, the Philippines, and India were all being courted by the communists.¹² Here were a clear set of dominoes. India's warming relations with the Soviet Union in 1954 was another signal that the possibility of one domino falling could cause more to follow.¹³ Finally the Soviet movement into the western hemisphere seemed to confirm the concern of communism spreading anywhere if unchecked. The communist movement taking hold in the United States' backyard with the rise of Fidel Castro in Cuba in 1959 firmly supported the idea of communism spreading and the call to a national strategy of containment.¹⁴ These country shifts and movements towards communism strengthened U.S. policy makers' belief in the domino theory and, as important, the need to do something about it.

Perceived gaps in U.S. technology was the third major area of concern that kept the domino theory alive and containment a

valid national strategy. Military assets were key players in this technology issue. In the mid-fifties the United States was concerned about it's military capability against the Soviet Union. The U.S. leadership saw a bomber gap and a missile gap with the Soviet Union.¹⁵ This perceived communist strength would allow the Soviets an upper hand in any serious confrontation in Indochina. "A zero-sum mentality prevailed. If you win, I lose."¹⁶ With a perceived military upper hand the communists could move into countries more directly, spread communism and threaten the U. S. if challenged.

The launching of Sputnik in 1957 and the beginning of the space race carried more evidence that the Soviets were ahead of the United States. This perceived technology advantage was thought to give them an edge against the United States.¹⁷ If this space technology advantage was the case, then the United States had to be concerned about the Soviet's increased power. This new power could be demonstrated by the expansion of their politics into the third world of Asia. The United States had to catch and surpass them in space technology to prevent the spreading of communism in Indochina. The technology race and the communist advances added fuel to the domino theory engine because if unchecked, space advantages would have added power to support the Soviet further expansion of communism.

We must review the significant ideologies of communism at this time to understand the key views of the communist movement. The major communist philosophies that were directing the Soviet

Union, China, and North Vietnam were the theories of Lenin, and Mao. These views would provide a glimpse into the minds and therefore direction of the communist leadership. Examining their writings provides an understanding about the intent of the communist movement in Southeast Asia. The essence of communism that applies to the domino theory must be identified. This study will look at Lenin first and discuss why a domino theory would make sense and why containment would be a logical reaction.

In Lenin's writings there is a significant theme that should be addressed in the review of the domino theory. The concept of communist internationalism is important to understand in trying to evaluate any credibility to the domino theory. In Lenin's Selected Works, VIII,366, dated May 19, 1919, he states:

We must declare to other nations that we are out-and-out internationalists and are striving for a voluntary union of the workers and peasants of all nations. This in no way precludes wars...We have never said a socialist republic can exist without military force. War may be a necessity under certain conditions.¹⁸

"Internationalism takes priority over nationalism", says Lenin in "The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky, 1918" and this is the "duty of the internationalist, of the revolutionary worker, of the genuine Socialist."¹⁹ Lenin states in his "Preliminary Draft of Theses on the National and Colonial Question, June, 1920," that the concept of internationalism is a critical foundation of communism. Lenin expands:

Proletarian internationalism demands, firstly, the subordination of the interests of the proletarian struggle in one country to the interests of the struggle on a world scale;

and secondly calls for the ability and readiness on the part of the nations which are achieving victory over the bourgeoisie to make the greatest national sacrifices for the sake of overthrowing international capital.²⁰

These concepts of internationalism with the ideas of world revolution to support a "fusion of nations"²¹ under communism are essential to the theories of Lenin. It is what the early Soviets, Chinese and Vietnamese will study and develop. It will be a significant element in the equation concerning the accuracy of the domino theory.

Lenin's beliefs about communism were a major force in the world after the Russian's October Revolution in the early 1900's. This vision of communism was clearly expressed by Nikita Krushchev in January, 1961. The famous speech to the Moscow Congress identified "national liberation movements in the Third World" and that "national liberation wars" were a part of the world order.²² This feeling did not fade over time.

How did the 1970 Russians see Lenin and his view of communism? This paper will use the writings of M. A. Suslov, the Secretary of the CC CPSU in 1971 to summarize the Soviet views of Lenin's teachings. First Russians felt communism was "the new epoch in the life of mankind."²³ Notice there is no identification of just one population but clearly all of mankind. Lenin wanted communism to have an impact on the world. Russians believed he professed an "international working class...to exert a determining and growing influence on world social development."²⁴ This is just one area of Lenin's communism

stressed by the Russians.

Lenin emphasizes internationalism and struggle. In an International Meeting of Communists and Workers Parties in Moscow in 1969, he spoke of the "struggle against imperialism for peace, national liberation, social progress, democracy and socialism."²⁵ Russians believed that according to Lenin the communist party was a "party of builders of socialism and communism...armed with a revolutionary theory and that it is profoundly true to internationalism and closely linked with the masses."²⁶ Lenin states:

Only the Communist party...is capable of leading the proletariat in a final, most ruthless and decisive struggle against all the forces of capitalism...it is only under such a party that the proletariat is capable of displaying the full might of its revolutionary onslaught...²⁷

The Soviets saw themselves as a "remarkable example" of the "new type of party" and for the "90 communist and working parties of the world."²⁸ Russians believed that of all stages of development of the world revolutionary process, loyalty to internationalism has been and remains a most important feature of activity of the Marxist-Leninist parties.²⁹ In the aforementioned Meeting of Communists and Working Parties, the principle link is the struggle against imperialism, ensuring the unity of world socialism and the communist movement, the widest unity of action of all anti-imperialist forces."³⁰ The Soviet Union understood internationalism and believed in a strong movement to communism throughout the world. They would struggle

to not only impede capitalism but also to spread communism. The masses of Southeast Asia would certainly be a proletariat, a likely group to struggle for communism. The writings of Mr. Suslov and Soviet thought on the communist doctrine according to Lenin support strong internationalism.

The leader of Communist China had strong views on communism as well. Chairman Mao developed his communist theories through his struggle for rule in China and used a warrior approach to communism. Mao, talking to the Chinese Communist Party Eight Congress in September, 1956 said, "to achieve lasting world peace...We must give active support to the national independence and liberation movement in countries in Asia..."³¹ He tied this struggle with a warrior attitude.

Mao believed war could only end "when human society advances to the point where classes and states are eliminated...war can only be abolished through war, and in order to get rid of the gun, it is necessary to take up a gun."³² Mao, like Lenin, agreed with Clausewitz and the linkage of war with politics. Mao's, in the period 1936-38 says, "War is a continuation of politics...war itself is a political action."³³ His political view, communism, would be spread by war.

Mao understood the movement to communism would take time. Mao did not change his views in 1957 when it looked like the Soviets might start a phase of peaceful coexistence with the U.S., "...the forces of socialism are overwhelmingly superior to the forces of imperialism."³⁴ Mao believed that the struggle

would be bit by bit, a sequential process that rings chillingly true to the domino theory when he states, "In war...the enemy forces can only be destroyed one by one...This is known as a piecemeal solution. In military parlance, it is called smashing the enemy forces one by one."³⁵ Over time Mao would unite the people and defeat the capitalists with force.

Mao took this struggle seriously. Mao identified his support to liberation movements as a concern for world war. Mao countered the arguments that actions in Asia would lead to a third world war between the Soviet Union and the United States with the logic that it would actually prevent World War III.

The United States and the Soviet Union are separated by a vast zone which includes many capitalist, colonial and semi-colonial countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Before the U.S. reactionaries have subjugated these countries, an attack on the Soviet Union is out of the question...The day will come when the U. S. reactionaries find themselves opposed by the people of the whole world...Only by victory in this struggle can a third world war be avoided; otherwise it is unavoidable.³⁶

Eventually Mao felt that communism must stop the imperialist spread in Asia and he had a lead role. He said in 1958:

...imperialism is still alive and kicking, still riding roughshod over Asia...It is the task of the people of the whole world to put an end to the aggression and oppression perpetuated by imperialism, and especially by U.S. imperialism.³⁷

Mao did see himself in a regional leadership position, reaching out to and securing the Asian countries with communism. "He had begun to see himself as the leader of the world revolution. 'We

support the people's liberation movements; we support the people's masses in the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America'."38 Mao gave himself a leadership role concerning communism in Southeast Asia and used warrior words. In Nixon's The Real War, China is described as "vigorous in its support of 'wars of national liberation'" and that Mao's direction was clear, "Every communist must grasp the truth: Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun."39 China led by Mao would be active in the Asian continent to stop the spread of U.S. imperialism, but more importantly, to spread the true socialism to the masses of Asia.

These insights into the Soviet and Chinese views are important to understand the credibility of the domino theory and the impact of communist philosophy on North Vietnam. It is critical to look at the support to North Vietnam that resulted from these communist philosophies to clearly understand how pressures could be brought to bear on the North Vietnam movement. These communist ideologies also raised expectations of future communist internationalism. Each of these significant communist powers provided assistance to North Vietnam and a summary of their support to North Vietnam is relevant to review. This review could identify potential obligations or commitments accepted by North Vietnam for the future.

The Soviet Union was a significant supporter of North Vietnam in many areas of diplomatic, military, and civilian operations. Douglas Pike identified the support of the Soviet

Union in his book, Vietnam and the Soviet Union. In the 1950's the Soviet Union was a strong supporter of the existence and rights of North Vietnam.⁴⁰ However this support seemed to change as the role of China became more significant. Through the late 1950's and early 60's Khrushchev began to change the nations view and "he and others in the Kremlin began to conclude that while their original policy-high posture in Asia remained essentially correct, it had to be pursued more cautiously, especially in Indochina."⁴¹ It seemed that the Soviets would support the North Vietnam actions but at arms distance and with caution. Their primary concern was with the actions of China.⁴² Pike saw Khrushchev ready to "wash his hands of truce supervision" by the middle sixties.⁴³ Support for North Vietnam would strongly resurface after Khrushchev was gone. We need to look at the Soviet aid to North Vietnam in some detail to understand the full commitment.

Military aid to North Vietnam was vital to their survival as "almost everything required had to be imported, there were no arms factories in North Vietnam."⁴⁴ "The 1950's show a "small but steady flow of such military hardware..."⁴⁵ This all changed after Khrushchev in 1965. The Kosygin Mission in February, 1965 "was devoted to chiefly planning overall war strategy and to determine Hanoi's future military needs for which the USSR would be responsible."⁴⁶ It was in grand scale. Upon termination of the war the USSR understood its investment in North Vietnam.

The Soviet Union, loyal to its
international obligation, provided

Vietnam with unlimited assistance in combat equipment...Soviet military experts in battle positions in Vietnam and in Soviet military academies helped train Vietnamese citizens as command cadres and military experts.⁴⁷

The Soviets were to remain key players in developing the military capability of the North Vietnamese.

The economic aid from the Soviet Union was significant to the stability of the North Vietnamese people and government. The total cost of the Soviet Union's support to the North Vietnam government ranges from 3.6 billion to 8 billion U.S. dollars.⁴⁸ The initial years of Soviet support was "modest." Later, "in 1960 the DRV launched its first Five-Year Plan (1961-65), an ambitious undertaking built around Soviet investment capital."⁴⁹ After 1965 the Soviet economic support was "geared to keeping the North Vietnamese War support system going."⁵⁰ The Khrushchev years were past. These actions were many and varied and included enlarging transportation and communication facilities, replacing shortage of stockage, fertilizer, loans, and providing economic aid for numerous types of tools and machinery.⁵¹

The Soviets contributed a significant effort to the Vietnam War. It could be attributed to the concept of internationalism. The Soviet expectation of the North Vietnamese after the war would be the critical point. Control of North Vietnam would be the issue and the "Soviet's strategic objective- gaining a foothold in Southeast Asia"⁵² would be the payoff. North Vietnam would be pressured to provide this Soviet foothold in Southeast Asia.

China had a historical and dynamic attachment to North Vietnam. North Vietnam and China have been intertwined throughout history. Jon Van Dyke, in his book, North Vietnam's Strategy for Survival, talks about the changing support from the Chinese. The peoples have mixed to include "an important community of some 50,000 overseas Chinese in North Vietnam, half of whom are in Haiphong."⁵³ They were also supported by mountain tribes strongly connected to Mao.⁵⁴ This support from China was present regardless of the war.

North Vietnam demanded much help from China because of the war. According to Van Dyke, China provided a wide range of support to North Vietnam. He stated the Chinese had impact on several requirements. The Chinese contributed greatly in unarmed personnel as workers and technical specialists. China also provided uniformed service personnel who operated the railroad system, built airstrips, and manned anti-aircraft positions on the rails. China contributed small arms and ammunition. The Chinese also provided transportation means including supply trucks and railroad boxcars.⁵⁵ This wide range of support covered many government transportation, construction, and defense needs.

Van Dyke also noted the Chinese support to the people. China was shrewd enough to include small consumer goods. These consumer goods would have a big impact when compared to Soviet support. The people would remember the direct aid of "thermos bottles, bicycle tires, plates, and pens."⁵⁶ China's support did

seem to cover a wide range of needs and would have an impact on a wide range of the population.

All was not strong support however. Van Dyke notes:

That even though the Chinese have contributed 70 percent of all goods in term of tonnage since 1965, the Chinese have fallen far behind that figure in terms of monetary value. The US Department of Defense estimated in 1967 that Chinese aid was about \$250 million, compared with some 750 million from Russia and Eastern Europe...⁵⁷

This shifting of support is mentioned by Van Dyke as a result of unrest along the border with Vietnam and the specific rejection of Chinese views concerning war strategy.⁵⁸ This growing apart at the end between the two countries would not have an impact on expectations of the Chinese towards North Vietnam involvement to further communist development activities. The teachings of Mao discussed earlier, supporting a world communist responsibility, would bring strong pressure on Vietnam to support communist internationalism in other parts of Asia. China pressured the Soviet Union. China certainly would pressure North Vietnam.

The concept of internationalism in communism supporting the domino theory and the role and impact of communism on North Vietnam should now be viewed from the perspective of the leaders of North Vietnam. What did they say about this expectation of world communism and internationalism? This study examines some of the significant North Vietnamese leadership writings during the timeframe of the Vietnam War. This paper considers the words used in these talks, speeches and interviews as insights into

North Vietnam's communist views and possible inclinations concerning the role of North Vietnam in spreading communism throughout Asia. What would North Vietnam do if pressured by the Soviet Union or China to continue to spread communism throughout Southeast Asia? What would North Vietnam do on their own initiative? Quotes have been taken from Ho Chi Minh, Le Duan, General Giap and several other significant leaders to identify the direction to North Vietnam. It is important to examine these words for clues to identify any aspect of support to the domino theory and thus a need for a national strategy of containment.

Ho Chi Minh was the leader of North Vietnam but he was more than that. He carried the heart of the North Vietnam movement to the world. It was said he was the "spiritual leader of the Vietnamese revolution...without Ho Chi Minh, there might not have been a Vietnamese revolution."⁵⁹ With this view of Ho's impact on Vietnam how did Ho react to communism? What did he say about the role of internationalism and communism? The first priority for Ho Chi Minh was Vietnam nationalism. This was his primary concern. However, Douglas Pike, in his book Vietnam and the Soviet Union, states that Ho Chi Minh felt communist internationalism strongly. Pike quotes Ho Chi Minh, "Each communist nation, large or small, said the Hanoi theoretician, has both national interest and international duty."⁶⁰ Ho believed this until he died.

Ho's last will and testament makes a strong statement for the unification of ideals between the Soviet Union and China and

the advancement of communism. He is "proud to see international Communist and workers' expand" and he further emphasizes this movement's role.

I want our party to do its best to contribute efficaciously to the reestablishment of good relations between the Communist powers, on Marxist-Leninist and international proletarian basis in conformity with the demands of the mind and heart.⁶¹

These words, written in May of 1969, were specifically for a role in world communism by the leader of North Vietnam's communist movement. This at the most telling time of his life. These specific feelings at this specific time were not lost on the leadership left behind as well.

During the same funeral ceremony Comrade Le Duan, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Vietnam at the memorial service for President Ho Chi Minh recognized the linkage of the international Communist movement and Ho Chi Minh as a "comrade resolute in battle."⁶² Further Le Duan clearly states that all of North Vietnam should:

Pledge ourselves to develop constantly the pure international sentiments that always inspired Ho Chi Minh; to contribute whole heartedly to reestablish and reinforce union within the Socialist camp and between the Communist powers, on the basis of Marxist-Leninist and proletarian internationalism; to tighten again the bonds of solidarity and friendship with the Indochinese peoples; to sustain with all our strength the revolutionary movements of other peoples...⁶³

This is the strong sense of internationalism inspired by the leader of North Vietnam.

During his life Ho Chi Minh wrote specifically about his views of communism. In a 1960 essay entitled, "The Path Which Led Me to Leninism", he firmly states his acceptance of communism and the thoughts of Lenin. Ho adds:

At first, patriotism, not communism, led me to have confidence in Lenin, in the Third International. Step by step, along the struggle, by studying Marxism-Leninism parallel with the participation in practical activities, I gradually came upon the fact that only socialism and communism can liberate the oppressed nations and the working people throughout the world from slavery.⁶⁴

It appears from start to finish Ho Chi Minh understood and supported the direction of communism and its impact with internationalism. If Ho had lived to see the take over of South Vietnam his words identify a strong inclination toward further international movement by the communist Vietnamese.

Mentioned earlier, Le Duan was a very significant player in the North Vietnamese hierarchy. His role and influence had great impact on the Vietnamese movement. Le Duan was for nationalism of Vietnam, but would he also move in the international communist spirit? In a conversation with Khrushchev in February, 1964 Le Duan argued with the Soviet leader concerning North Vietnam's efforts with China. The Soviet's wanted a more aggressive stance by North Vietnam against China. Le Duan "offered to back two other Soviet moves both of which had anti-Chinese overtones-in Laos, where the USSR was pressing for an international conference, and in Cambodia aimed at increasing Soviet presence

there."⁶⁵ This response in support of regional solidarity led by Soviet internationalism at the death of Ho Chi Minh appear as a clear indicator of how Le Duan would react if communist aggression were knocking down dominoes.

Truong Chinh was one of the two senior lieutenants of Ho Chi Minh. His efforts to create a nation of North Vietnam were heralded by Ho Chi Minh throughout his life. He too, respected the role of international communism. In a 1972 speech to the Vietnam Fatherland Front he emphasizes early, "Our people's resistance is aimed at not only national but also international goals...The Vietnamese revolution is an inseparable part of the world revolution."⁶⁶ Yes, it was an inseparable part of the Vietnam revolution then and would it be an inseparable part of the world revolution later? Would a communist Vietnam support other world countries reaching for communism? His words indicate internationalism was part of Vietnam's plan, and a part of the world revolution.

General Giap, the defense minister for Ho Chi Minh, was seen as a leader who was "going to make a substantial contribution to the political history of his country during the next twenty or thirty years..."⁶⁷ Mr. Robert O'Neill, in his book General Giap, recounts the internal acceptance of communism with Giap's own account. Giap says he,

...took the papers on communism climbed a tree and studied them, finding great intellectual satisfaction in idea of a total overthrow of the current order and in the principle of a peaceful international community linked by the bonds of Communism.⁶⁸

According to O'Neill, real power did not come to Giap until 1964. In an article reported in FBIS in February, 1972 entitled, "Arm the Revolutionary Masses and build the People Army. Pt 3", Giap defines the communist movement in North Vietnam and describes the meaning of their actions. He feels it is important to state, "Our people have successfully carried out and continue to successfully wage the second sacred resistance...and contribute to the revolutionary cause of the peoples of various nations throughout the world."⁶⁹ He too felt the power of the international movement concerning communism.

Pham Van Dong, a Vice Chairman of the National Defense Council under Ho Chi Minh showed strong signs of the support for internationalism under communism. He was openly critical of a major communist power when a lack of international spirit was demonstrated. Pham Van Dong was outwardly concerned about the Soviet's actions concerning the United States which looked to him as hurting Hanoi's goals. Dong predicted that "'big power detente' would create conditions in which small nations can be 'repressed'."⁷⁰ Author Douglas Pike thought it was clear that North Vietnam was feeling negative support from the Soviets as the USSR tried to create a less belligerent position with the United States. Pike wrote it seemed not to matter to Dong if the Soviet's lack of support would prevent nuclear war. Dong was concerned about the lack of international support to North Vietnam's communist efforts. This concern took priority in his view of other actions from the Soviet Union. Clearly Pham Van

Dong understood the threat and impact of nuclear war. Is this not a very serious dedication to communist internationalism as a responsibility? Although this statement was for the support of their nationalist movement, it is an indicator of how far North Vietnam would view international responsibilities to other nations attempting to create new communist countries.

The internationalist direction of communism reached many in leadership roles. The Minister of Agriculture, Hoang Anh, acknowledged the teachings of Leninist international communism and the obvious views from Ho Chi Minh. Concerning aid from abroad Hoang Anh stated in 1966:

our people highly value and strive to win the sympathy and support from the fraternal socialist countries and from the progressive people of the world...We are exerting all our strength to fulfill this international duty.⁷¹

Internationalism was a reality for the leadership of North Vietnam. It was something they needed to draw upon during their nationalist struggle. It would be a possible debt they would have to pay if they became independent and were asked for help.

The actions of this time period support communist expansion and the domino theory, and the ideology, investment, leadership inclination, and involvement also emphasized this internationalist activity. These issues support the domino theory and a need for a national strategy.

Then why did Southeast Asia not fall to communism? Was it because the domino theory was incorrect? No. The domino theory was accurate for the time. Although the theme of this paper is

to identify why the domino theory was correct, it is important to provide a brief explanation on why the theory did not take hold after 1975 in Southeast Asia.

Several significant factors that could not be foreseen in the sixties, which occurred in the late sixties and early seventies thwarted the domino effect. These events included the deaths of key god-like leadership (Ho Chi Minh and Chairman Mao); the concern for nuclear war from the Soviets and their movement towards detente with the United States; and the U.S. commitment in Vietnam. The deaths of these two great Asian communist leaders caused a direction vacuum that prevented the domino theory from moving ahead. Remember these two were spiritual leaders to their people. Both new leaders had to look internally to ensure their survival. Their loss weakened the communist movement.

As for the Soviets, their buildup in the sixties developed "to the point where in the early 1970's it had attained rough equivalency with the United States in strategic capabilities."⁷² Focus on Vietnam needed to be reevaluated. Henry Kissinger supports, in The White House Years, USSR's warming to the United States, stating the US/USSR summit in 1972 was to preclude the Soviets "worst nightmare" of a bond between the US and China.⁷³ The Soviets would not directly confront the United States in Indochina and cause the U.S. to move towards China. Together with the commitment of the United States in Indochina and the fear of a US/China bonding, the Soviets looked elsewhere. This may be

one aspect for their movement into Afghanistan in 1979. The Soviets would not look to overtly confront the United States and expand communism in Indochina in the future.

The actions of the United States military during the Vietnam War were controversial. This paper has not discussed how the U.S. fought in Vietnam, but the fact is the U.S. was there (the nation's longest war), there longer than the communists expected. This showed a commitment the communists did not expect.⁷⁴ Kissinger states that Nixon's commitment to the war and defeating the "military collapse of South Vietnam" in the early seventies kept the US/USSR summit alive.⁷⁵ This military commitment, indirectly helping the summit, deepened the rift between the USSR and China. With these actions, the drive to expand communist influence in Southeast Asia slowed and the domino theory lost power.

The domino theory was an accurate theory. It was accurate for the 1950's and 60's. Critical events, some caused by the U.S. national strategy, in the 1970's defeated the potential completion of the theory. However the United States was correct in establishing a national strategy of containment to deal with real and potential communist expansion in Southeast Asia. The Korean conflict and communist movements through Asia supported communism's spreading influence. The political view, military capability, and investment of the communist powers supported it. The communist dogma and inclinations of the North Vietnam leadership supported it. In the end the domino theory was not

proven completely true. It did not occur because of the deaths of critical Asian leadership, the Soviet desire for detente, and the U.S. commitment in Vietnam. This paper supports the domino theory. There was always a need to address it with a national strategy. It was important to the United States and to the world. Former President Nixon wrote in his book, The Real War, "The dominoes have always taken the 'domino theory' seriously- only in the fashionable salons of the West was it scoffed at."⁷⁶ With all due respect Secretary McNamara, you are wrong.

ENDNOTES

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53. Jon M. Van Dyke, North Vietnam's Strategy for Survival (Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1972), 219.
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