BALANCING EMPIRES:

COMPETITIVE DECOLONIZATION IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

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IN A SPEECH before the House of Commons in 1826, Foreign Secretary George Canning defended his decision not to fight France in order to right the power imbalance created by Charles X's invasion of Spain. "No," he declared, "I looked another way—I saw materials for compensation in another hemisphere. Contemplating Spain, such as our ancestors had known her, I resolved that if France had Spain, it should not be Spain '*with the Indies*'." Emphasizing Britain's support for the newly independent states of Central and South America, Canning concluded that "I called the New World into existence, to redress the balance of the Old."[1]

This bit of classic diplomacy highlights a central tendency in international relations that analysts commonly overlook. In the pursuit of international balance, states seek not only to enhance their own capabilities but also to weaken the capabilities of others. Where most analysts focus on a "capabilities aggregation" model of international politics,[2] in this article, we highlight its inverse, what might be called a "capabilities disaggregation" model. Although this category is actually quite broad, as explained below, we focus on one particular tactic that reveals clearly its central logic: support for independence movements in a target's empire, a policy we term "competitive decolonization." This was historically an important means, as Canning recognized, of redressing an imbalance of power.

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1. Quoted in Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed., rev. (New York: Knopf, 1978), 198 (emphasis in original).

2. James D. Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances," *American Journal of Political Science* 35, no. 4 (November 1991): 904–33.

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The first section below outlines the strategy of capabilities disaggregation and the tactic of competitive decolonization. We deduce eleven hypotheses that predict when this tactic is more (or less) likely. The main body of the essay examines five cases: French support for the thirteen colonies in North America during the Revolutionary War, America's seemingly contradictory role in Southeast Asia of opposing colonialism in Indonesia while aiding it in Indochina, and Soviet policy toward Indonesia and Indochina. These cases demonstrate the robust nature of competitive decolonization.

The concluding sections address implications of this discussion for the study of international relations and contemporary policy. Despite the passing of the classic European empires, the strategy of capabilities disaggregation continued to be a tactic that both superpowers employed during the cold war against their adversary's informal empire. This was exemplified by Soviet support for "national liberation movements" on several continents and the "Reagan Doctrine" of backing anticommunist "freedom fighters" wherever they might arise.[3] With the end of the cold war, political instability in many regions of the world has created new opportunities for external meddling in internal political unrest. Competitive "decolonization," perhaps directed at an opponent's home territory, may become even more common in the future. This creates new demands for understanding the potential and dynamics of foreign intervention in territorial changes within and between states.

DISAGGREGATING CAPABILITIES

BALANCE OF power theory is often described as the theory of international politics. Neorealists have formulated this theory in its starkest and most axiomatic form: in any anarchic system in which the units wish to survive, they predict, balances of power will tend to recur.[4] Balancing has been criticized as an incomplete description of the alternatives available to states, and neorealism has been criticized as an incomplete theory, but few dispute that balancing remains one of the central tendencies of states and of the international system.[5]

3. See Peter W. Rodman, *More Precious Than Peace: The Cold War and the Struggle for the Third World* (New York: Scribner's, 1995).

4. See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979).

5. For our purposes here, differences between balance of power and balance of threat theories are not central and we do not differentiate between these two variants. On the former, see Waltz, *Theory*; on the latter, Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). On other strategies, see Paul W. Schroeder, "Alliances, 1815–1945: Weapons of Power and Tools of Management," in *Historical Dimensions of National Security Problems*, ed. Klaus Knorr (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1976); and Paul W. Schroeder, "Historical Reality vs. Neorealist Theory," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994): 108–48. On neorealism as an

It is commonly postulated that states, when faced with a threat from abroad, act either to strengthen their own capabilities, a strategy referred to as "internal balancing," or pool their resources and efforts with others, a strategy known as "external balancing."[6] The latter, in turn, subsumes a range of specific policies from forming an alliance to building an empire.[7] These strategies of internal and external balancing are often presented as exhausting the logical possibilities.[8] Both are commonly used to aggregate capabilities and balance power within the international system. Nonetheless, another set of equally important strategies also exists.

Power is a relative concept. A's ability to get B to do something B would otherwise not do is defined only within a dyadic relationship.[9] The capabilities that allow A to influence B do not exist in isolation; they matter only relative to the capabilities of B. Knowing Belgium's GNP, for example, tells us little about her power. This indicator takes on meaning only when measured against the GNP of, say, the United States, which is roughly thirty-seven times larger, or France, which is more than six times larger.[10]

The relative nature of this concept implies that states can increase their power by enhancing their own capabilities or by reducing the capabilities of others. Indeed, decreasing an opponent's capabilities is functionally and politically equivalent to increasing one's own. Although not commonly thought of in terms of the balance of power, reducing the capabilities of foes was central to the cold war policy of containment, which sought to limit further gains by the Soviet Union in the international arena and to isolate its economy and polity so as to hasten its demise.[11] Capability disaggregation is also central to "relative gains" explanations of the failure of cooperation under anarchy, which imply that states prefer to forfeit possible gains for themselves

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incomplete theory, see Paul Papayoanou, "Economic Interdependence and the Balance of Power," *International Studies Quarterly* 41 (1997): 113–40.

6. Waltz, *Theory*, 116–28.

7. On alliances, see Walt, *Origins of Alliances*. On theories of imperialism, see Michael W. Doyle, *Empires* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986). For a discussion of these security relationships as arrayed along a continuum, see David A. Lake, *Entangling Relations: American Foreign Policy in Its Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 24–31.

8. See Waltz, *Theory*, esp. 118.

9. This classic definition of power is from Robert A. Dahl, "The Concept of Power," *Behavioral Sciences* 2, no. 3 (July 1957): 201–15. See also David A. Baldwin, "Power Analysis and World Politics: New Trends versus Old Tendencies," *World Politics* 31, no. 2 (July 1979): 161–94, and Jeffrey A. Hart, "Three Approaches to the Measurement of Power in International Relations," *International Organization*, 30 no. 2 (spring 1976): 289–305.

10. These ratios are for 1984 and based on figures in Walt, *Origins of Alliances*, 289.

11. On containment, see John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); and Michael Mastanduno, *Economic Containment: CoCom and the Politics of East-West Trade* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

in order to deny the target perhaps even greater gains.[12] These are both strategies of denial, where the object is to weaken an opponent even at some cost to oneself.

Like the capabilities aggregation model, disaggregating the capabilities of a target takes two principal forms. In a tactic of *sabotage*, the aim is to weaken the other state by undermining its domestic capabilities, either by strangling its economy, fomenting internal political dissent, or spreading information (whether true or false) that contradicts the opponent's official government "line." In the classic but underappreciated tactic of *divide and conquer*, the goal is to break up the other state's security relationships, whether these are alliances or empires. These tactics, along with those of the capabilities aggregation model, are summarized in Table 1.

Although they are alternatives at the margin, these four tactics are complements and may all be pursued—to a greater or lesser extent—simultaneously. At low levels of threat, one tactic may be sufficient to protect the state from an opponent; at higher levels, states may choose to pursue all four, although perhaps not in identical proportions. The complementary nature of these four tactics makes a theory of "grand strategy" difficult. As demonstrated by critics of neorealist balance of power theories, we currently lack well-developed explanations of any single tactic. We are even further from a completely specified theory that integrates the various options.[13] Nonetheless, in a preliminary fashion, we can identify conditions that make any tactic more or less likely. In the remainder of this article, we focus on competitive decolonization. This means of weakening target states is particularly clear historically. We also believe it is generalizable to the broader class. We focus on it here to emphasize the importance of capability disaggregation and to demonstrate the plausibility of the general model.

COMPETITIVE DECOLONIZATION BETWEEN OPPONENTS

In systemic theories, imperialism is explained as one way in which a state can attempt to enhance its own security in an anarchic world.[14] Just as alliances increase the capabilities of a state by aggregating its resources and capabilities with those of others, empires expand the power of imperialists. If empires

12. See Joseph M. Grieco, *Cooperation Among Nations: Europe, America, and Non-Tariff Barriers to Trade* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), and David A. Baldwin, ed., *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

13. For "state-of-the-art" but separate models of internal mobilization and alliance formation, see Robert Powell, *In the Shadow of Power: States and Strategies in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). For an attempt to integrate only the capabilities aggregation models, see Lake, *Entangling Relations*.

14. For example, Benjamin J. Cohen, *The Question of Imperialism: The Political Economy of Dominance and Dependence* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 229–58; and Doyle, *Empires*, 26–30.

Table 1

MODES OF BALANCING

Site of balancing strategy	Purpose of balancing strategy: IMPROVE ONE'S OWN CAPABILITIES	Purpose of balancing strategy: WEAKEN CAPABILITIES OF OTHERS
INTERNAL	*Internal mobilization*	*Sabotage*
	Examples: Stimulate economic growth Extract resources Promote nationalism and strategic myths	Examples: Employ economic warfare Support dissident groups Propagandize
EXTERNAL	*Security Relationships*	*Divide and Conquer*
	Examples: Form alliance Consolidate sphere-of-influence Build empire	Examples: Fracture opposing alliance Promote conflicts of interest between members of opposing coalitions Break up opponent's empire

enlarge capabilities, it follows that states can seek to enhance their own power by dismantling the empires of others, thereby reducing the territory, population, and resources under the control of real and potential opponents. This process of competitive decolonization is typically accomplished with the least cost—that is, without committing military forces of one's own—by supporting independence movements within the possessions of others and recognizing the sovereignty of such movements once they claim power (see below). At the very least, support for such independence movements forces imperial states to commit resources to maintaining their control. At most, it creates new states dependent upon and indebted to their supporters and alienated from their former rulers.

To explain the choice of competitive decolonization, we build upon a simple model of the state as an agent for its politically relevant population (its "selectorate") that seeks to provide security in the most efficient way possible. In other words, no group nor the state has an incentive, it is assumed, to intentionally waste resources that might be put to other valuable uses.[15] From this foundation, we can predict when strategies of competitive decolonization will be more attractive. Three sets of considerations are important: the level of threat, the imperial bargain, and the costs to the balancing state.

The more competitive or threatening the international environment facing states, the more effort they will devote to providing security. In responding to threats, states are likely to adopt all four balancing strategies identified above. Even if competitive decolonization is not the most cost effective option at first, the decreasing marginal returns from other tactics are likely to render it increasingly attractive as threats increase. This same principle suggests that weaker states, which possess a higher marginal return to balancing for any given level of effort, will be more aggressive in seeking to dismantle the empires of their opponents, all else held constant. This implies the following comparative static hypotheses:

H1: States will support independence for the imperial territories of others as a means of enhancing their own position in the balance of power.

H2: As threats to their security increase, states are more likely to engage in competitive decolonization. States are most likely to support independence for another's possessions during periods of intense rivalry or war.

H3: Weaker states are more likely to engage in competitive decolonization against more powerful states than the reverse.

15. This conforms with now standard logic of systemic and, specifically, neorealist theories of international politics. It differs from neorealism only in allowing the state to possess multiple goals, one of which is security; indeed, the existence of multiple goals is important for motivating the efficient production of security. For a more complete defense of these assumptions, see Lake, *Entangling Relations*, 39–44.

All imperial relationships are based upon a "bargain" between the dominant state and its colony.[16] This bargain may be freely negotiated, in which case both sides must benefit from the relationship. It may also be coerced, with the colony acquiescing in its subordination only to avoid an even more unpleasant punishment. In this imperial bargain, the dominant state often gets direct benefits from the subordinate, including strategic bases and privileged access to the local market. The dominant state also receives indirect benefits from its formal political control, reflected primarily in a reduced risk that the colony, as an independent state, might act in ways that contravene its interests. The imperial state receives these benefits, however, only by bearing some cost of governance, including the real costs of colonial administration and sidepayments to local leaders or groups who might otherwise contest external rule. The colony, in turn, cedes independence in exchange for either some share of the benefits of empire, such as protection from other threats or privileged access to the metropole's markets, or to avoid a costly punishment inflicted by the dominant power.

It follows that the greater the net benefits of empire to the imperial powers, the more likely other states will be to engage in competitive decolonization. The logic is straightforward. The greater the benefits relative to the governance costs of empire, the more rewarding the relationship is to imperial states and the larger the "loss" if the colonies become independent. The greater the benefits of empire, in turn, the greater the incentives for others to disrupt these relationships. Competitive decolonization is, thus, most attractive to balancing states when empire "pays" or provides large net benefits to the imperialists.[17] Conversely, when colonies are costly on net to imperial powers, states are unlikely to pursue competitive decolonization. In this case, the balancing state might prefer that the imperial power retain its empire, but the target state is likely to divest itself of its costly colonial albatross.[18] We may observe decolonization in such instances, but for unilateral reasons distinct from the logic of competitive decolonization we

16. This is true for all security relationships, but we focus here only on empires. See Lake, *Entangling Relations*, 58–65.

17. The definitive study of the economic benefits of empire is, Lance E. Davis and Robert A. Huttenback, *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire: The Political Economy of British Imperialism, 1860–1912* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

18. It remains an analytic possibility that balancing states will seek to entrap target states into debilitating and costly empires. We can find no clear historical examples of this tactic, however. Germany's attempts to incite conflict between the United States and Mexico to keep the former out of the First World War, and Che Guevara's call to draw Washington into "many Vietnams" may contain elements of this logic. See Barbara Tuchman, *The Zimmerman Telegram* (New York: Ballantine, 1979); Cole Blasier, *The Hovering Giant: U.S. Responses to Revolutionary Change in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1976), 108–16; and Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1997), 719.

examine here. Noting that we present only a partial theory of decolonization, our logic suggests that:

H4: The greater the net benefits of empire to target states, the more likely other states are to engage in competitive decolonization.

There are three primary costs to states from engaging in competitive decolonization. The first and perhaps most important costs to the balancing state are the resources transferred to the indigenous independence movement or expended directly to promote decolonization. The greater these costs, the less likely states are to seek to break up the empires of their opponents. This directly implies:

H5: The larger the costs of breaking up an opponent's empire, the less likely states are to engage in competitive decolonization.

The second set of costs to balancing states arises from weakening the principle of empire or strengthening the principle of national self-determination. The bargain or relationship between metropole and colony rests, in part, on the legitimacy of empire. If the principle of foreign rule is under-mined, all empires become more tenuous. Thus, supporting independence movements and seeking to break up the empires of opponents may also damage a state's control over its own subordinate possessions. This suggests:

H6: States with large imperial holdings will be less likely to engage in competitive decolonization.

Finally, states also incur costs from competitive decolonization in the risk that target states will retaliate against them. Retaliation can take many forms, of course, from the target stiffening its own internal balancing efforts to launching a preventive war against the balancer. All are costly. It is difficult, however, to distinguish retaliation from balancing behavior more generally. If one state balances against another by increasing its own power, or weakening its opponent, that opponent can be expected to respond in some similar manner. Balancing is an interactive process in which states act strategically with regard to one another—and other states in the system. Competitive decolonization may precipitate a response from an opponent, but so would *any* balancing strategy. Moreover, if the target possesses options that would improve its power position relative to the balancer, it should pursue those options regardless of the balancer's decision to engage in competitive decolonization. If preventive war creates benefits for the target state, for instance, those benefits will exist whether or not the balancer attempts to break up its empire. Competitive decolonization may ratchet up levels of tension between states, but its independent costs, above and beyond the competition between two states, are hard to discern. Nonetheless, it does

stand to reason that the greater the likelihood of retaliation, the less likely a state is to balance, in general, and to engage in competitive decolonization, in particular. In short, we predict that:

H7: States will moderate their policies of competitive decolonization when the target is likely to retaliate in a costly fashion.

Although less central to our analysis and although the cases below were not chosen to test this implication directly, the nature of imperial bargains and the costs to balancing states combine to suggest which colonies are the most likely to be objects of competitive decolonization. By the same logic as in H5, states will target the colonies of others that provide the largest net benefits, and generally ignore those colonies that provide small net benefits. All else held constant:

H8: States engaging in competitive decolonization will focus their support and assistance on those possessions that provide the largest net benefits to imperial powers.

Moreover, since we assume that they seek to minimize their costs, we further predict that states will target those colonies in which the imperial bargain has already become frayed and can be most easily broken. Whether as cause or effect, large indigenous independence movements are likely to indicate that the imperial ties have weakened and that the colonies can be lured away from their metropoles with relatively small efforts or contributions of resources. This implies:

H9: The stronger the movement for independence in an opponent's empire, the more likely states are to engage in competitive decolonization.

There is, of course, a tradeoff between the benefits of competitive decolonization captured in H8 and the costs that underlie H9. For states seeking to realign the international balance of power, beneficial but politically vulnerable colonies are the most attractive objects for competitive decolonization; supporting independence movements in such areas will produce the greatest damage to imperial states at the lowest cost to themselves. In all cases, however, balancing states must optimize between the damage caused to the metropole and the costs to themselves of stimulating and supporting independence movements. This implies that it may not be the "crown jewels" or most important colonies that are the targets of competitive decolonization, nor will it necessarily be the ones that are most "ripe" for revolt. Rather, states will target the colonies of their opponents that yield that most "bang" for the "buck." Holding the conditions for the other constant, however, both hypotheses 8 and 9 can hold simultaneously.

COMPETITIVE DECOLONIZATION BETWEEN ALLIES

When two states are locked in struggle, competitive decolonization can be an efficient means for one state to weaken the other. Under these circumstances, a small amount of aid and assistance may have a dramatic effect on the balance of power. Even when two states are allied, however, there may be opportunities to gain from competitive decolonization. Allies seldom have perfectly congruent interests. Moreover, they may look to the future and seek to mold the rules of the international system to their advantage. As a result, as well as balancing against enemies, states seek to construct intra-alliance balances of power that favor themselves.[19] This also creates incentives and opportunities for states to further their own interests by supporting independence movements within the possessions of their allies.

In general, the logic of intra-alliance competition is similar to that above. All of the propositions except H2 carry through to relations between allies. The calculus of intra-alliance bargaining, however, is slightly more complex. A state must balance its alliance with the imperial power, and the benefits to its own security that flow from that alliance, against its interests in consolidating its influence over the alliance. This suggests that the state will often have to moderate its support for colonial independence if pushing the matter aggressively could disrupt an existing alliance or alienate an ally. A state seeking to consolidate its influence over an alliance must also calculate the likely alignment of the now independent colony. While it wants to improve its bargaining position relative to its allies, it does not want to reduce the overall capabilities of its coalition. This implies that a state will support indigenous demands for independence when the colony is likely to remain within the alliance and move into its own sphere of influence and oppose demands for independence when the colony will join a hostile alliance. In other words, when the colony belongs to an ally, the state's decision to engage in competitive decolonization is contingent upon whether it expects the freed colony to join up with it or an opposing coalition. This more complex set of tradeoffs suggests two further hypotheses:

H10: States will engage in competitive decolonization against an ally when the former colony (newly independent state) is expected to remain within their alliance or join their sphere of influence.

H11: States will abandon or moderate tactics of competitive decolonization when they would otherwise disrupt intra-alliance relations or otherwise jeopardize hoped-for cooperation with other metropolitan powers.

19. On intra-alliance bargaining, see Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Michael Doyle divides theories of imperialism into metrocentric (cause lies in the dispositions of imperial states), pericentric (cause lies in conditions of colonial polities), and systemic (cause lies in interactions of imperial states) variants.[20] We offer here a systemic theory of imperial breakup. Like the capability aggregation models of imperialism, however, capability disaggregation theories also come in metrocentric and pericentric versions.[21] Even though such theories have not been explicitly developed, it is possible to infer their broad outlines from existing literatures.[22]

Much of the literature on decolonization, and especially the large number of case studies on successful movements within colonial areas, has focused on the strategies and choices of indigenous political leaders and how they struggled to victory over the greater or lesser opposition of the imperialist states.[23] This literature provides a useful baseline and even a null hypothesis for our study, namely that decolonization is the result of an autonomous struggle by indigenous peoples to throw off the yoke of imperialism. The case material below, however, suggests serious problems with this traditional view. In each instance we examine, a third party was deeply involved in the struggle and may have been crucial to the outcome. Our cases were not chosen to test this hypothesis fully, but they imply that, at least, the pericentric view needs to be substantially qualified.

Metrocentric theories of anti-imperialism appear in three principal forms. First, and perhaps most commonly, anti-imperialist ideologies are posited as causes of third party support for colonial independence.[24] Although their own

20. Doyle, *Empires*, 22–30.

21. The literature on decolonization does not distinguish sharply between pericentric and metrocentric theories. Unlike theories of imperialism, where these variants are quite distinct, scholars of decolonization typically recognize that changes in the imperial states stimulated by the Second World War and the rise of national independence movements conjoined to pro duce decolonization. For overviews of this literature, see M. E. Chamberlain, *Decolonization: The Fall of the European Empires* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985); and R. F. Holland, *European Decolonization, 1918–1981: An Introductory Survey* (London: Macmillan, 1985).

22. We also examined the literature on extended deterrence as another possible source of insight. This literature, however, deals with threats and, in cases of deterrence failure, the outbreak of conflict between opposing states. It sheds little light on the *means* states choose to balance against foreign threats. See Ted Hopf, *Peripheral Visions: Deterrence Theory and American Foreign Policy in the Third World, 1965–1990* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994); and Paul K. Huth, *Extended Deterrence and the Prevention of War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

23. For example, see the essays in Timothy K. Welliver, ed., *African Nationalism and Independence* (New York: Garland, 1993); and those in Prosser Gifford and William Roger Louis , eds., *Decolonization and African Independence: The Transfers of Power, 1960–1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

24. For a particularly clear example, see Robert L. Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists, 1898–1900* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968).

behavior was often at odds with their anti-imperialist beliefs, both the United States and Soviet Union have long histories of opposing European colonialism and, thus, their behavior seems to support this approach. Ideology, however, cannot account for French support for American independence; as noted below, France had every reason, including ideology, not to back the American colonists in their struggle with Britain. Nor, as we shall see below, can ideology explain the frequent withholding of support for colonial independence movements by the United States and Soviet Union for reasons of intra-alliance unity. This suggests that ideology may complement the systemic motivations we identify but cannot by itself provide a complete explanation.

Second, imperialism is frequently explained in terms of domestic political and economic motivations. Various authors have posited that imperialism arises from atavistic elites, capitalism, or cartelized societies that logroll incompatible policy objectives.[25] These theories do not explicitly discuss decolonization, but they imply that it should be associated with changes in political regimes within imperialist states.[26] Again, although our cases were not selected on the basis of regime change, there is little evidence to support this inference.

More important, dispositional theories of imperialism offer few direct predictions about competitive decolonization. If imperialism benefits only selected groups within countries and is suboptimal for national populations, as most such theories imply, then imperialism should weaken those states which engage in it. In contrast to the systemic logic above that imperial states should unilaterally shed their costly appendages, dispositional theories suggest that third parties who are concerned only with the balance of power and who might otherwise promote competitive decolonization should stand aside and let imperial states suffer the pains of their own self-inflicted wounds.[27] Only third parties that have fallen prey to the strategic myths that sustain

25. See, respectively, Joseph Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (Cleveland: World, 1955); John A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1938); V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York: International Publishers, 1939); Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order* (New York: Monthly Review, 1966); Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism* (New York: Monthly Review, 1969); and Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

26. See Miles Kahler, *Decolonization in Britain and France: The Domestic Consequences of International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

27. Alternatively, third parties concerned with threats emanating from other states may still choose to engage in competitive decolonization. Where imperialism benefits only small groups within a target state, we can presume that a) the privileged group is already in power and b) it is willing to suffer some loss in national welfare to increase its own returns. If this group engages in policies that threaten others, the balancer can weaken this group politically and reduce the threat to itself through competitive decolonization. Substituting the calculations of the elite for that of the country as a whole, the propositions posed here should still hold.

imperialism, as Jack Snyder describes them, should believe imperialism enhances national welfare and power and only such states, it follows, should seek to break up the empires of others.[28] The evidence from our cases again poses serious doubts about this explanation. The United States and Soviet Union, according to Snyder's own cases, were less prone than others to the pathologies and strategic myths that promote imperial overstretch; indeed, Snyder presents both as examples of states that successfully learned from their environment and pulled back from self-aggrandizing policies. Yet, as shown below, they did not stand aloof from anti-imperial struggles. From this perspective, why these two states engaged in competitive decolonization remains a mystery.

Third, imperialism may be the product of "greedy" states that seek not security, as we assume, but territorial aggrandizement for its own sake.[29] It follows that, if target states are expansionist or believed to be expansionist, states concerned with maintaining the balance of power must work harder to contain them. This implies that third parties will pursue competitive decolonization and other tactics for correcting power imbalances even more vigorously than otherwise. It the states concerned are themselves expansionist, they may seek to disrupt the empires of others not to right the balance of power but for their own imperialist aims.

Given the debate in international relations, and especially neorealism, over whether states are inherently security or power maximizers, this approach, not surprisingly, overlaps substantially with our own. It suggests that when states are greedy both targets and balancers should engage in more competitive decolonization than would otherwise be the case. Without a clearly defined baseline for the expected level of competitive decolonization, which for reasons discussed above remains out of reach, it is difficult to distinguish between the approaches. Nonetheless, a focus on the inherently expansionist tendencies of states suggests that we should observe at least occasional efforts at competitive decolonization that are independent from threats to the security of the states in question. We do find some evidence of this in one of our cases, namely Soviet support for the Viet Minh in 1948–51. For the other states we examine, however, security appears to be the principal motive.

28. Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 31–49.

29. On "greedy" states, see Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (summer 1994): 72–107; and Randall L. Schweller, "Neorealism's Status Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma," *Security Studies* 5, no. 3 (spring 1996): 90–121. For how implications of a greedy state model differ from a security-seeking state approach, see Charles L. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics* 50, no. 1 (October 1997): 171–201.

COMPETITIVE DECOLONIZATION IN PRACTICE

THE FOLLOWING cases were selected to illustrate the logic of competitive decolonization and probe the initial plausibility of the hypotheses. France during the Revolutionary War and the United States and Soviet Union during the cold war existed in very different international milieus. The three states also possessed very different internal structures. Common threads in policy across these divergent cases will strongly support the hypotheses above, and we do find that the desire to reduce the capabilities of others was an important part of all five instances. At the same time, the policies of the United States and Soviet Union toward Indochina and Indonesia differed in subtle ways and changed over time, depending on intra-alliance and other security-related concerns. Holding the subject country constant, and examining two similar colonies across different periods, also supports the model of competitive decolonization posed above.

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Officially initiated in 1776 by the Declaration of Independence, the American revolution was ultimately rooted in the Seven Years War (1756–63), as it became known in Europe, or the French and Indian War, as it was called in the American colonies. On the continent, France, Austria, Russia, Saxony, and Poland were allied against, and eventually defeated by, Great Britain and Prussia. In North America, France allied with several Indian tribes against the white settlers in the thirteen colonies and Great Britain; upon defeat, it ceded French Canada and all French territory east of the Mississippi river (except New Orleans) to England. "It was [the] bitter cut-throat international rivalry" of the Seven Years War, according to Samuel Flagg Bemis, the dean of American diplomatic historians, "which was to make American independence possible."[30] Greatly weakened by the war, France sought to rectify the power imbalance created by its defeat in 1763. Indeed, it aimed to displace Great Britain as the single most powerful actor in Europe by supporting the American independence movement and thereby fracturing the basis of British strength.

Britain's wartime extractions undermined the imperial bargain that had maintained stable relations with its North American colonies. She increased taxes to cover her debts and to reduce the burden on herself of defending the colonies. Feeling increasingly exploited and freed from the French threat that

30. Samuel Flagg Bemis, *The Diplomacy of the American Revolution* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1935), 15.

had helped hold them to Britain, the colonies resisted and the movement for relief eventually grew into a demand for full independence.[31]

As Britain feared, its rupture with the colonies provided the opportunity for France to meddle in its empire. France had several strong reasons for not supporting the colonies: 1) the colonies were republics, France a monarchy; 2) although France itself now had few colonies, its support for the revolutionaries was sure to engender the hostility of other European monarchs who feared colonial rebellions of their own; 3) French finances were in an extremely precarious position, and another war with Britain threatened to bankrupt the state; and 4) given its tenuous finances, France could support either the colonies or its long-time ally Austria, which was planning to intervene in the Bavarian succession and offered the Low Countries in exchange for French support. Despite these strong ideological and material disincentives, however, France chose to support the colonists through, at first, secret financial and material support and, later, a formal alliance and military troops.

Balance of power politics was central to France's decision to intervene in the colonial revolt. Humiliated by the Treaty of Paris in 1763 which ended the Seven Years War, and by the collective partitioning of its ally Poland in 1772, France feared for its position in the European system. Moreover, Britain was the rising power, increasingly capable of threatening French interests on the continent and elsewhere. In seeking to rebalance the scales, "The American rebellion presented France with just that opportunity to weaken the power of Britain....The American war was not...a war of revenge; it was a preventative war fought to avert future catastrophe by rearranging the balance of power."[32]

The American rebellion provided a ripe opportunity for French redress because of the colonies' importance in the British mercantile system. Nearly everyone in Europe and North America believed that Britain would be seriously weakened if the colonies became independent. Linking together colonial trade, the supply of trained seamen, the availability of naval stores, the strength of the Royal Navy, and the health of the British economy, contemporary analysts strongly believed that Britain's power would be gravely weakened by America's independence.[33] Thus, from Paris's viewpoint,

31. For an account of the struggle over the "imperial bargain," see Don Cook, *The Long Fuse: How England Lost the American Colonies, 1760–1785* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1995).

32. Jonathan R. Dull, "France and the American Revolution Seen as Tragedy," in *Diplomacy and Revolution: The Franco-American of 1778*, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), 84.

33. Dull, "France and the American Revolution," 87–88.

supporting the colonies would help to establish "France in Britain's place"[34] and "teach [Britain] some humility."[35]

Rather than seeking to recapture its former territories in North America and extend its own sovereignty over the thirteen British colonies, "the prime purpose of France was the achievement of the independence of the United States."[36] French ambition was limited for two reasons. First, France did not seek new colonies or to regain its old territories because it did not want to antagonize neutral states whose friendship it sought or strengthen the position of the Loyalists by driving the supporters of American independence into their arms.[37] Second, and more important, the balance of power could be adjusted more cheaply and just as effectively through symbolic support for American independence and modest financial and military assistance for the rebels. At the very least, as the French ambassador in London reminded his superiors at Versailles, "England could be forced into the position of a second-rate power if she were compelled to expend all of her resources to bring the colonies under control."[38] At best, the loss of its colonies would substantially and permanently weaken Britain. Additionally, the French foreign minister, the Comte de Vergennes, foresaw the possibility of France gaining a new trade partner, and, possibly, even a client state that would remain dependent on French protection.

In support of the colonies, France decided on 2 May 1776 to provide secretly one million livres worth of munitions. The decision was initiated by France, occurring even before the first American envoy "had set foot on the soil of France." It was "actuated by coolly calculated motives of European international policy connected with the principle of the balance of power..."[39] When informed of the French action, Charles III of Spain, who, unlike France, retained important colonial possessions and refused to recognize the independence of the colonies until Britain had done so, matched the French support with an additional one million livres.

Within two years of extending this secret support to the colonies, France had entered into an open and formal alliance with them against Great Britain, thereby extending the war to Europe and ultimately bringing in Spain and the

34. Lawrence S. Kaplan, *Colonies into Nation: American Diplomacy 1763–1801* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 111.

35. Dull, "France and the American Revolution," 84.

36. Bemis, *Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, 65.

37. Bemis, *Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, 65 and 197.

38. Orville T. Murphy, "The View from Versailles: Charles Gravier Comte de Vergennes's Perceptions of the American Revolution, in Hoffman and Albert, *Diplomacy and Revolution*, 128–29.

39. Bemis, *Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, 27.

Netherlands on the side of the revolution.[40] An American diplomatic mission, headed by Benjamin Franklin, eventually gained the support of Louis XVI for an alliance in which France endorsed the goal of American independence, provided troops, and pledged not to conclude a separate peace.[41]

In summary, then, the American revolution was intimately bound up with, and an essential element of, European balance of power politics. On its own, the colonial desire for independence would not have been enough. If it were not "for those hateful rivalries [of Europe] the struggling republican colonies would not have found an ally. Great Britain would have suppressed their revolt." As Bemis concludes, "The French alliance, let it never be forgotten, brought independence..."[42]

This case, one of competitive decolonization between opponents, provides broad support for the hypotheses presented above. Not only did France support American independence as a means of weakening Britain's international power (H1), but its action came during a period of intense rivalry between the two European powers (H2) and after a serious blow to France's power and prestige (H3). The North American colonies were extremely important to Britain, and their loss was greatly felt; as a result, France could achieve a decisive change in the balance of power (H4) for a comparatively small expenditure of effort (H5). As predicted, France targeted the then "jewel" of the British Empire, the crucial North American colonies (H8), immediately after Britain had greatly increased its extractions from its subjects (H9). Although France had been shorn of its most important imperial holdings in 1763, and therefore did not fear undermining the principle of imperialism for itself, it was constrained by the fears of other European powers about the blow to imperial legitimacy, qualifying support for H6. The North American conflict did escalate into a costly European war, challenging H7. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that the conflict spread only two years after France extended her initial support, and the war itself was

40. For the motives of other states involved in the struggle for American independence, see Buchanan Parker Thomson, *Spain: Forgotten Ally of the American Revolution* (North Quincy, Mass.: Christopher, 1976); Francisco Morales Padron, *Spanish Help in American Independence* (Madrid: Publications Espanolas, 1952); Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, trans. Herbert H. Rowen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); and Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov, *Russia and the American Revolution*, trans. C. Jay Smith (Tallahassee: Diplomatic Press, 1976).

41. On the French alliance, see William C. Stinchcombe, *The American Revolution and the French Alliance* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1969); Maurice Ross, *Louis XVI: America's Forgotten Founding Father* (New York: Vantage, 1976); Edward S. Corwin, *French Policy and the American Alliance of 1778* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1916); Thomas Balch, *The French in America During the War of Independence of the United States, 1777–1783*, vol. 1 (1891; reprint, Boston: Gregg Press, 1972); and James Brown Scott, ed., *The United States and France: Some Opinions on International Gratitude* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1926).

42. Bemis, *Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, 255.

intimately tied into Europe's own continental maneuverings, making clear how difficult it is to separate retaliation from broader balance of power politics.

This instance of divide and conquer superbly illustrates the tactic of competitive decolonization. The case of America's independence also raises serious doubts about alternative explanations of decolonization. The broad consensus in the diplomatic histories of this period on the important role of France suggests that pericentric theories are clearly insufficient. Moreover, France had strong reasons not to intervene in support of the American colonies, suggesting that metrocentric theories are seriously misleading. Finally, its self-restraint in not seeking to rebuild its North American empire demonstrates that greed was not the motive; rather, France is better understood as seeking a more favorable balance of power.

THE SOVIET UNION AND COLONIAL SOUTHEAST ASIA

Until the early 1930s, the Soviet Union pursued a policy of anticolonialism in French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies. After the mid-1930s, however, balance of power concerns led Moscow to abandon the policy for alliances with the colonial powers. After the Second World War, the Soviet Union returned to anticolonialism in Southeast Asia, although it moderated its policy in Indochina, at times, because of security concerns in Europe.

Early Soviet anticolonialism. In the years following its own revolutionary birth, the Soviet Union pursued a clear policy of anticolonialism in Asia, a course that flowed logically from V. I. Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Since the capitalist powers depended on imperial expansion into lesser-developed countries, Lenin reasoned, depriving them of this outlet for their surpluses would help lead to the demise of capitalism. At the Second Comintern Congress in 1920, Lenin even argued for supporting non-communist independence movements.[43]

The Communist International extended its activities to Southeast Asia in the 1920s and 1930s. It established schools for Asian revolutionaries,[44] and dispatched agents to Asia to aid colonial revolutionaries.[45] A number of

43. Rodman, *More Precious Than Peace*, 22–27.

44. Charles B. McLane, *Soviet Strategies in Southeast Asia: An Exploration of Eastern Policy Under Lenin and Stalin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 26.

45. During the Soviet alliance with Nationalist China (1923–27), Comintern personnel in South China recruited Vietnamese exiles and provided military training. Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925–1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 63–67, 76–77, and 88–89. The Vietnamese Nguyen Ai Quoc, later known as Ho Chi Minh, apparently was dispatched to Singapore in the late 1920s and Hong Kong in 1930 to coordinate Comintern activities in Southeast Asia. McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 131–38; and Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 119–29. The exiled Indonesian communist leader Musso was sent to Indonesia in

organizations affiliated with the Comintern extended their trade union and "anti-imperialist" propaganda activities to the region.[46] The Comintern also charged the communist parties in the imperialist countries with providing tactical advice, organizational assistance, and other support to colonial communists.[47] The Communist Party of France (PCF) actively recruited and trained Vietnamese expatriates.[48]

Throughout this period, Comintern activity in the colonies generally proceeded with little concern for Moscow's relations with other powers. The Comintern's anti-imperial propaganda, for instance, was a continual source of tension between Moscow and London.[49] Soviet relations with France were strained almost to the breaking point over the Comintern's connections to the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP). French officials were quite aware of the role Soviet-trained Vietnamese played in the unrest that swept Indochina in 1930. Despite diplomatic protests from Paris, Comintern support for the ICP continued.[50]

Rising threats and the change in Soviet policy. Growing threats to the Soviet Union in both Asia and Europe led to a radical change in policy in the mid-1930s. In 1931, Japan occupied Manchuria, ending the Moscow-Tokyo détente that had existed since the mid-1920s.[51] Fearing that France might try to buy security for Indochina and its concessions in China by making a deal with Japan,[52] Moscow sought to gain France, the United States and, later, other Western powers as allies against further Japanese aggression.[53]

1935. George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952), 86–87. The Comintern also operated a Far Eastern Bureau in Shanghai. McLane, *Soviet Strategies,* 136; Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Threat From the East, 1933–41: Moscow, Tokyo and the Prelude to the Pacific War* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University, Press, 1992), 54–55; and William J. Duiker, *The Comintern and Vietnamese Communism* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, Southeast Asia Program, 1975), 28.

46. McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 70–73 and 122 n. 114.

47. McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 23–24.

48. Duiker, *The Comintern and Vietnamese Communism*, 3–6.

49. Carr, *Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 3, 286–88 and 344–46; and Jonathan Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930–33: The Impact of the Depression* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 32.

50. Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 33–57. Soviet assistance enabled the ICP to withstand French repression. The Communist Party of Siam and Chinese Communist Party organizations in South China provided asylum and safe areas for training new ICP cadres. PCF and Comintern front organizations campaigned for the amnesty of Indochinese prisoners. Vie tnamese cadres held in reserve in Siam, France, China, and the USSR were repatriated to Indochina to rebuild the communist underground. Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 99–102 and 171–75. See also Duiker, *The Comintern and Vietnamese Communism*, 24–28, 34–36, and 40–42.

51. Max Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia*, vol. 1, *1929–36* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), 76–77; and Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 71–82.

52. Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy*, 97–99.

53. Jonathan Haslam, *The Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security in Europe* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), 27–29; and Haslam, *Soviet Union and the Threat From the East*, 30–34 and 44. After full-scale Sino-Japanese hostilities started in 1937, much of the Soviet equipment provided to Nationalist China was sent from the Soviet Union by way of Hong

After the consolidation of Nazi rule in 1933, Moscow's relations with Berlin also deteriorated. Until that time, Soviet security in Europe had rested on playing Germany against the other capitalist powers, especially France.[54] Hitler's hostility, however, led Moscow to seek an arrangement with Paris.[55] From March 1934 into 1939, Moscow acted like a status quo power and pursued security arrangements with the Western democracies.[56] The Franco-Soviet Pact was concluded in 1935[57] and, with French government knowledge and approval, the Communist International used French territory for a number of "antifascist" activities.[58]

With the Soviet Union seeking alliance with the democratic "imperialists" against the fascists,[59] the world communist movement modified its anti-imperialist policy to meet new Soviet security needs. The Comintern required member parties to drop demands for colonial independence in order to avoid offending Soviet allies. Even more striking, the possibility that premature independence for the colonies would play into the hands of Japan became a consistent theme of communist commentary on Southeast Asia.[60]

Recognizing the new signals from Moscow, the communist parties in the colonial areas, in turn, modified their own policies.[61] The ICP launched a new, moderate program in accordance with the Popular Front policy of the Comintern in July 1936, and even denounced "separatism" against France. This caused tremendous dissension in the Party's ranks.[62] The Comintern apparently pushed the Vietnamese communists to adopt this policy.[63]

Kong, Indochina, and Burma. This required the permission of British and French authorities in the face of Japanese threats. Haslam, *Soviet Union and the Threat From the East*, 92–94 and 122–23.

54. Regarding the early years of this policy, see, Edward Hallett Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917–1923*, vol. 3 (New York: Norton, 1953), 305–38, and 372–82.

55. Haslam, *Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security*, 6–26.

56. Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: Soviet Foreign Policy 1917–73*, 2d ed. (New York: Praeger, 1974), 183–279; and Haslam, *Soviet Union and the Struggle for Collective Security.*

57. Ulam, *Expansion*, 223–25.

58. These included numerous propaganda activities and support of the International Brigades in Spain. Stephen Koch, *Double Lives: Spies and Writers in the Secret Soviet War of Ideas Against the West* (New York: Free Press, 1994), 63–67 and 72–73; and R. Dan Richardson, *Comintern Army: The International Brigades and Spanish Civil War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 31–41.

59. Manuel Caballero, *Latin America and the Comintern 1919–1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 122–23.

60. See Nguyen Ai Quoc's July 1939 report on Indochina to the Comin tern. Quoted in Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 219. Additionally, both the Filipino communists and their American communist advisers dropped their demands for Philippine independence in the face of the Japanese threat. McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 179–80, 183–85, and 222–31.

61. The Comintern best implemented its new colonial policy in those Asian colonies where the metropolitan communist parties were most effective in playing their appointed role of guiding the local communists. McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 237–45.

62. Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 218–25.

63. A Soviet history of the Comintern's colonial work later admitted the problems that the Popular Front strategy caused for the ICP. It credited "the international communist movement"

Although less clearly focused, the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) also adjusted to the new Popular Front strategy. The PKI at first seemed confused as to whether its priority was confronting the Dutch or the Japanese.[64] Yet, it too eventually conformed. As early as 1934, the Comintern blasted Indonesian nationalists such as Mohammed Hatta for being pro-Japanese.[65] In addition, two other communist organizations concerned with Indonesian affairs— an Indonesian student group in Holland and the Communist Party of the Netherlands— both dropped their demands for immediate independence for Indonesia on the grounds that it would be too weak to withstand Japan.[66]

The Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939 allowed a brief return to the policy of anticolonialism. The Comintern now walked a fine line, opposing the Allied war effort but continuing to resist further Japanese expansion in Asia.[67] The ICP, accordingly, began to place new priority on the struggle for national independence in September 1939. Responding to Japan's progressive occupation of Indochina after the fall of France in 1940, the ICP initiated a series of armed uprisings. In May 1941, it formed the Viet Minh as an umbrella organization for its activities.[68]

In Indonesia, it was harder to oppose the Allies and Japan simultaneously. Although Soviet and PKI exile commentary also reverted to hostility to the Dutch after the Pact,[69] their parallel anti-Japanese program did not receive significant political support in Indonesia. Indeed, many Indonesians, including nationalist leaders, were quite willing to work with the Japanese, or at least saw them as no worse than the Dutch.[70]

Germany's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 meant that communist parties everywhere were required to support the war effort of the Western powers. In the colonies, this implied that communist demands for independence had to be put on hold.[71] Throughout the Second World War,

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with doing "a great deal" to guide the Indochinese on the correct path. I. A. Ognetov, "The Comintern and The Revolutionary Movement in Vietnam," in *The Comintern and the East: The Struggle for the Leninist Strategy and Tactics in National Liberation Movements*, ed. R. A. Ulyanovsky, trans. David Fidlon (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1979), 486 -87. Maurice Thorez, secretary-general of the Communist Party of France, urged a "free, trusting, and paternal" union between France and Indochina. Quoted in McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 217.

64. McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 231–34.

65. Cited in McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 191.

66. Kahin, *Nationalism*, 50–51 and 88–89.

67. Ulam, *Expansion*, 285.

68. Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 233–62; and John T. McAlister Jr., *Viet Nam: The Origins of Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1969), 109–82.

69. McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 235–36.

70. Kahin, *Nationalism*, 99–100.

71. This was especially true in India. Blunt Soviet and British communist criticisms prodded the Communist Party of India (CPI) to back the British war effort without a guarantee of independence, even though the domestic political position of the CPI suffered. See Robert H. Donaldson, *Soviet Policy toward India: Ideology and Strategy* (Cambridge: Harvard University

the Comintern's Southeast Asian member parties adjusted their policies to Soviet security needs.[72] Following Comintern policy enabled the Vietnamese communists to seize power and proclaim the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) at the end of the war. In Indonesia, following the turns of Soviet policy left the PKI a comparatively minor force in the Republic of Indonesia at the end of the war.[73]

Summarizing Soviet policy through the Seond World War, it is clear that the Soviet Union used competitive decolonization against the West from its earliest days (H1), at a time when its regime was rather weak in comparison to many capitalist states (H3). When its relations with the West were particularly strained, such as the late 1920s and the early 1930s or the time of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, it was especially likely to pursue this tactic against the colonial powers (H2). Since it saw the prosperity and survival of hostile capitalist powers as resting on colonial exploitation, Moscow found it natural to enhance its security by seeking to disrupt imperial ties (H4). It also believed that small amounts of direct aid and larger amounts of guidance to fraternal organizations could produce significant fractures in the European empires (H5). Since the Soviet republics were ostensibly part of a voluntary union rather than a formal empire, the USSR did not worry that independence for the colonies of others would set a precedent that could undermine its internal stability (H6).[74] Finally, the Soviet Union was more likely to support

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Press, 1974), 56–60. A Soviet scholar admitted the effects on the political position of the CPI. O. V. Martyshin, "The Comintern and the Problem of a United Anti -Imperialist Front in India," in Ulyanovsky, *Comintern and the East*, 454.

72. Judging by the lack of Soviet criticism then or later, these policies arguably were what Moscow wanted from the communist movement. McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 477. By contrast, Soviet commentators rebuked the "political miscalculation" of those Burmese communists and noncommunist Burmese and Indonesian nationalists wh o initially collaborated with Japan. See G. I. Levinson, "The Second World War and the Comintern's Policy in the East," in Ulyanovsky, *Comintern and the East*, 216. The Vietnamese communists themselves explained their willingness to work with any anti -Japanese force in terms of defending "the interests of the Soviet Union and her allies." See the document issued by the February 1943 ICP Conference, quoted in Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 285. They had earlier rationalized their policy at the time of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in terms of upholding the "consistent peace policy" of the USSR. Ognetov, "Comintern and The Revolutionary Movement in Vietnam," 488.

73. Because the Japanese left a Vichy French administration in place until March 1945, the ICP, unlike other colonial communist parties, could oppose Japan and the metropolitan power simultaneously. Thus, it could work with and receive aid from the Nationalist Chinese, the Free French, and the United States. The ICP, in turn, was able to assume a dominant role in Vietnamese politics. See Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 263–338; and McAlister, *Viet Nam*, 185–220. Many Indonesian nationalists, including a number of self -described "communists," were disposed initially to cooperate with the Japanese occupation in return for political concessions. PKI opposition to the Japanese proved a liability to the communists after the war. Hatta and Sukarno, who had worked with Tokyo, were the ones who proclaimed an independent Republic of Indonesia. The nucleus of the new army came fr om paramilitary organizations that had at first been recruited by the Japanese. See Kahin, *Nationalism*, 101–46.

74. Even though some now see the Soviet Union as having constituted a continental empire, the Soviets at the time certainly did not see themselves in this way. On the USSR as an empire, see

independence movements when colonial unrest was especially severe in major possessions, as in French Indochina in the 1930s (H8 and 9).

Nonetheless, the Soviet Union did qualify its support when it feared retaliation, specifically worrying that the Western powers, and especially France, would be inclined to make a deal with Japan at their expense if its anticolonial policies were too provocative (H7). Despite the "anti-imperialism" of the Comintern, competitive decolonization was set aside in 1935–39, when Moscow saw the colonial powers as potential allies (H11). The Soviet Union feared that "premature" independence for Southeast Asia would benefit Japan more than itself (H10), and competitive decolonization was dropped during the Second World War when Moscow and the Western democracies were allies (H11). Throughout these twists and turns, Soviet policy conformed with the logic of competitive decolonization.

Soviet policy after the war. Absorbed in consolidating its position in Central Europe and the Balkans, and uncertain as to the exact shape of the postwar order, the Soviet Union tempered its anti-imperialism during the first postwar years. Soviet press commentary on Southeast Asia was at first rather restrained. It criticized the Dutch and the French for their return to Indonesia and Indochina, respectively, and Britain for facilitating this effort. At the same time, Moscow issued no calls for armed struggle, and even failed to demand immediate independence for all colonies. The policies pursued by communist parties of Southeast Asia immediately after the war indicate that they received no hint from the USSR that they should end the wartime united front abruptly.[75] Yet, as Moscow's relations with the West deteriorated, Soviet policy once again turned toward anti-imperialism.

In Indonesia, the Soviet Union initially showed little intention of using anticolonial rebellion to weaken the West. After some initial militancy, the PKI, apparently responding to those of its leaders in contact with the rest of the world movement, cooperated with the noncommunist government of the Republic of Indonesia and supported its policy of trying to reach independence peacefully.[76]

As the cold war began to emerge, Soviet policy on Indonesia began to change. Press coverage continued to support the Republic's predominantly noncommunist leadership, but a distinct anti-British animus dominated discussion of Indonesia; London was denounced for trying to seize the

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Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, eds., *The End of Empire? The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1997).

75. McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 292–338.

76. Ruth T. McVey, *The Soviet View of the Indonesian Revolution: A Study in the Russian Attitude Towards Asian Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Modern Indonesia Project, 1957), 9 and 9–10 n. 14.

country through its weak Dutch client.[77] The Soviet Union also championed the Indonesian cause in United Nations Security Council.[78] Finally, the Dutch communist party adopted a campaign of strikes to disrupt the military effort in Indonesia.[79]

After a September 1948 PKI coup attempt, however, Soviet policy toward Indonesia took on a new twist. The Republic's leaders now faced considerable Soviet hostility because they were not sufficiently "anti-imperialist." Throughout 1949, the Soviets seemed to be encouraging the Indonesian people to rise up against President Sukarno and Vice-President Hatta as traitors. The American-brokered negotiations between the Dutch and the Indonesians, which led to independence at the end of that year, were constantly castigated as leading to the emergence of a new U.S. client state.[80] Moscow's seemingly odd behavior resulted from applying the logic of competitive decolonization: it feared the emergence of bourgeois nationalist regimes that would in effect be members of a hostile coalition; it saw nationalists, such as Sukarno in Indonesia, as American clients. This reasoning led to an endorsement of and propaganda support for communist uprisings against noncommunist regimes in Indonesia—as well as in Burma, the Telengana district of India, and the Philippines.[81]

The situation in Indochina, in turn, confronted the Soviet Union with different issues. Under the terms of the Potsdam accords, the British were to occupy the area south of the sixteenth parallel and the Nationalist Chinese the area to the north in order to disarm the Japanese. Although the Chinese generally accepted the existence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, by the end of 1945 the British found themselves helping the French reoccupy Cochinchina (South Vietnam). After several Franco-Viet Minh negotiations, full-scale war broke out between France and the DRV in December 1946.[82]

The Soviet Union, however, did not initially attempt to capitalize on this conflict. First, France's geopolitical alignment was unclear well into 1947.[83]

77. See the analysis in Robert P. Hager Jr., "The Soviet Union and the First Indochina War: Evolution of Soviet Policy Toward National Liberation Movements in Asia" (Master's thesis, University of California at Davis, 1984), 41.

78. McVey, *Soviet View*, 11–12 and 23.

79. Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *The Left Wing in Southeast Asia* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1950), 190–91.

80. McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 401–15.

81. McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 351–85 and 401–32; and Donaldson, *Soviet Policy*, 79–94.

82. McAlister, *Viet Nam*, 223–347.

83. Herbert Tint, *French Foreign Policy since the Second World War* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), 116–20. A French communist group in Saigon in 1945 reportedly advised the Viet Minh to avoid "premature adventures" that "might not be in line with Soviet perspectives," such as a potential Franco-Soviet alliance in Europe. This would make the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's demands for independence an embarrassment. Harold R. Isaacs, *No Peace for Asia* (1947; reprint, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967), 177–74.

Second, the Communist Party of France seemed likely to emerge as the dominant force in French political life.[84] The French communists wanted to maintain their nationalist appeal by supporting French grandeur abroad.[85] Consequently, Moscow muted its sympathy for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Soviet scholarly and journalistic commentary on Vietnam urged the DRV to try to reach accommodation with France until such time as the PCF was in a position to grant the Viet Minh better terms.[86] The DRV received no aid. In contrast to its stance on Indonesia, the Soviet Union remained silent about Indochina in the United Nations, despite requests by the DRV to take a more active position. Unlike the Dutch communists regarding Indonesia, the Communist Party of France made no effort to block the French war effort.[87]

After France moved closer to alignment with Britain and the United States and the PCF left the French cabinet in May 1947, however, Soviet policy toward France and her Indochina policy grew more hostile.[88] The full onset of the cold war led to a return to a Soviet policy of anticolonialism. Now out of contention for power, the French communists began an open campaign of sabotage and propaganda against the Indochina War.[89] Soviet press commentary, in turn, noted that the French armed forces were suffering from the war and hoped that events in Indochina might destabilize further France's empire in Africa.[90] At a time when Western rearmament was getting underway, the drain on NATO resources posed by Indochina appears to have pleased the Soviets.[91] After the 1949 victory of the Chinese communists, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (PRC) began a joint military aid program to the DRV that included Soviet-made trucks and weapons. The scale of Sino-Soviet aid gave the Viet Minh an edge in firepower on the ground by the end of 1953, despite American aid deliveries to the French.[92]

Even though the Viet Minh's struggle was making headway in 1952–54, once again Moscow moderated its anticolonialism toward Indochina. The "two camps" doctrine, which was announced in 1947, posited the inevitable

84. Wolfgang Leonhard, *Eurocommunism: Challenge for East and West*, trans. Mark Vecchio (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), 184–85.

85. See the various PCF statements quoted by Hager, "Soviet Union and the First Indochina War," 52–53.

86. McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 270–71; and Hager, "Soviet Union and the First Indochina War," 55–56.

87. Evelyn S. Colbert, *Southeast Asia in International Politics, 1941–1956* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 69–70.

88. Hager, "Soviet Union and the First Indochina War," 62–63.

89. Bernard B. Fall, "Tribulations of a Party Line: The French Communists and Indo-China," *Foreign Affairs* 33, no. 3 (April 1955): 503–5.

90. Hager, "Soviet Union and the First Indochina War," 119–20.

91. Soviet press commentary also noted the large amount of British forces tied down fighting the communist uprising in Malaya. McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 396.

92. Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy*, 4th ed. (Harrisburg: Stackpole, 1967), 55–56 and 93–94.

division of the world into hostile capitalist and communist blocs. By 1952, key Soviet leaders, including Stalin himself, began to see the possibility of "contradictions" between the United States and other capitalist powers, especially France.[93] The Soviet Union desired to use French nationalism and the pro-Soviet "peace movement" to block Western plans for German rearmament and, generally, to weaken French ties to NATO.[94] The French communists, in turn, now were willing to support almost any government that would negotiate an armistice in Indochina.[95]

This led to a two-track Soviet policy on Indochina. On the one hand, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam owed a large part of its 1954 victory at Dien Bien Phu to Soviet help, especially field artillery and air defense systems.[96] On the other hand, the 1954 settlement at Geneva gave the DRV less than it might have expected. To obtain this settlement, the Soviet Union promoted several measures that required significant Viet Minh concessions.[97] In the months leading up to the Geneva settlement, the Soviet press expressed sympathy for France's vulnerability to a revived Germany and an interest in a negotiated settlement of the war. It also played on the sense of grievance that the French felt at the way their dominant position in Indochina was being eroded by the United States. France was assured that it could best maintain its economic and cultural interests in Asia by quickly reaching a negotiated settlement with the DRV.[98] Another factor to consider in explaining Soviet haste in seeking an end to the war was the increased possibility that the United States might enter directly into the conflict on the side of France. The Soviet press showed some fear that the United States might even escalate the war by military action against China, or maybe even the USSR itself.[99] Once again, it is clear that Soviet policy toward Indochina changed because of Franco-Soviet relations and their connection with Moscow's broader security concerns.

In conclusion, after the end of the Second World War and before the wartime coalition with the Western powers had broken down, Moscow

93. Joseph Stalin, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.* (New York: International Publishers, 1952); and G. Malenkov, *Report to the Nineteenth Party Congress on the Work of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. (B.)* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1952). For an analysis of these works' implications for Soviet policy toward France, see Hager, "Soviet Union and the First Indochina War," 152–54.

94. Marshall Darrow Shulman, *Stalin's Foreign Policy Reappraised* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

95. Fall, "Tribulations of a Party Line," 505–8.

96. Bernard B. Fall, *Hell In a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu* (New York: Vintage, 1966), 126–27 and 377.

97. Philippe Devillers and Jean Lacouture, *End of a War: Indochina, 1954*, rev. ed., trans. Alexander Lieven and Adam Roberts (New York: Praeger, 1969), 239, 249, 292–93, and 308–10.

98. Hager, "Soviet Union and the First Indochina War," 179–80 and 188–89.

99. Herbert S. Dinerstein, *War and the Soviet Union*, 2d ed. (New York: Praeger, 1962), 216; and Hager, "Soviet Union and the First Indochina War," 190–91.

refrained from pushing decolonization (H11). It returned, however, to a policy of anticolonialism in Southeast Asia after its relations with its wartime allies deteriorated (H1 and 2). As the Soviet Union saw a Western alliance headed by the United States emerge, competitive decolonization became a way of limiting the strength of its more powerful superpower rival, as well as weakening the European powers (H3). Having supposedly "solved" its own nationalities problem, and having stopped short of creating a formal empire over its client states in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union did not fear that its anti-imperialist campaign would lead to the breakup of its own sphere of influence (H6). Moreover, anticolonial propaganda and, after the victory of the Chinese Communists, military aid to the Viet Minh were cheap ways to undermine the West (H5). Soviet support for independence in both Indonesia and Vietnam was encouraged by the strength of the independence movements (H9), and the fact that these were major overseas possessions of America's allies (H4 and 8).

As in the interwar period, there were some odd twists in policy as a result of the logic of competitive decolonization. In Indonesia, Moscow came to urge a revolution against the nationalist leadership in order to head off the emergence of a pro-American regime (H10). In Vietnam, the USSR originally refrained from overt backing of Vietnamese independence when it looked like France might become a Soviet ally (H11). In 1954, the Soviets encouraged the victorious communist-led independence movement to show moderation in victory because of broader Soviet security goals, especially its attempt to court France (H11). It also pursued this path in part because of the fear that a prolonged war would lead to a new conflict on the scale of Korea (H7). Throughout the early cold war, however, support for anticolonialism was clearly part of a broad strategy for weakening hostile international competitors.

Alternative explanations of Soviet policy. To some extent, Moscow's support for colonial independence movements might be attributed to ideology. As noted above, hitting at capitalism by undermining colonial empires flowed naturally from Lenin's theory of imperialism. Straining to determine whether or not Moscow's use of competitive decolonization was rooted in Leninism or realpolitik, however, might create a false dichotomy. On the one hand, until well into the Gorbachev era, much of the Soviet debate over the Third World centered on whether the most effective tactical allies against the West were local communist parties or noncommunist nationalists; the strategic goal of attacking "imperialism" was not in question. Those periods of Soviet policy notable for courting noncommunist nationalist regimes were also notable for serious attempts to undermine Western economic, military, and political

interests. This was true even of the early Gorbachev years.[100] This did not change until the final years of the Soviet Union, when the whole of Leninist ideology was, as one scholar put it, "buried."[101] On the other hand, the analysis above shows that ideology often gave way to other concerns in Soviet Third World policy. Moscow readily shelved the tactic of competitive decolonization when and where it needed improved relations with individual capitalist states to further Soviet security goals. This was repeatedly the case in French Indochina.

Ideological criteria did not always determine which independence movements Moscow aided. In the 1945–47 period, for example, the USSR was forthcoming with diplomatic support for Indonesia, where the Soviet-oriented communist party was a comparatively minor member of the ruling coalition. At the same time, it gave only polite sympathy to a Vietnamese regime headed by a communist party that was led by a prominent former Comintern agent.[102] The way the USSR sometimes employed this tactic indicates that even a regime with a different ideology might have used it against great power rivals.[103]

Snyder explains pre-Gorbachev periods of Soviet involvement in the Third World as the result of the late industrialization of the USSR.[104] In his view, mobilizing resources for the command economy and extensive growth for the First Five-Year Plan of 1928–33 led to an exaggeration of foreign threats, an emphasis on military preparedness, and the promotion of ideological causes abroad in order to justify the dominant position of the military-industrial complex in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Party members

100. See Francis Fukuyama, "Patterns of Soviet Third World Policy," *Problems of Communism* 36, no. 5 (September–October 1987): 1–13; and Francis Fukuyama, *Gorbachev and the New Soviet Agenda in the Third World*, RAND Report R-3634-A (Santa Monica: RAND, June 1989).

101. Steven Kull, *Burying Lenin: The Revolution in Soviet Ideology and Foreign Policy* (Boulder: Westview, 1992).

102. In addition to this, one could note that support for noncommunist nationalists was a major tactical weapon against the British Empire in the Middle East from the earliest years of Soviet policy. At first it was adopted as a means of diversion against London's effort to use the region to aid anti-Bolshevik forces during the Russian Civil War. Later Bolshevik hopes cen tered on undoing the whole British position in the area. See David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Avon, 1989), 413–62; and Carr, *Bolshevik Revolution*, vol. 3, 229–304 and 467–89. Soviet policy in the late Stalin years was noted for both hostility to bourgeois nationalism and anti -Semitism. Despite this, and traditional communist antipathy to Zionism, the Soviet Union still aided the Palestinian Jews in 1946–48 in order to weaken Britain in the Middle East. See Ulam, *Expansion*, 584–85.

103. For example, early Soviet efforts to undermine the British position in India resemble somewhat those used by Tsarist Russia and Imperial Germany. Milan Hauner, "Russian and Soviet Strategic Behavior in Asia," in *Dominoes and Bandwagons: Strategic Beliefs and Great Power Competition in the Eurasian Rimland*, ed. Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 250–71.

104. Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 1–6, 31–55, and 212–54.

internalized these ideological norms. The Plan also created several interest groups in the CPSU—the armed forces and heavy industry—with a vested interest in the perpetuation of these norms. Snyder further argues that coalition politics, and the resulting logrolling and strategic mythmaking, account for Moscow's policy of "offensive détente." In order to please the technical intelligentsia, improved relations with the West were sought. Simultaneous policies of military build-up and expansion in the Third World, however, were pursued to appease the military-industrial complex and Party ideologues. Appropriate ideological justifications were manufactured to accommodate these seemingly contradictory policies.

This argument is not a satisfactory explanation for Soviet activism in the Third World. Most important, this activism began before the First Five-Year Plan. The activities of the Comintern and its affiliated organizations in Southeast Asia predate 1928. The initial era of an offensive détente in which the Soviets tried to enjoy the benefits of normal diplomatic and economic relations with the West while attacking imperialism in the colonial regions occurred during the time of the New Economic Policy in 1921–27. This was well before the Plan and the emergence of any interests groups it created. During this earlier time, the Soviets supported regimes and revolutionary movements that were involved in various confrontations, sometimes including armed hostilities, with the Western powers. These included Mustafa Kemal in Turkey, the Nationalist Chinese in South China, and Augusto Cesar Sandino's fight against the U.S. Marines in Nicaragua.[105] One cannot credit Soviet activism in the Third World to interest groups spawned by an industrialization program that had not been inaugurated.

Soviet policy toward Southeast Asia may have been consistent with that of a "greedy state," especially in the years 1948–51. This was a time when the victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) led to considerable Soviet optimism regarding the prospects for communist revolution in Asia.[106] Stalin himself is reported to have written privately in 1949, "If socialism is victorious in China and our countries follow a single path, then the victory of socialism in the world will virtually be guaranteed."[107] At the time, the Soviets encouraged the CCP to play a leading role in furthering the revolutionary

105. Part of this analysis owes a debt to Francis Fukuyama, "Metropole and Colony: The Place of the Developing World in Soviet Foreign Policy" (unpub. ms., 1988), 83–172. The current authors would like to thank Fukuyama for making this manuscript available to Hager. Regarding Nicaragua, see Neil Macaulay, *The Sandino Affair*, (1967; reprint, Durham: Duke University Press, 1985), 112–13.

106. See analysis and primary sources cited in Hager, "Soviet Union and the First Indochina War," 102–5.

107. Letter to his unofficial representative to the CCP, I. V. Kovalev, quoted in Michael M. Sheng, *Battling Western Imperialism: Mao, Stalin, and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 168.

process in Asia.[108] Most of the Southeast Asian insurgencies, however, failed to make any headway, and by about 1952 Moscow began to disengage from them in favor of pursuing better relations with a number of noncommunist regimes.[109] The Chinese themselves adopted a less militant line.[110] As noted in the above analysis, Soviet ambitions in Indochina were scaled back not long after this. Although the USSR might have pursued a "greedy" strategy when revolutionary prospects in the Third World seemed especially good, it seems generally to have pursued a more limited agenda consistent with the logic of competitive decolonization.

THE UNITED STATES AND THE DECOLONIZATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

Despite a genuine dislike of colonialism, and misgivings about Dutch and French policy in Southeast Asia, the United States in the years immediately after the Second World War adopted a policy of tacit complicity in the reimposition of colonial rule in Indonesia and Vietnam. Highlighting the subtleties of the strategy of competitive decolonization and, especially, the importance of the anticipated allegiance of the postcolonial states, American policy toward Vietnam and Indonesia took radically different turns after 1948. In Indonesia, the United States eventually opposed the Dutch and supported independence. In Vietnam, largely because the indigenous independence movement was communist-led and had long-standing ties to Moscow, the United States reluctantly continued to back French efforts to reimpose control on Indochina. The French refused to create a credible Vietnamese regime as an alternative to the communists and rebuffed American pressures to do so by threatening to withdraw from the struggle. Only after 1954, as its dependence on the French armed forces for containing the Viet Minh diminished, did the United States finally switch to a policy of anticolonialism in Vietnam.

U.S. policy toward Indochina. Throughout the Second World War, the United States was torn between the need to maintain good relations with its allies, on the one hand, and the desire to see colonial empires dissolved, on the other.[111] This tension, especially acute regarding French Indochina, produced

108. Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao and the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 71–75; and Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 74–75.

109. McLane, *Soviet Strategies*, 449–73.

110. In 1951 they urged the Burmese communists to negotiate an end to Burma's civil war. Colbert, *Southeast Asia*, 194–95.

111. Robert J. McMahon, *Colonialism and Cold War: The United States and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence, 1945–49* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 65–83. See also Colbert, *Southeast Asia*, 27–53.

a highly inconsistent policy.[112] The region only became a major concern to Washington in 1940, when the Vichy French government permitted Japan to occupy the territory and use it for further military expansion. The Roosevelt administration initially favored a trusteeship for Indochina, and the president himself was notably hostile to French rule there. Wanting to avoid public identification with colonialism, Roosevelt tried to block the use of Free French troops in Southeast Asia.

Even while the war was in progress, however, American policy shifted. The United States could not afford to alienate Free France completely by openly challenging colonialism. By 1944, as a result, American commanders were cooperating with the French in gathering intelligence and rescuing downed aviators. After the Japanese coup of 9 March 1945 unseated the Vichy French administration in Indochina, the Americans assisted both French and Viet Minh units in opposing the new regime. The death of Roosevelt in the spring of 1945 removed a strong opponent of French colonialism from the scene just when American officials most concerned with Asian affairs were seeking to clarify policy toward Indochina. By that summer, plans to push for a trusteeship over Indochina were dropped. Already looking to the need for a strong ally in Europe, Washington accepted French sovereignty.

The United States was reluctant to involve itself in Indochina in 1945–47. It ignored President Ho Chi Minh's letters requesting support for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and rejected a Nationalist Chinese proposal to negotiate between the French and the DRV in 1946. It also pointedly refused to assist the return of French forces to Indochina.[113] During the Nationalist Chinese occupation of northern Indochina, which lasted until spring 1946, the actions of Americans on the spot generally hindered the French. American personnel in the region made no effort to aid any French return, which they thought could lead to war, and generally enjoyed good relations with the Viet Minh. When the British assisted the French return to southern Indochina, Americans there tried to remain aloof—even after the Anglo-French forces began fighting with the Viet Minh in September. American officials also did not try to prevent American-made weapons from reaching the Viet Minh by way of Nationalist China, Thailand, and the Philippines.[114]

112. Except where noted this study of American Vietnam policy is mostly based on Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years 1941–1960* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1985), 3–256. It is, however, consistent with other works such as Colbert, *Southeast Asia*.

113. In early 1946 the State Department made it official policy that no American vessels or aircraft could transport troops or military equipment to Indochina. Colbert, *Southeast Asia*, 87.

114. Bernard B. Fall, *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis*, 2d ed., (New York: Praeger, 1967), 68–71.

Even though American diplomatic observers feared that French actions were setting the stage for a colonial war, they did little to stop them. There are several reasons for this ambivalent policy. First, American officials worried that any public disputes between Paris and Washington could unfavorably affect French domestic politics and play into the hands of either the Communist Party or the Gaullist Right.[115] Second, Washington was concerned over the nature of the Viet Minh regime. The events discussed here took place in a context of increasing East-West tension and the use of local communist regimes to tighten Soviet control over Eastern Europe. The domination of the DRV by a communist party made America reluctant to antagonize France on its behalf.[116] American officials knew of Ho Chi Minh's earlier ties with the Comintern. In 1948 the State Department noticed Moscow's increased interest in Southeast Asia, and believed that the Soviet mission in Bangkok was directing local communist parties.[117] The Truman administration would not intervene diplomatically on behalf of the DRV as it did in the case of the Republic of Indonesia (see below).

As the cold war escalated, the United States shifted to an active alliance with France against the DRV. Yet, this occurred only after the French made some attempt to deal with the colonial issue by granting limited independence within the French Union to the "Associated States" of Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos) in 1949. In Vietnam, hopes for creating an effective noncommunist alternative to the Viet Minh centered on ex-Emperor Bao Dai, with whom the French had been negotiating since spring 1947. France refused to grant his regime enough internal independence to make it a credible rival to the Viet Minh. Nevertheless, many American officials hoped that the policy of creating a viable noncommunist regime might work. Fearful that a Viet Minh victory would favor the Soviet bloc, American officials, despite continued misgivings, embraced the "Bao Dai solution." In February 1950, the United States recognized the Associated States. The next month, President Harry S. Truman approved the first military aid to the French in Indochina.

Even though American officials had already concluded that Western colonialism, including France's unwillingness to accommodate Vietnamese nationalism, was a major hindrance to long-range American goals in Asia,[118] they went remarkably far in supporting France. American equipment was diverted to Indochina during critical phases of the Korean War. The Eisenhower administration seriously considered using air and ground forces

115. Colbert, *Southeast Asia*, 67–68.

116. Colbert, *Southeast Asia*, 89–90.

117. John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 90–91.

118. See the discussion and quotations of a March 1949 National Security Council report in McMahon, *Colonialism and Cold War*, 289–91.

in Indochina in 1954. That Washington backed Paris as long as it did eloquently testifies to the former's concern over the prospect of a pro-Soviet regime emerging in Vietnam.

After the end of the First Indochina War in 1954, the United States finally achieved its goal of placing a pro-West nationalist regime in power in South Vietnam. Premier Ngo Dinh Diem—an anti-French nationalist—was invested on 7 July 1954. The French and United States continued to compete for influence in South Vietnam.[119] Although the United States desired to maintain a French military presence in South Vietnam as a continued deterrent to the Viet Minh, Diem insisted on France's withdrawal. Realizing that it could not have both Diem and French troops, the United States accepted the latter's departure. This was acceptable only because Diem promised an effective pro-Western regime that would be firmly aligned with the United States in the cold war.

The United States and Indonesia. At the end of the Second World War, the Dutch were determined to reassert their rule over the East Indies.[120] Holland's prewar prosperity had depended even more than other colonial powers on the benefits of empire. The Dutch returned to Indonesia, with British assistance, in 1945–46. In October 1945, a colonial war broke out between British and Dutch forces, on one side, and the newly proclaimed Republic of Indonesia, on the other.

The Truman administration initially adopted a "neutral" position in this conflict, doing nothing that would unduly antagonize the Dutch but avoiding any commitment to their renewed rule in Indonesia. After realizing the extent of popular opposition to the Dutch in Indonesia, both Washington and London urged Holland to negotiate with the Republic of Indonesia. American sales of military equipment to Dutch forces in the East Indies ended in November. The United States also encouraged the British to withdraw, and both attempted to mediate an end to the conflict in 1946. Fighting broke out several times due to Dutch violations of their agreements with the Indonesians.

Although officially neutral, Washington deplored Dutch policy in Indonesia. It preferred moderate nationalist regimes that moved to independence gradually while maintaining ties with the metropole. Colonial wars were an anachronism that threatened regional stability. In the specific

119. The civil war that wracked the nascent state in 1954–55 was something of a proxy battle between the U.S. and France; the CIA backed Diem while French intelligence backed his opponents. R. B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, vol. 1*: Revolution versus Containment, 1955–61* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), 35–53.

120. Except where noted, this study has based its account of U.S. policy in Indonesia on McMahon, *Colonialism and Cold War*, esp. 39–42, 104–5, 139–50, and 168–303. Earlier works, however, such as Kahin's *Nationalism* and Colbert's *Southeast Asia*, support his main points.

case of Indonesia, Dutch actions hurt American interests in at least three ways. First, they hindered attempts to revive normal economic activity. Second, the Indonesian conflict embarrassed the United States in its relations with the Third World, making hollow its professed support of self-determination. Dutch receipt of American-made military equipment and economic aid laid the United States open to Soviet charges of hypocrisy;[121] even though Washington condemned Holland's July 1947 "Police Action," the United States could not fully distance itself from an ally it was actively arming. Third, the United States also was concerned about the effect of a prolonged conflict on Indonesia's domestic politics. American agencies involved with Indonesian affairs blamed the Dutch for the growth of communist influence and the radicalization of Indonesian public opinion in 1948, and felt that renewed guerrilla warfare would damage Western interests while benefiting the USSR.

Nevertheless, prior to 1949, American policy did not actively seek to hinder or undermine the Dutch. This passive acquiescence to Dutch ambitions was directly related to America's global strategy. Rebuilding Holland, a country the Joint Chiefs of Staff had termed "vital...to American national security," was seen as essential to America's plans to revive Western Europe economically and politically. Even if it disapproved of Dutch policy, the Truman administration was unwilling to risk scuttling plans for European recovery and the joint defense of Western Europe.[122]

American policy toward Indonesia changed decisively in 1949. In December 1948, the Dutch had again renewed offensive operations. The United States condemned Holland and began to support Indonesian independence in the UN Security Council. It also suspended economic assistance to the Netherlands East Indies, but avoided any cut off of economic aid to Holland itself. Washington was in part moved by the diplomatic embarrassment caused by Dutch actions, and the fact that Congress was likely to scuttle further aid to the Netherlands if it meant continued financing of a colonial war. The Republic's defeat of the September 1948 communist uprising, however, believed at the time to have been ordered in Moscow, was also a decisive event in reordering policy in Washington. American officials now could rest assured that any successor regime to the Dutch would not align itself with the Soviet bloc, and thus could throw their support unequivocally behind independence.

In the years immediately after the Second World War, concerns over the international balance of power and intra-alliance unity trumped American economic interests and ideology (see below). Despite its "open door"

121. Some of these are cited in Hager, "Soviet Union and the First Indochina War," 46 –47.
122. Colbert, *Southeast Asia*, 67.

economic policies and anticolonial stance, the United States accepted the return of France to Indochina and Holland to Indonesia for the sake of intra-alliance relations (H11). After 1948, however, it pursued radically different policies toward the two colonial conflicts. In Indonesia, Washington became a key diplomatic player in negotiating independence, once it was assured that the successor state to the Dutch colonial regime would not join a hostile coalition. In Indochina, on the other hand, American officials feared that a victorious Viet Minh would align with Moscow. Despite its conviction that French policy was shortsighted, Washington allied itself with France and even considered entering the war on the French side. Only after it was convinced that the successor regime would align itself with the West did the United States firmly press France to withdraw. Throughout both episodes, the United States pursued a strategy of competitive decolonization against its allies only when it was assured that independence, while it might weaken individual allies, would not undermine the strength of its broader coalition (H10).

American behavior regarding Southeast Asia also sheds further light on our other hypotheses. As in the other cases, the United States was deeply concerned with the balance of power (H1). With Indonesia providing large benefits to the Dutch, and Indochina important to France's political and economic position in the world, the United States could achieve a decisive gain in influence within the Western alliance (H4 and 8) merely by withholding aid to imperialist forces and throwing its diplomatic support to the increasingly strong independence movements in the region (H5 and 9). Moreover, having just granted independence to the Philippines, the United States did not possess large imperial holdings of its own (H6) and, as the dominant member of the alliance, it did not fear retaliation from its dependent partners (H7). Yet, only after it was assured of the pro-Western orientation of the successors to colonial rule, did the United States support independence in Southeast Asia.

Only in the case of H3 does the evidence cut against our predictions. Far stronger than its partners, the United States nonetheless sought to weaken further its political partners by disaggregating their colonial holdings. This may reflect the relatively low cost of supporting independence in these cases—particularly given the worldwide call for an end to European imperialism—or perhaps it is a product of the special circumstances of intra-alliance bargaining. Overall, however, the evidence again strongly supports our predictions.

Alternative explanations of American policy. America's opposition to colonialism was in part ideological and based on Wilsonian liberalism.[123]

123. Rodman, *More Precious Than Peace*, 18–22.

Practical economic concerns reinforced this. During the interwar period, British, French, and Dutch policies arguably hurt American interests. During the Second World War, American officials were convinced that avoiding another depression and creating a smoothly functioning world economy required an end to colonial trading blocs.[124] America's anticolonialism, however, explains little about the policies that Washington actually adopted. In both Indonesia and Vietnam, the United States deplored what its allies were doing, but was not inclined to upset its relations with the metropolitan powers until the successor regimes had demonstrated their pro-Western credentials.

American policy toward Indochina has often been described as being driven by an "indiscriminate anticommunism" that blinded it to local realities.[125] It is true that anticommunism accounts for the different American policies toward Indonesia and Indochina after 1948, but this pattern, as we have shown, can also be explained in balance of power terms. The Vietnamese communists' connection to the Soviet Union was quite real. Indeed, some analysts argue that the Comintern's assistance enabled them to become the dominant force in Vietnamese politics.[126] The American decision to begin military assistance to the French in Indochina, in turn, followed the victory of the Chinese communists in 1949, the public alignment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam with the Soviet bloc and China in the cold war by the end of that year, the conclusion of an alliance between the PRC and the USSR in early 1950, and the diplomatic recognition of the Viet Minh regime by both communist powers shortly thereafter. The late 1940s also saw communist insurgencies break out in other regions of Southeast Asia, all with the endorsement of Moscow and Beijing. Although many have criticized the "domino theory" as a guide for policy, the fear of American policy makers in 1950 that a communist victory in Vietnam would lead to other gains for Moscow had some basis.[127]

America's own policy toward Indochina and Indonesia, in turn, was relatively restrained, at least during the initial years after the Second World War. This suggests that neither expansionist logrollers nor inherently

124. McMahon, *Colonialism and Cold War*, 49–65.

125. For example, Melvyn P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 508.

126. For example, Duiker, *The Comintern and Vietnamese Communism*, 42.

127. Regarding the context of the Truman administration's decision to aid the French, see Douglas J. Macdonald, "The Truman Administration and Global Responsibilities: The Birth of the Falling Domino Principle," in Jervis and Snyder, *Dominoes and Bandwagons*, 112–44; and Andrew J. Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 171–72. Most of the contributors to Jervis and Snyder, *Dominoes and Bandwagons*, are among those who find the "domino theory" to be an unsound guide to policy in practice.

aggressive motivations were driving the policy of anticolonialism at this time. Rather, American policy appears to be better explained as a strategy of intra-alliance balancing—contingent upon expectations of the political direction the colony would take if it became independent.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THIS ANALYSIS has implications for the literatures on the balance of power, decolonization, and the origins of the modern state system. First, and most directly, the focus here on capability disaggregation, in general, and competitive decolonization, in particular, does not challenge balance of power theory, but it does highlight the need to expand our research horizons. Scholars often do not recognize what statesmen have long known: that there are many ways to balance power within the international arena. This failure to consider the full range of strategies open to states, in turn, creates a selection bias that makes balance of power theory appear less robust than it really is.

For instance, in his widely cited study, Stephen M. Walt examines whether states in the Middle East form alliances in response to emerging imbalances of power and threat, but he does not consider alternative strategies. As the research is designed, the failure of states to form new alliances following the rise of a new threat to the system would disconfirm the theory. Fortunately for Walt, alliances were commonly chosen in response to new threats in the region, and there is sufficient evidence of such alliance formation that the theory is not necessarily rejected. Had alliances, however, not been the common response in the Middle East—if states had, instead, sought to dismember one another through competitive decolonization, or some related strategy, as implied in the strange case of the short-lived United Arab Republic—Walt might have been forced to reject the theory in error. Other studies, which find less empirical support for balance of power theory, also suffer from this selection bias. Indeed, Richard Rosecrance and Chih-Cheng Lo criticize balance of power theory on both analytic and empirical grounds for predicting more balancing behavior than they actually observe, but they do not consider the possibility of competitive decolonization or any other strategy of capabilities disaggregation.[128]

128. Rosecrance and Lo, "Balancing, Stability, and War: The Mysterious Case of the Napoleonic International System," *International Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (December 1996): 479–500. See also Schroeder, "Alliances, 1815–1945"; and Schroeder, "Historical Reality vs. Neorealist Theory."

More generally, the cold war is often believed to have come "late" to the Third World, beginning only after Khrushchev's opening to nationalist regimes in such countries as India, Egypt, and Indonesia. Yet, as the analysis above shows, the periphery was implicated in the cold war and the global balance of power from the very start. By focusing only on alliances and other direct ties between the Soviet Union and peripheral states, this significant dimension is ignored.

Second, the literature on decolonization has largely focused on processes within the periphery and has ignored how events and politics within the core shaped this important process. The literature on decolonization has been largely pericentric: the push for decolonization is typically assumed to arise within the colony and to be a sufficient explanation for independence. Even Robert Jackson, who emphasizes the importance of the international norm of self-determination and is otherwise critical of the granting of independence to states that lacked the political infrastructure necessary to protect their citizens and develop their economies, fixes nearly the entire responsibility for decolonization on the peripheral independence movements.[129]

The theory and empirical material presented here, however, suggests that decolonization is a complex process. It may require indigenous independence movements, but it is also influenced in important ways by the struggle for power between states. Indeed, in the cases examined here, at least, external support by at least one great power appeared to be necessary to achieve independence. This suggests that to explain decolonization scholars must, at a minimum, meld pericentric and systemic theories.

Third, critics of realism, and especially of its neorealist variant, have charged that these theories are static, statist before they are realist, and possess no "generative" logic of their own.[130] While the approach offered here does not yet contain an explanation for the origins of the modern states system, it does explain how the system which originated in the core spread to the rest of the globe—or, to use the language of the critics, how it reproduced itself within and eventually dominated alternative forms of political organization.[131]

129. Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

130. See John Gerard Ruggie, "Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis," *World Politics* 35, no. 2 (January 1983): 261–85; Richard K. Ashley, "The Poverty of Neorealism," *International Organization* 38, no. 2 (spring 1984): 225–61; and Alex Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory," *International Organization* 41, no. 3 (summer 1987): 391–425.

131. The contributors to Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, eds., *The Expansion of International Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), a significant and largely constructivist account of state propagation, often acknowledge the importance of the balance of power as a force behind Europe's imperialist expansion into the rest of the globe, but they appear not to recognize how this same mechanism led to the breakup of empires and to the homogenization of institutional forms.

In this light, the balance of power mechanism should be understood itself as a generative principle of the modern state system. Once set in motion, the balance of power creates the very states that sustain it and eventually produces a homogenization of political authority in the form of the sovereign territorial state. This is, of course, not a complete explanation of the formation of the states system, especially as the equivalent of the "big bang" in international relations remains untheorized.[132] Nor does this suggest that the balance of power is the only or even the most important generative principle of the states system. It does imply, however, that the balance of power is a dynamic force in international politics and that realism, properly conceived, is not necessarily a static theory.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRENT POLICY

THE CASE studies above demonstrate the importance of the tactic of competitive decolonization and, more generally, the strategy of capabilities disaggregation. In the struggle for European dominance in the late eighteenth century, competitive decolonization was a significant tool used by France to weaken its principal rival. In the cold war, the Soviet Union used similar policies to undermine the West, but also tempered these policies when courting Western support before the Second World War and, in the case of France, after the war. Even as it built an international coalition to counter the Soviet threat, the United States acted to consolidate its influence within the alliance by backing pro-Western independence movements. States seek not only to aggregate their internal or external capabilities; they also seek to "disaggregate" the capabilities of their opponents—and even sometimes their own alliance partners.

There are many ways to balance power. Historically, competitive decolonization has loomed large in world politics. Analytically, this tactic has been largely ignored. We do not offer a complete theory of grand strategy, only a series of comparative static hypotheses rooted largely in a systemic theory of world politics. Beyond indicating the importance of the tactic of competitive decolonization, the cases above also demonstrate the plausibility of our hypotheses. No significant anomalies emerge from the historical record we have examined. Not all the hypotheses are supported equally, with H3 and H7 receiving only mixed backing. Nonetheless the evidence overall shows that these cases, at least, are consistent with our theoretical expectations.

132. See, however, Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

Although readers should remain skeptical until more thorough tests have been undertaken, we are sufficiently confident in our results to probe the contemporary relevance of our arguments. Formal empires appear to be of an age past. Competitive decolonization is, however, but one of a larger class of strategies for increasing one's own power by weakening another. Despite its subtlety, especially when played out between states that are otherwise allied, the logic of competitive decolonization is analytically straightforward and easy to recognize in practice. The key question is what does it tell us about the future?

With the end of the cold war, political fragmentation, secessionism, and other challenges to the current structure of national-states appear to have been unleashed. A trend toward political dissolution has been seen in the breakups of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the ethnic clashes experienced in several postcommunist states and parts of Africa, and the growing separatist movements in Canada, Spain, and other so-called developed states. Change in the basic units of international politics once again appears to be on the agenda. The analysis of competitive decolonization above suggests that the potential for foreign meddling in these unstable political relationships may be quite high.[133] It also suggests that states may have strong incentives to capitalize on this potential. In the decolonization episodes examined above, external support was important for obtaining independence. "Outsiders" are also likely to play important roles in the success or failure of attempts to redraw our contemporary political map.

It is still too early to tell whether competitive decolonization will play any role in Washington's future relations with Russia, perhaps the largest and most fragile continental empire in the current system. Some have called for the United States to oppose more vigorously Moscow's attempts to dominate its "near abroad."[134] Yet, however much Americans deplored Russia's war in Chechnya, no one proposed to arm the Chechens. Likewise, the Russian intervention in Tajikistan has not led to calls for military aid to the Tajik rebels. Fred Ikle, one of the intellectual fathers of what later became the "Reagan Doctrine,"[135] has argued more recently that there is no reason for the United States to become involved in Russia's relations with its neighbors. Russia's empire was of no concern to Americans in the pre-Soviet era, he now

133. On ethnic ties and intervention in ethnic conflicts, see Will Moore and David R. Davis, "Transnational Ethnic Ties and Foreign Policy"; on ethnic ties and support for secessionism, see Stephen Saideman, "Is Pandora's Box Half-Empty or Half-Full? The Limited Virulence of Secessionism and the Domestic Sources of Disintegration," both in *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, Diffusion, and Escalation*, ed. David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 89–103 and 127–50, respectively.

134. For example, Charles Krauthammer, "Enough Bear Stro king," *Time* (31 January 1994), 116.

135. Rodman, *More Precious Than Peace*, 262.

argues, and the two powers currently have more pressing concerns.[136] Such reasoning also implies, however, that a sharp worsening of Russian-American relations might see some form of competitive decolonization revived in the future. Much the same can be argued about China, also a potentially vulnerable multinational state. As long as Sino-American relations do not deteriorate further, the United States is likely to forswear competitive decolonization. If relations worsen dramatically, however, U.S. support for Taiwan, Tibet, and other peripheral areas claimed by China may become more vigorous.[137]

In ways reminiscent of the decolonization episodes discussed above, foreign intervention may be cheaper, and therefore more likely and frequent, outside the territories of the great powers themselves. Given the political instability of the Balkans, much of Africa, and other parts of the developing world, foreign meddling by regional states or extraregional powers may become far more common. We need only look at the involvement of others in the war and now the fragile peace in the former Yugoslavia to see the consequences of foreign intervention. Countries must recognize the strong incentives other states have to strengthen themselves by intervening in and weakening their opponents.

Current political leaders must decide how to cope with the incentives of others to support independence movements within their own territories and those elsewhere. Recognizing the potential for foreign involvement is the first step. Understanding why states intervene in the territorial affairs of others is the second. Examining past episodes of competitive decolonization provides useful insights on both scores and will, hopefully, help to expand the horizons of analysts and practitioners alike. The analysis here clearly suggests that looking only at the internal dynamics of fragmenting states is insufficient. The dissolution of political units is intimately linked to international politics and the balance of power.

136. Fred Ikle, letter to the editor of *National Interest*, no. 36 (summer 1994): 109.

137. For a recent discussion of the earlier American alliance with Taiwan and the Tibetans, see John W. Garver, *The Sino-American Alliance: Nationalist China and American Cold War Strategy in Asia* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1997).