

# Vanderbilt Historical Review

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# Letter from the Editor

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Dear Readers,

I am humbled to introduce you to the Spring 2019 Issue of the *Vanderbilt Historical Review*. This issue marks the beginning of our fourth year as a publication, and I for one could not be more excited! Within these pages, you will find a broad array of excellent historical scholarship from students from numerous universities. They span a broad range of topics, from trade and religion to politics and child adoptions.

Our publication's continued excellence would not be possible without a host of supporters, old and new, who have sustained our success. First, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to our Faculty Advisors and the Vanderbilt History Department. They have assisted us without hesitation in forming the foundations for our publication's future. I would also wish to thank our executive editors for their effective and leadership this year. Last but not least, I want to spotlight our 14 staff editors, who were true heroes when it came to putting this issue together. Despite their busy schedules as students, our staff editors have worked tirelessly alongside us executive editors this semester. They have put in mind, heart, and soul to select and cultivate the many stories you will find within this thin booklet.

As usual, there will be an article for everyone, no matter what your preferred flavor of history may be. However, I would still encourage you, as readers, to take time to absorb and think about all the essays showcased in the pages that follow. This is not just because the scholarship we publish is outstanding, though it always is. Rather, it is because History is more than a single moment – it is a continuity. The learned historian understands that seemingly disparate events can nonetheless be connected, sometimes in profound ways.

For example, within this issue's first article, "Redefining Chinese-American Scholarship," you will read about how the famed Song Mei-Lin<sup>1</sup> represented and solidified China's status as an equal, wartime ally of the United States. Yet years later, as detailed by Syrus Jin's article, "The Casualties of U.S. Grand Strategy", the Republic of Korea would be excluded from the same privilege. In the same vein, you will find William Kniep's essay on Napoleon's promulgation of legal reforms a page away from Trent Kannegieter's essay about Félicité de Lamennais, a religious scholar once arrested by Napoleon's secret police.

I am of the belief that the goal of history is to tell stories, to share pieces of insight about the past. The telling of each story needs to be compelling and enriching, exquisitely detailed yet coherently crafted. But understanding history is to also realize the dangers of only knowing a single story. Furthermore, History is the story of us, our environment, and our human spirit. What William Faulkner wrote of poetry is also true for the work of the historian: it "need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail."<sup>2</sup>

Regards,  
Winston Wenhao Du  
Co-Editor-in-Chief



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## Vanderbilt Historical Review

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<sup>[1]</sup> Madame Chiang is the daughter of "Charlie" Soong (宋嘉樹), who graduated Vanderbilt University in 1885 as one of its first Chinese graduates.

<sup>[2]</sup> William Faulkner, "Nobel Prize Banquet Speech." (Speech, Stockholm, December 10, 1950). American Rhetoric.  
<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/williamfaulknernobelprizeaddress.htm>

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# REDEFINING CHINESE AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

## Madame Chiang and the Repeal of Chinese Exclusion Laws in 1943

*Abstract: In 1943, after 60 years of exclusion, the ban on Chinese immigration to America was suddenly lifted with the passing of the Magnuson Act. The legislative change came shortly after Soong May-ling, wife to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, finished her three-month-long speaking tour in the U.S., during which she made numerous public appearances to appeal for more American aid for Chinese troops fighting in the Pacific theater of World War II. Interestingly, while much of the publicity surrounding Chinese exclusion repeal hailed Mme. Chiang as the catalyst for the campaign's momentum, in reality she never once broached the subject in any of her speeches. By examining the content of her speeches as well as the news coverage of her visit, this study attempts to piece together a timeline of the rise in support for exclusion repeal during Mme. Chiang's U.S. visit and probe her significance in a campaign that would redefine American citizenship.*

By Cindy Kuang  
Stanford University

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On February 18, 1943, Soong May-ling, the wife of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, became the first private citizen and second woman to address Congress when she spoke before first the Senate and then the House. Known affectionately to Americans as the “Missimo”, Madame Chiang dazzled the room full of white male legislators with her oratorical ability and her confidence, as she called for more American aid to China’s war in the Pacific. As *Time* magazine wrote, “The U.S. Senate is not in the habit of rising to its feet to applaud. For Madame Chiang it rose and thundered.”<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Mme. Chiang’s appearance before Congress—and her subsequent grand tour of the United States—represented a moment of irony. Under legislature passed by Congress since 1882, Chinese were largely barred from immigrating to the United States and from obtaining citizenship.<sup>2</sup> However, just as it was designed to improve relations between the United States and China, Mme. Chiang’s tour seemed also to inspire America to reevaluate its treatment of Chinese attempting to enter or already living in their country. Immediately after her speech before Congress, Rep. Martin Kennedy of Massachusetts introduced HR 1882 to repeal Chinese exclusion laws:

We welcome you also, as a daughter is welcomed by her foster mother, to the land where you received an American education.... I take this auspicious occasion, in your gracious presence, as an indication of my unbounded admiration of a nation’s courage which has amazed the world, to introduce this day a bill to grant to the Chinese rights of entry to the United States and rights of citizenship.<sup>3</sup>



Soong May-ling (c. 1942)

Source: San Diego Air and Space Museum Archive  
(Wikimedia Commons)

Eleven months later, the 78th Congress voted to repeal Chinese exclusion laws, establishing annual quotas for Chinese immigrants and making Chinese eligible for naturalization.

While Rep. Kennedy may have symbolically linked the repeal of Chinese exclusion to Mme. Chiang’s visit, it is more difficult to pin down her legacy in advocating for

## *Redefining Chinese American Citizenship*

the cause against Chinese exclusion. Even though she made dozens of public appearances during her tour, Mme. Chiang never once publicly addressed the issue. Despite the hopes of racial liberals that she would speak on behalf of minority peoples in America, Mme. Chiang conducted herself as a diplomat from China during her visit and steered clear of polarizing topics which would have been detrimental to U.S.-China relations. On the other hand, Mme. Chiang's visit undeniably coincided with a rise in support for the repeal campaign. As Senator Charles Andrews of Florida remarked during a Senate debate on the repeal, "Hundreds of editorials and news articles have appeared in the newspapers throughout the country since last May ... favorable to legislation of this kind".<sup>4</sup> In fact, Mme. Chiang had concluded her tour of the U.S. in April 1943; the publication of these editorials—many of whom actually cited the Madame by name—certainly suggests her presence in the country had a galvanizing effect on the repeal efforts' momentum.

The following study examines Mme. Chiang's public rhetoric and persona to determine the interests Mme. Chiang acted on behalf of during her tour, and evaluate the extent to which her presence in the United States shaped the debate over exclusion repeal. In particular, this essay assesses the influence Mme. Chiang exerted in two key areas: The United States' wartime alliance with China and American public opinion of Chinese Americans. These issues are worth examination due to their importance not only to the exclusion repeal but also to Mme. Chiang's personal success in securing American aid for her husband's war campaign in China. This essay argues that the alignment of interests between the two causes allowed Mme. Chiang to advance the campaign for exclusion repeal without compromising her own agenda, accomplishing both objectives perhaps more effectively than otherwise possible.

### **REPEALING EXCLUSION AS WARTIME AID**

When Mme. Chiang arrived at Mitchel Field in New York on November 27, 1942, she was greeted by Harry Hopkins, one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's top advisors in charge of the Lend-Lease wartime program.<sup>5</sup> This was highly unusual, as Mme. Chiang had come to the U.S. not as a diplomatic representative but rather as a private citizen, in order to be hospitalized for various debilitating health conditions.<sup>6</sup> The nature of the visit did not, however, seem to deter the Madame's intent to secure diplomatic gains for China while she was abroad. Shortly before her arrival, Mme. Chiang had specifically asked that Hopkins be the first person she met with when she landed in New York. On the car ride to Presbyterian Hospital, despite Mme. Chiang's assurances that she had come only for medical treatment and rest, her conversation with Hopkins turned immediately to the war. Her objective was clear: to shift Allied focus from the European theater to Japan, and to obtain more material aid for China.



Madame China Kai-Shek (1945)

Source: *Unknown, Wikimedia Commons*

Unfortunately, it seemed this would not be accomplished easily. The White House seemed to be well aware of Mme. Chiang's intentions, having known for some time that the visit was coming. In a telegram sent from Washington to the British Foreign Office in the summer of 1942, Viscount Halifax Edward Wood worried that the trip would be "potentially dangerous as Madame Chiang may make no secret of her views on the [Far East] War to U.S. journalists who will be much more ready to believe her than us. If and when the visit becomes known officially to our Embassy in Washington, it might be well ... to indicate tactfully to Madame Chiang the danger to our common cause of immoderate criticism".<sup>7</sup> The White House appeared to echo these views and resolved to deflect Mme. Chiang's attempts to secure promises from Washington. In February 1942, the House had just approved a \$500 million loan to Chiang Kai-shek for the war against Japan. Even though the ratio of U.S. Lend-Lease aid to China was only around 1.5 percent of the total from 1941 to 1942, rumors that corrupt Chinese officials were siphoning resources frustrated the White House.<sup>8</sup> Upon hearing Mme. Chiang's direct appeals to turn Allied focus to Japan, Hopkins only replied that such a strategy would be "infeasible," making it abundantly clear that swaying Washington during this trip would require additional finesse.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, news of Mme. Chiang's arrival in the U.S. had generated hope among left intellectuals and civil rights activists that her popularity could become a platform for advancing discussions of race relations in the country. Among them was Richard Walsh, editor of the liberal magazine *Asia*. Walsh would later serve as head of the Citizens Committee to Repeal Chinese Exclusion, a group of well-connected white Americans who served as the primary advocates for the repeal campaign. Though the Committee would be formed in July 1943, efforts to rally support for repeal preceded Mme. Chiang's U.S. visit by more than a year.<sup>10</sup> In February, Walsh published a memorandum by Charles Nelson Spinks entitled "Repeal Chinese Exclusion!"<sup>11</sup> As historian K. Scott Wong observes, the article argued that the Chinese were the only group excluded by a set of specific laws and that, since lifting the immigration ban would result in only about two thousand Chinese entering the country annually, Americans should support a repeal because "[the Chinese] have been entitled to [racial equality] ever since the United States first came into contact with their country."<sup>12</sup> Upon publication, the article received considerable attention and the base of support for repeal grew. China scholar—and advisor to Chiang Kai-shek—Owen Lattimore wrote: "It seems to me there could hardly be a better time for launching a program for the repeal of Chinese exclusion."<sup>13</sup>

In spite of the coincidence of her visit with burgeoning momentum in the campaign for repeal, Mme. Chiang did not seem keen to involve herself in the debate. Walter White, head of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), repeatedly sought to meet with the Madame during her stay in Presbyterian Hospital.<sup>14</sup> With the help of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, White passed along numerous letters asking to set up an appointment, but each time was ignored. Meanwhile, Mme. Chiang entertained numerous other notable guests during her recuperation, making her lack of response to White appear to be a purposeful dismissal the cause he represented. Her actions make political sense in light of the diplomatic challenges Mme. Chiang faced in her campaign to secure Washington's support. In order to win American approval for more aid to China, Mme. Chiang would need to make a concerted effort to distance herself from an issue that might require her to critique the same administration upon whom she relied for help. Thus, her reluctance to engage controversial figures like White can be viewed as a realist approach to the diplomatic mission at hand.

However, even though Mme. Chiang never explicitly spoke on behalf of the ongoing movement to repeal exclusion laws during her U.S. visit, her public rhetoric of bolstering the wartime alliance between the U.S. and China seemed nonetheless to positively affect the repeal campaign's progress. In her Congressional address in February 1943, Mme. Chiang strategically positioned China not only as a

military ally to the United States but also as an old friend in need, while simultaneously criticizing the Roosevelt administration's refusal to increase aid to China:

We in China, like you, want a better world, not for ourselves alone, but for all mankind, and we must have it. It is not enough, however, to proclaim our idea[l]s or even to be convinced that we have them. In order to preserve, uphold, and maintain them, there are times when we should throw all we cherish into our effort to fulfill these ideals even at the risk of failure.<sup>15</sup>

As historian Laura Tyson Li writes, "[Mme. Chiang's] attack on American policy was cleverly camouflaged by a carefully worded appeal to Americans' deepest emotional need as a nation: to be admired, and—most of all—needed by weak, oppressed, and ostensibly less civilized people."<sup>16</sup> In particular, Mme. Chiang highlighted the common ideals which the two countries—despite their racial differences—were both fighting for in the war, while affirming her belief "that devotion to common principles eliminates differences in race and that identity of ideals is the strongest possible solvent of racial dissimilarities."<sup>17</sup> By emphasizing the shared ideological values between the U.S. and China, Mme. Chiang sought to challenge Washington's policy of focusing on its European Allies, with whom it presumably shared racial and cultural ties. In the process, she tied the success of the war effort to the maintenance of the "traditional friendship" between the Chinese and American forces, a notion that she would continuously reinforce in later speeches.<sup>18</sup>

This idea was quickly seized upon as a key argument in the debate surrounding the repeal. In his pro-repeal article in 1942, Rep. Spinks had made a moral appeal for repealing Chinese exclusion, arguing that "as our allies, the Chinese deserve racial equality now."<sup>19</sup> A year later, Mme. Chiang's campaign for aid to China put further pressure on the United States to support its ally. Increasingly, these two issues of repeal and wartime aid became tied together in the public rhetoric. As Mme. Chiang's tour continued, abolishing Chinese exclusion laws became more than simply a symbolic gesture to a wartime ally, but rather in itself a necessary act to preserve Allied momentum in the Pacific. Advocacy groups ran newspaper ads urging citizens to write their Congressmen in favor of the repeal "as a measure of war expediency, to strengthen Chinese morale."<sup>20</sup>

As the story of the repeal bill was picked up by American media, Mme. Chiang made more direct reference to the issue of racial equality in her rhetoric, even though she did not openly call for support of the legislation. When she spoke in Madison Square Garden, a few weeks after Kennedy had first introduced HR 1882 during her Congressional appearance, Mme. Chiang digressed suddenly in her enthusiastic speech

on the U.S.-China war effort to consider ancient history. “All the peoples in the Roman Empire could become citizens,” she said. “Other tribes of the so-called barbarian world of that day were accepted and welcomed as allies of Rome, and not as subject peoples. This broad and practiced concept of the Romans was, I think, the chief cause of the Roman Empire lasting over a thousand years.”<sup>21</sup> It is possible these words were casually spoken. Nevertheless, Mme. Chiang could not have touched on a more timely issue. It is unlikely that Mme. Chiang was unaware of the burgeoning campaign for Chinese exclusion repeal, but her diplomatic status prevented her from engaging more openly with the issue. Thus, her innocuous remarks—addressed to an audience of more than 3,000—seem like nod to repeal, reinforcing a symbolic link between her tour and the movement’s momentum without openly critiquing U.S. policy.

women’s organization, fundraised over \$22,000 for Mme. Chiang’s charity for war orphans in 1943.<sup>25</sup> Though her insistence that the Roosevelt administration provide China with more financial support was not as successful, Mme. Chiang had successfully swayed the American public to act on behalf of her country.

#### **SHAPING AMERICAN POLICY THROUGH PUBLIC OPINION**

Though she was confident as an orator and a diplomat, Mme. Chiang arguably exerted the greatest influence upon the American public through her personal traits. Kennedy’s passionate speech dedicating his repeal bill to the Madame was by no means the only instance where call for repeal mentioned Mme. Chiang by name. Some even proposed repeal specifically as a tribute to the Chinese First Lady.<sup>26</sup> Her personality and charms were so infamous that, before

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**“Together with her educational background, her openly professed faith and values further established her in the public imagination as a success story of Americanization.”**

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As Mme. Chiang’s tour continued, the repeal campaign began to catch Washington’s attention. During Mme. Chiang’s White House meeting with Roosevelt in February, the President had carefully deflected her attempts to secure promises of more material aid to China.<sup>22</sup> Upon embarking on her tour, Mme. Chiang unrelentingly pressured Roosevelt’s administration for support through her public speeches. The question remained: would Washington provide this aid—and where would it come from? Admiral Henry E. Yarnell, who served as Special Advisor to the Chinese Military Mission during the war, testified before Congress on the importance of “strengthening the determination of the Chinese Government and people to fight on until real and adequate assistance can be given... [by considering], by act as well as word, China as an equal in every respect with the other three Allied Nations.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, supporting Chinese exclusion repeal now represented an increasingly effective way to silence the Madame’s criticisms without damaging the relationship between China and the United States. In October, Roosevelt called on Congress to act prompting on the bill for repeal: “China’s resistance does not depend alone on guns and planes and on attacks on land, on the sea and from the air. It is based as much in the spirit of her people and her faith in her Allies. We owe it to the Chinese to strengthen that faith.”<sup>24</sup> For her part, Mme. Chiang utilized her influence on the public sympathies of Americans to secure monetary aid for China. Donations to China relief organizations saw a 200 percent increase during her tour, primarily from individual donors. The Order of the Eastern Star, a particularly conservative

Hopkins’ meeting with Mme. Chiang when she arrived in the U.S., the President had jokingly offered to provide his advisor with a bodyguard, warning him: “Watch your step, or before you know it she will have you wound around her little finger.”<sup>27</sup>

Even as she was hailed as a symbol for racial liberalism during her U.S. tour, Mme. Chiang herself had deeply ambivalent feelings about America. During her time as a student at first Wesleyan and then Wellesley College (transferring in 1914), the discrimination Mme. Chiang faced left her both frustrated with American racism and insecure about being viewed as an outsider. Her Wellesley professor Annie Tuell noted that Mme. Chiang “did not love very many of us, or very hard.”<sup>28</sup> Even before she ever left China, Mme. Chiang was already deeply aware of how U.S. immigration policy perpetuated discrimination against Chinese. In 1904, her eldest sister Soong Ailing had been detained at the immigration station in Seattle, Washington, while on her way to enroll at Wesleyan College. Immigration officials did not believe Ailing was a student legally entering the country, even though she possessed all of the proper papers confirming her identity.

While touring the U.S. in 1943, Mme. Chiang insisted on top ceremonial protocol even though she had not been sent to the U.S. on a diplomatic visit. Her preoccupation with protocol may have stemmed from her desire for recognition in a country that had rejected her for her race decades earlier. Contrasting her visit with Winston Churchill’s in

April of the same year, a journalist remarked, “Why, it may be asked, was Churchill’s visit so hush-hush, and Madame’s so well advertised? Simply because Madame’s visit had to do with molding public opinion, while Churchill’s had to do with secret conferences over future United Nations war strategy. In the former there was every reason for publicity—in the latter every reason for secrecy.”<sup>29</sup>

Though her demands on protocol made her a controversial figure among other diplomatic officials, Mme. Chiang’s high-profile tour was met with an unprecedentedly warm welcome from the American public. It was easy to see why. Having studied at two different American colleges, she spoke flawlessly in English. Her speeches often included allusions and anecdotes designed to show off her Western education, and Clare Boothe Luce once praised her ability to speak “flawless, tumbling, forthright *American*.”<sup>30</sup> Mme. Chiang was also a devout Christian. Simultaneously to her 1943 speaking tour, The Methodist Church published a testimonial account written by the Madame, entitled “I Confess My Faith.”<sup>31</sup> Together with her educational background, her openly professed faith and values further established her in the public imagination as a success story of Americanization. As Leong writes, “Her image was both produced for American consumption and intended to appear American-made. Its true impact was not on China but on American attitudes toward China.”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Mme. Chiang’s personal image positively impacted public perception of Chinese Americans. A few weeks into her tour, Mme. Chiang arrived at Pennsylvania Station in New York and paid a visit the same afternoon to Chinatown. News coverage of the event described “flags of the two countries [U.S. and China] and draping colorful bunting” hanging from buildings, hailing the visit as a shared moment between Chinese Americans and the rest of the country: “It was Chinatown’s day, not as a city curiosity, but as a link to another nation that has suffered from Japanese aggression. The distance between Pearl Harbor and Pell Street grew small.”<sup>33</sup>

Yet, for all her popularity in the country, Mme. Chiang was nevertheless barred under American immigration law from becoming a U.S. citizen—an irony that was not lost upon either the American public or supporters of the repeal. On Mme. Chiang’s Congressional address, Representative Will Rogers of California remarked, “I want you to know that many of us sitting in the House felt embarrassed to remember that by the laws of this country, this woman was legally not good enough to apply for citizenship in the United States, if she had wanted to; but we exclude her purely on the basis of race.”<sup>34</sup> Representative Walter Judd put a point on things even more colorfully: “Hitler could come in under a quota, Mussolini could come in under a quota, but Madame Chiang Kai-shek, or the finest type of Chinese people, cannot because we say they are ineligible to come here.”<sup>35</sup> The protest against exclusion



SPEECH OF

*Madame Chiang Kai-shek*

at Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass.

March 7, 1943

Wellesley College speech poster (1943)

Source: Wellesley College (Wikimedia Commons)

on the basis of race had found in Mme. Chiang a perfect poster child; here was an individual who widely accepted by Americans as one of their own but was barred from legal naturalization.

The fact that Mme. Chiang was received publicly with protocol fit for royals and statesmen provided an even sharper juxtaposition, while positive public perception of Chinese Americans called anti-Chinese exclusion laws into question altogether. As historian Madeline Y. Hsu wrote, “The contradiction between the generalized racial discrimination embedded in the Chinese exclusion laws and the accomplishments attributable to outstanding, individual Chinese provided potent arguments for repeal.”<sup>36</sup> In her appearance during the House hearings on HR 1882 and HR 2309 (both of which were repeal bills), novelist and ardent internationalist Pearl S. Buck testified, “We have excluded not only Chinese coolies; we have excluded Chinese of the highest quality and attainment by our total exclusion laws.”<sup>37</sup> Buck was by no means the only support of repeal to make such an appeal. Representative Judd similarly pointed out that, despite the continued existence of discriminatory immigration laws, many Americans “have come to admire the Chinese for his industry, his intelligence, his patriotism, and his good faith, and we



Soong May-ling in White House Oval Office (1943) Source: *US Whitehouse Staff, Wikimedia Commons*

have come see, in the person of Mme. Chiang Kai-shek, the symbol of a truly great people”.<sup>38</sup> These sentiments were echoed by California Democrat Thomas Ford, who vouched for the Chinese as “reliable people ... and good citizens in every sense of the word. I am sure the Chinese will make a distinct and tremendously valuable contribution to freedom as conceived by democracy”.<sup>39</sup>

However, while it is true that public opinion of Chinese Americans improved during Mme. Chiang’s tour, racist opposition to repealing the immigration ban persisted in debates surrounding the issue. William Green, president of the staunchly anti-repeal American Federation of Labor, dismissed Chinese as unassimilable to American society: “People from other countries are absorbed in a few years and you can’t tell where they came from. A Chinaman is a Chinaman”.<sup>40</sup> Representative Compton White voiced similar concerns: “I do not think we can take the Chinese with their habits and mentalities and ... bring them up to our standards of civilization.... Let us help the Chinese—but help them in their own country!”<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, in seeking to improve American perception of Chinese, Mme. Chiang reinforced existing racism against Japanese that had been perpetuated by the ongoing war in the Pacific. In her speech in Congress, entitled “Japan IS First Foe”, she claimed to have seen American values of democracy displayed in the camaraderie between U.S. soldiers of all different nationalities but notably left out Japanese Americans. Her

argument that U.S. war policy must fight Japanese imperialism first found strong support particularly on the West Coast, where Pearl Harbor remained fresh in the public mind. In a way, this aspect of Mme. Chiang’s rhetoric also served to improve the American view of Chinese Americans by juxtaposing them with against the Japanese, thereby strengthening the case for repeal. A brief on the introduction of repeal to Chinese exclusion appeared—notably, in the *Manzanar Free Press*, a Japanese internment camp publication—directly underneath a story about lawsuits attempting to revoke native-born Japanese American citizenship.<sup>42</sup> Time published an article claiming to teach Americans “How to Tell Your [Chinese] Friends from the Japs”.<sup>43</sup> Only by transferring the longstanding “Yellow Peril” narrative to Japanese in the U.S. could the American public consider Chinese as fellow citizens. Unfortunately, in their efforts to expedite repeal, some supporters played up this sentiment, arguing that failing to lift the immigration left the U.S. open to attack by Japanese propaganda. Senator Carl Curtis of Nebraska worried of the consequences Chinese and Japanese from joining forces: “I cannot see it any other way that the future is black if all the yellow and brown men of Asia turn against us. I believe one of the most important things we have to do is to see to it that our war in the Pacific does not become a race war”.<sup>44</sup> Others argued that only by passing the repeal could the Allies counter Japanese taunts. As effective as such a strategy was, it is nonetheless ironic that, in seeking to right a historical wrong, repeal supporters turned to racialized arguments against another Asian group as evidence for lifting the ban against Chinese.

## CONCLUSION

By examining the rhetoric and public persona Mme. Chiang maintained during her tour, we are better able to evaluate her legacy with respect to the repeal of the immigration ban. In her campaign to bolster the Chinese-American war alliance and pressure Washington for more financial support, Mme. Chiang enabled supporters of repealing exclusion laws to co-opt her rhetoric for their own purposes, while motivating the White House to act on behalf of the repeal effort. Granted, minding her status as an Allied nation's first lady and informal diplomat to the Americans, Mme. Chiang never spoke publicly in support of the repeal movement in spite of the campaign's gaining momentum, in order to advance her primary objective of securing gains for China. However, though her rhetoric was carefully chosen to appeal to the sympathies of Congress, her emphasis on a special U.S.-China bond extending beyond a purely military alliance lent itself instead to the repeal campaign efforts by linking the success of China's war effort to the equal treatment of its citizens.

Mme. Chiang's second—and perhaps more important—contribution to the efforts to repeal of exclusion laws lies in her role in shaping public opinion during a crucial time in the legislation's progress through Congress. Her image, from her educational and religious background to her oratorical skills, was carefully constructed to fit American values and garner support for China's cause. Her high-profile reception and numerous celebrated appearances—at her own insistence—further increased her celebrity during the tour, despite the fact that her status officially remained that of a private citizen for the duration of her trip. While racial discrimination against Chinese remained a barrier, Mme. Chiang's personal prominence was strikingly effective in improving American perception of Chinese and advancing the case for repealing exclusion laws.

Though scholars have criticized her for her silence in public about racial discrimination, Mme. Chiang would ultimately announce her support for repealing exclusion laws shortly before the legislature was set to debate the bill in mid-May 1943, when she invited to dinner a group of the campaign's most vocal political supporters.<sup>45</sup> During the dinner, she reportedly urged the Congressmen to push the bill through while sympathy for China was at its height. If Mme. Chiang had acted earlier out of strategic considerations for her own diplomatic agenda when she had refrained from taking a stance on the repeal, her sudden openness on the subject in this particular instance seems to indicate newfound confidence in her tour's influence upon the American public—and a prevailing interest in seeing the repeal through to its resolution. Critics of Mme. Chiang might be right in claiming she was not selfless in her support of the repeal, but it is undeniable that she was a deliberate actor as well as a crucial agent in the cause's final success. 🏛️

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### **Authors Note:**

*"I would like to express my thanks to Professor Gordon H. Chang for his mentorship both in defining the questions being asked in this paper and in revising the first drafts. His expertise in U.S.-Chinese relations and willingness to give his time have been very much appreciated."*

## Endnotes

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# THE CASE OF THE CINCINNATUS

## American Neutral Trade in the British Wartime Legal Order

*Abstract: Historians have generally agreed that American neutrality during the “French Wars” of the early 1800s was a boon for the country’s shipping industry. This article seeks to analyze the actions of these neutral American merchant-sailors from a global perspective. It illustrates how these merchants also had significant economic impacts in the regions that they operated in. Moreover, since the merchants’ profits and practices often conflicted against British maritime interests, they profoundly influenced the development of British maritime law. Narration and context of one particular voyage of the American ship *Cincinnatus* helps to explore the global history of the trade the ship engaged in, from markets to battlefields to courtrooms.*

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Fear and uncertainty pulsed among the crew of the American ship, *Cincinnatus*, as it rounded the Bulge of Africa on the morning of July 31, 1803. It wasn’t the five French *Men O’War* (battleships) approaching from the horizon that had caused this panic, nor the fact that one of the ships had fired a warning cannon shot to signal the *Cincinnatus* to halt. Though certainly intimidating, such encounters were routine and certainly not cause for alarm. Rather, what surprised the crew was the unexpected switch of flags by the approaching warships from French to English. The action indicated that the English ships were raiding potential French shipping. As the ship’s captain, Massachusetts native John Endicott, correctly surmised, this particular switch of flags suggested England and France were, yet again, at war. This boded ill for the *Cincinnatus*, as it was carrying a cargo of Sumatran pepper that was destined for France.<sup>1</sup> The crew’s livelihoods, if not their lives, were now at the mercy of the boarding Englishmen.

According to depositions by members of the crew, two British officers boarded the *Cincinnatus*, demanding Captain Endicott explain “whence he came [and] where he was bound.”<sup>2</sup> Summoning his courage, Endicott gave an honest and detailed reply: he had just made a port stop in Isle de France, or modern-day Mauritius, and he was now bound for the French port L’Orient in western France. However, he left out the precise source of the cargo onboard. Dutifully, the Britons informed Endicott that a state of war now existed France and Britain, requesting to see his ship papers for verification. To satisfy their inquiry, Endicott led the British officers into his cabin whereupon he produced the documents. For a long, tense hour, Endicott’s crew waited outside, uncertain of their fates.

Before they entered the cabin, the British captains had strong suspicions of the *Cincinnatus*’s true allegiance. As they followed Endicott down the cabin stairs, one whispered to the other that he was sure Endicott was a Frenchman.<sup>3</sup> While it is unclear what occurred inside the captain’s cabin, it is apparent that, a quarter hour into his conversation with the British captains, Endicott found an excuse to ring the cabin bell -- a previously agreed upon secret signal for one of his shipmates, William Haskell, to immediately destroy the cargo documentation and passports. Haphazardly stuffed into a cloth bag during the precious moments before the British ships had closed in on the *Cincinnatus*, the papers were weighed down by cannonballs and suspended near the rudder of the ship by rope. As the faint ringing of the cabin bell reached his ears, Haskell furiously cut the rope, and the papers were forever buried beneath the waves.<sup>4</sup> They were never discovered by the British officers, who eventually cleared the *Cincinnatus* to go on its way freely.

Why were these papers so crucial that they had to be disposed of with such urgency? Why was the ship even headed for port in France instead of Massachusetts? Why didn’t the British captains immediately call for the seizure of the American ship after learning of its destination from Captain Endicott? To even begin to comprehend the inner workings of this interaction calls for a careful examination of the legal, economic, and political context of American merchant trade, especially in the backdrop of the imperial rivalry between the then-superpowers France and England. American neutrality was a paradoxically safe, yet highly tenuous cover. American merchants like those on the *Cincinnatus* had to react to changing markets in a time of not only globalized trade, but also globalized conflict. At the same time, their actions catalyzed a true counterreaction on part of frustrated Anglicans that set minute, but important distinctions on what qualified as “neutral” trade.



Portrait of John Jay (1794)  
Source: Gilbert Charles Stuart, *The National Gallery of Art*  
(Wikimedia Commons)

### AMERICAN NEUTRALITY IN CONTEXT

Historians have generally agreed that American neutrality during the “French Wars” of the early 1800s was a boon for its shipping industry. In his work, *So Great a Proffit*, Historian James Fichter documents how the wars left the Americans as the only viable neutral shipping agent between European countries and their colonies in the East Indies, a situation that gave rise to “the first millionaires in American history.”<sup>5</sup> The economic historian Cathy Matson concurs, noting that “England and France were forced to suspend their mercantile regulations” in order to meet their empires’ respective trade demands, especially when it came to Pacific commodities like “pepper, salt, tea, and coffee.”<sup>6</sup>

Previous scholarship regarding the freedom and restrictions of American commerce, especially in the East Indies routes, has largely focused on raw numbers and important treaties, but somewhat glosses over the undeveloped state of international law at the time of the conflict. The historian Holden Furber, writing in the 1930s, goes to great lengths to document the impacts of Jay’s Treaty on American commerce. Zeroing in on the few obscure provisions governing trade between Britain and the US, Furber argued that the treaty’s implication meant the “East India Company was powerless to prevent the Americans from carrying on

... an ever-increasing trade in the Indian seas, little of which was in accord with the original intent of Article XIII [of Jay’s Treaty].”<sup>7</sup> More recently, James Fichter paints a picture of American merchants during the 1800s as a fearless group, emboldened by a few key treaties, who were “unconcerned with national boundaries; they bought what they could sell anywhere, not just what they could sell in the United States.”<sup>8</sup> Few historians of the field have delved into the possibility that the global environment American traders and ship captains found themselves in was rarely so clear cut.<sup>9</sup> The neutral trade they practiced, during and between the Anglo-French conflicts of the time, were full of ambiguities.

It is important to understand that the early nineteenth century was an era when codification of international regulations of international laws had only just begun in earnest. At the time, enforcement of particular statutes still offered much leeway to ship captains and admirals. In the case of piracy and slave-trading, for example, historians have argued that the legal murkiness, from uncertain jurisdictions to broad terms of law, allowed British agents and naval officers “to direct policy in action.”<sup>10</sup> Historians Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford document an instance in 1822 when a British captain and his crew attacked and captured two ships in port merely based on hearsay that they were in port awaiting delivery of slaves. After the attack, however, the captain and his crew only found evidence pointing to the contrary.<sup>11</sup>

If, as the historical evidence suggests, the vitality of American shipping during the first decade of the nineteenth century was significant and central to the sustenance of European colonies,<sup>12</sup> then it would have certainly been a catalyst for legal development as well. As this article proceeds to document, American trade operating under this cloak of neutrality rubbed against British wartime interests. It profoundly impacted the development of British maritime law, especially when the merchants’ routes were thrown into question during times of war. Using *the Cincinnatus* as a microcosm, this paper illustrates a story of how profit-seeking American merchants not only traversed the world, but also acted as lawyers who weaved and navigated their way through the dominant British legal order.

### THE CARGO OF PEPPER: THE AMERICAN EAST INDIES TRADE

Before it had encountered the English warships in 1803, the *Cincinnatus* had first sailed from its home port of Salem in May 1802 to the coast of Sumatra, where it arrived in October of that year. There, it loaded up on a cargo of largely pepper, though with some amount of coffee, which likely acted as small hedge.<sup>13</sup> Pepper, as a singular commodity, was one of the most highly valuable and sought after in the Western nations. The *Cincinnatus* was not the only ship, American or not, that was a member of this lucrative industry. In his *Remarks on the Northwest Coast of Sumatra*, the Massachusetts sailor Nathaniel Bowditch documents how American purchases

of Sumatran pepper were large enough to move the local market. In 1803, not long after the *Cincinnatus* departed from the island, the price was “10 to 11 dollars per pecul,” an increase from a price of eight due to the demand caused by a constant “near thirty sail of American vessels on the coast.” The industry was large and employed thousands of natives, some of whom even spoke English well and were happy to make contracts with the American sailors.<sup>14</sup>

American pepper purchases were of significant consequence to economic as well as political developments in the region. Indeed, by the time the *Cincinnatus*' crew had sailed off Sumatra, “the natives of Sumatra were at war with other, in consequence of the Americans procuring pepper at the petty ports and thereby depriving the Rajah's of the larger ports of their revenue.”<sup>15</sup> The highly-cited *A History of Islamic Societies* gives a concurring (though more nuanced) account, noting that American and British purchases on the island at the time “created a boom in the highland economy that disrupted traditional trading systems” and consequently eroded traditional Islamic morality, spurring a fundamentalist backlash and bitter civil war by 1803.<sup>16</sup> This aspect of American trade parallels a contemporary economic effect documented on the Sulu archipelago, in which British bulk purchases of Southeast Asian commodities such as bird's nests led to piracy and regional conflict as certain groups subjugated others for enslaved labor.<sup>17</sup>

American naval trade at the time was surprisingly global at the time. However, it was the relatively new Pacific routes, of which pepper constituted the central product, that had the highest profits. American trade in the Dutch East Indies assumed significant proportions by 1797. In *The Economic Growth of the United States*, economic historian Douglas North asserts that these new routes accounted for earnings that were “probably a higher proportion of total income in the carrying trade.”<sup>18</sup> Emory Johnson concurs, noting that “commerce with the Far East subsequently became an important source of wealth to American traders.”<sup>19</sup>

According to James Fichter's estimates for the years that import data were available, US merchants imported 62 million pounds of pepper, 54 million pounds of which came on US vessels, and re-exported 56 million pounds of pepper elsewhere, often in Europe.<sup>20</sup> The reason for this re-exportation was often simply a matter of better profit, and it would also be the same reason why the *Cincinnatus*, originally home-bound towards Salem when it left Sumatra, would end up sailing towards France.

#### ISLE OF FRANCE: STRATEGIC TRADE ROUTES

After having spent months at sea on the homeward journey, Endicott's ship was running low on provisions by early May 1803. Therefore, the *Cincinnatus* headed towards a port that would welcome it – L'Ile de France, or modern-day Mauritius, a hundred miles west of Madagascar near the

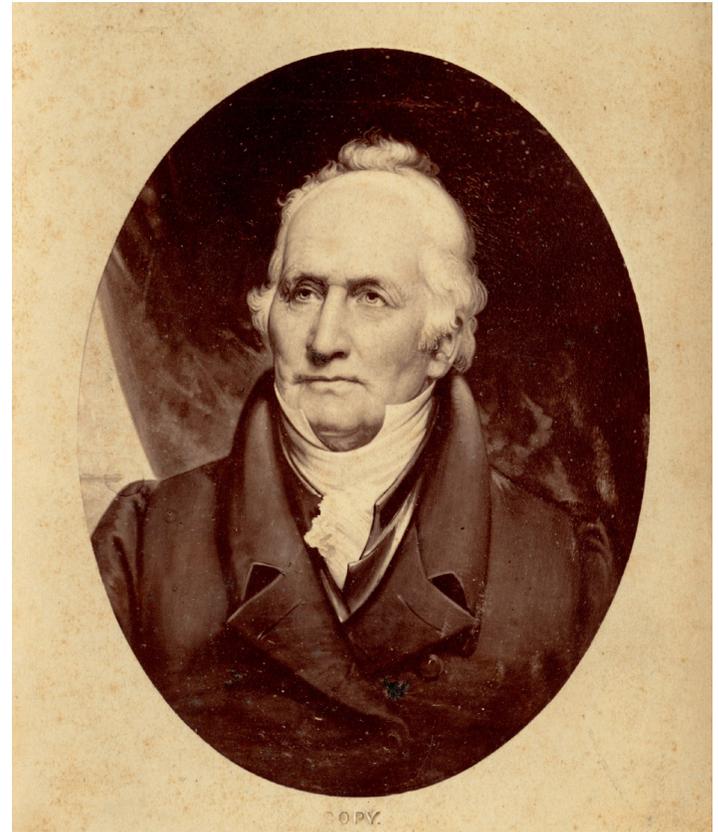


Photo of Painted Portrait of Captain Joseph Peabody, Primary owner of the ship *Cincinnatus*.

Source: James Notman, Stevens-Coolidge Place Collection (Massachusetts Digital Commonwealth)

African continent.<sup>21</sup> There, Endicott encountered the French merchants Messrs. Pitot, Leclerio, and Icery, who offered to buy his pepper cargo for twenty sous (one French franc or livre) per pound, a price Endicott gladly obliged. The catch, however, was that the contract was to be fulfilled in France in the L'Orient, where Endicott and his crew would deliver the pepper at their own risk, and where two other agents, Messrs. Dugray and Cossin, would actually pay for the cargo.<sup>22</sup>

The *Cincinnatus* was not the lone American ship to stop in Ile de France. During the period from 1793 to 1810, 521, or over half of the 748 foreign vessels that stopped at the French port, were American, out of 960 vessels counted in total by a meticulous French observer.<sup>23</sup> American ships were practically the lifeblood of the island. “Nearly all the supplies of the Isle of France come from us,” the American Amasa Delano noted at the onset of the French Revolutionary War.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Ile de France, as a strategic point off the coast of Africa, was frequently contested during wartime, and American ships were thus helplessly sucked into the conflict. Years earlier in 1801, the American Captain Crowninshield of the ship *America* was embargoed in the Isle of France for thirty days, on account of two English warships blockading the port.<sup>25</sup> This would repeat shortly after the *Cincinnatus* left the island's harbor in 1803, when England had, yet again, declared war on France.



Battle of Grand Port at Isle de France (1810)

Source: Pierre Julien Gilbert, Musée National de la Marine de Paris (Wikimedia Commons)

By the time the *Cincinnatus* sailed away from the Isle of France in 1803, British forces had already begun exerting pressure on the island. The colonial prefect of the island noted that year that “[t]he admission of neutrals into these colonies, in times of war, [is] a necessity.” He went on, “since the war, only Americans have come here, who are nearly all linked to the English, and there is no other means of supplying the colony.”<sup>26</sup> During the last quarters of 1803, it was only the Americans who carried on the trade with French colonies like Ile de France most closely, and it was only they who could supply it.<sup>27</sup>

#### **A LAWFUL PRIZE? LEGAL PRECEDENTS FOR SEIZURE**

From 1799 and 1800, when Britain and France had been at war, there had been unparalleled prosperity by the American merchant class.<sup>28</sup> With the renewal of conflict worldwide in 1803 (until passage of the Embargo Act under President Jefferson in 1807), US shipping took advantage of this renewed opportunity for a windfall. However, this was also a potentially risky windfall. During the previous war between Britain and France, both sides seized American shipping when it was found to be on behalf of the other. Seizures by the French in 1796, for example, led to an undeclared sea war between America and France.<sup>29</sup> The period of war beginning in 1803 was no exception, and clearly not a free-for-all

for American merchants acting as neutrals. The American Secretary of State estimated that between 1803-7 the British had seized 528 American ships, while the French seized 389.<sup>30</sup>

However, in 1803 Britain seemed very keen not to anger American interests. On June 24, 1803, Britain had declared that “direct trade between neutrals and colonies of enemies not to be interrupted.”<sup>31</sup> Of course, this excluded contraband and the running of naval blockades, but this new legal framework meant that the resumption of war that began in 1803 was an unparalleled boon to American sailors. James Monroe, writing to Madison in July 1, 1804, remarked that “The truth is[,] that our commerce never enjoyed in any war, as much freedom, and indeed favor from this govt [sic] as it now does.”<sup>32</sup> Such was the context when the *Cincinnatus* ran into the British ships in 1803.

The first mystery around the *Cincinnatus* occurrence is, why were the British officers so interested in knowing whether Endicott was French? Despite the existing Anglo-American treaties, there were still grounds for the taking of American ships after 1795. One of these grounds was disputed ownership of a vessel. This loophole in British tolerance was allowed, since French ship owners, not surprisingly, tended to switch their flags to protect their ships from wartime seizure.

Various practices in enforcement could have allowed the British captains to at least temporarily seize Endicott's ship. If the British could prove Endicott was actually French, the case of the famed Philadelphia merchant Stephen Girard's ship *Sallie* would have held, in which British courts counted Girard as French because he was born a Frenchman (despite being an American citizen). Conversely, if the British could prove Endicott and his crew had spent significant time on French soil, the case of the *Betsey* would have held, in which the British Admiralty courts decided that because the part owner George Patterson of Baltimore had been a short-term inhabitant of a French island, the vessel was a lawful prize.<sup>33</sup>

The next mystery surrounds the destruction of papers on the *Cincinnatus*. At the time, destruction of evidence occurred quite often on the part of American merchants. In the contemporary *War in Disguise*, published in 1805, British Admiralty lawyer James Stephens documents that the British Order of 1798 during the previous war period, which in particular called for detention of vessels of heading to French colonies or land<sup>34</sup>, led Americans to pretend a British destination. In reality, the Americans only came into British port to get a sense of which *enemy* port they should proceed to for the highest prices. In case a British cruiser came nearby, Americans destroyed or concealed such papers that disclosed their destination.<sup>35</sup> In other cases, the excuse of captured American captains was often that they had intended importation to America, but news of better markets had caused them to alter course.<sup>36</sup> According to Stephens, American ships going into a non-British port would even preemptively destroy their old papers and replace them with fraudulent new ones to skirt British wartime rules.<sup>37</sup>

The publication of *War in Disguise, or, The Frauds of the Neutral Flags* was a prime illustration of how the economic activities of American merchant-sailors posed new legal challenges that the British legal system wrangled with. The book, by calling for a complete clamp-down by the British Navy on American trade with countries Britain was at war with, "caused a great and immediate furore in legal and political circles" and was printed multiple times on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>38</sup> An immediate response was given by Gouverneur Morris, an American ambassador to France, who accused James Stephens of proposing "to make war [with the United States]; not in disguise, but open and flagrant, as it is unprovoked and unjust."<sup>39</sup> This was a conversation that even James Madison would weigh in on, invoking Hugo Grotius to make his own contributions to the international legal debate.<sup>40</sup>

The case of the *Cincinnatus* does not fit cleanly into these previously documented circumstances: after all, Endicott actually *did* honestly inform the British captains where he was headed. This seems perplexing: why would Endicott say that he was headed to a French port — as if he was begging to be seized, yet then destroy the pieces of evidence apparently

proving the destination? A potential explanation is offered by the subtle legal distinctions between navigation, trading, and cargo carrying. In particular, it was perfectly fine for a neutral ship to go to an unblockaded enemy port under certain conditions. Under the Rule of 1756, a British rule of war, it was permissible for a neutral to trade *with* the enemy during war, it was just not permissible for a neutral to trade *for* the enemy (i.e. carry enemy cargo) without British approval.<sup>41,42</sup> Therefore, while Endicott could reply honestly to the British that he was headed to a French port, he could not let the British find the contract he had made in Ile de France (Mauritius). Otherwise, his pepper of cargo could be construed as being French: Endicott technically already sold the pepper at Ile de France by signing the contract (the trading *with*), and in effect his current leg of the voyage could be construed as merely carrying (the trading *for*). Thus, when Endicott's shipmate William Haskell cut the rope to drop the contract papers into the sea, he also cut the Gordian knot of a possible legal tangle — without the French papers, the only papers left would ostensibly have been any receipts or contracts from Sumatra, leaving the pepper undisputedly American.

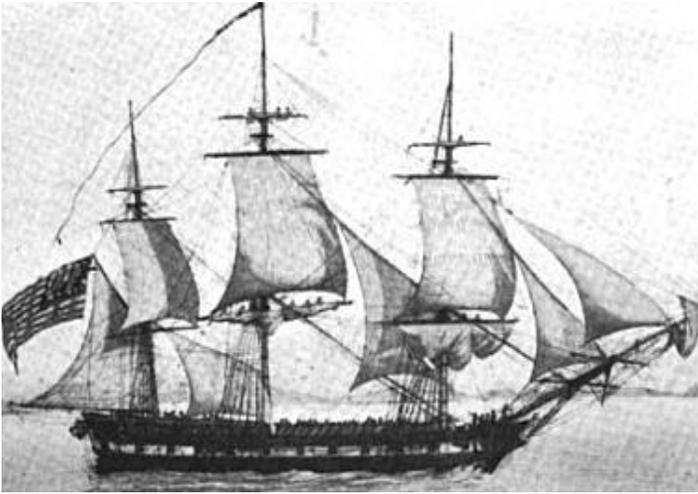
#### THE JOURNEY CONTINUES?

While one may attribute it to pure New England sincerity, it still seems strange why Endicott did not lie outright to the British officers. As an explanation, Endicott's original honesty was perhaps a cue to get information about the war. It was standard procedure for the British Navy to inform neutrals about which French ports were blockaded. Indeed, after the incident, Endicott had a long discussion with his crewmates whether to continue on their journey to the French port despite its blockade.

Though they eventually decided not to, it was not unimaginable for Endicott to run a blockade to chase profits in a French port. American ships running blockades, even in spite of British forewarnings, was generally quite common. During the previous conflict between Britain and France, American ships often violated the order of 1798, which required neutrals coming from enemy colonies to bring cargoes directly to their home countries. In 1800 and 1801, American ships were seized for trying to enter or leave the British-blockaded port of Cadiz, Spain.<sup>43</sup>

Such blockade running also occurred during the renewed conflict. In 1805 in Ile de France, the very island on which the *Cincinnatus* had made its original French contracts, American ships eluded a British blockade by sailing in the night.<sup>44</sup> This was also the case for certain European ports, where American ships ran blockades even when directly informed of them. One ship, *The Shephardess*, tried to evade a British blockade of Havre and the Seine in Europe, even after being warned by the British Cruiser *Pluto*.<sup>45</sup> Another ship, *The Harriet*, similarly attempted to enter Havre after having been informed by another British ship of the blockade, and was captured and condemned.<sup>46</sup>

## The Case of the *Cincinnatus*



Painting of ship “America” of Salem (1799)  
Source: M.F. Corne. Peabody Essex Museum of Salem  
(Wikimedia Commons)

At the end of the journey, having chosen to go directly home instead of to France, the *Cincinnatus*' crew still believed they would have gotten a better price for their pepper in Europe.<sup>47</sup> This was likely true, since most of the revenue such merchants got were from actual re-exportation anyway, as a loophole on international laws. The prevailing theory of English courts was the *Polly* decision, the precedent that a ship landing its goods in an US port made them US goods, and thus could not be interfered with until a radical change in British-American treaties. Of course, this did not stop British courts from enforcing their own country's interest around the loophole. In the case of the *Mercury*, an American vessel carrying Havana sugar going from Charleston to Hamburg, a British court ruled that since the sugar had not been reloaded or duty paid for, the touching at Charleston was for the mere purpose of giving the voyage “the color and appearance of having begun there.”<sup>48</sup>

Americans often pursued profit and gave discretionary ability for captains to do so. The re-export trade, especially with regard to the far east, was encouraged by the various tariff laws that gave lower duties on tea, cargo from American ships, and allowed for the fact that goods imported and then re-exported within twelve months were entitled to drawbacks of all except one percent of the amount paid.<sup>49</sup> As Stephens, writing in 1805, makes apparent in *War in Disguise*, this was actually a ploy within a long series of cat-and-mouse games that American merchants played with British wartime orders regarding neutrality.<sup>50</sup>

## CONCLUSION

After returning to its home port of Salem, Massachusetts with 307,824 pounds of pepper and 10,460 pounds of coffee, the *Cincinnatus* would make two more documented voyages to Sumatra (one immediately in 1804, and another in 1807) under the former first mate and rope-cutter William Haskell, and additional voyages to Havana after that.<sup>51</sup> But its encounter with British ships in 1803 illustrates how America's position as a neutral trader had been exposed to a variety of fluctuations at a time of globalized trade and globalized conflict, and how sailors like Endicott and Haskell navigated them.

Unfortunately for the merchants that engaged in this trade, this sort of occupation was seen as almost unpatriotic by some of their countrymen. In New York, Clement C. More circulated a pamphlet entitled *Inquiry into the Effects of the Foreign Carrying Trade upon Agriculture Population and Morals of the Country*. He argued that agriculture and manufacture should be the chief occupations of the American people, instead of this sort of carrying trade for other nations that inevitably embroiled the United States in new conflicts.<sup>52</sup> More was remarkably prescient. As exemplified by works like *War in Disguise* in 1805, American sailors' actions caught the attention of British parliament and prize courts, influencing considerable changes in the British legal outlook. Such progress catalyzed the controversial *Essex* decision by British Admiralty courts, cited by historians as a leading cause of the War of 1812, in which an American ship was found to have violated the Rule of 1756 by “trading for” the French despite its intermediate stop in an American port.

By 1812, British imperial policy declared preventing neutral trade during wartime became a matter of “its most ancient, essential, and undoubtable maritime rights.”<sup>53</sup> This proclamation considerably stretched Hugo Grotius' writings regarding neutrals, the prevailing legal consensus at the time, that stated “nothing can justify us taking or applying the property of [a neutral] to our own use, beyond the immediate demands of that emergency.”<sup>54</sup> As this article concludes, while the actions of American ships like the *Cincinnatus* were independent and profit-seeking, together they not only illustrate America's unwitting involvement when it came to various conflicts (whether local, like in Sumatra, or global in the case of England and France), but also offer an economic interpretation to the legal underpinnings of British law at the beginning of the long nineteenth century. ■

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- [9] Anna Cornelia Clauder, *American Commerce as Affected by the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon*, 2nd ed. (Clifton, New Jersey: Augustus M. Kelley, 1932).
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- [12] Ole Feldbaek, "Dutch Batavia Trade via Copenhagen 1795-1807: A Study of Colonial Trade and Neutrality", *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 21 no. 1 (1973): 46-56.
- [13] Clauder, 20 documents the case of a time when an American ship captain deviated from his pepper buying instructions and brought coffee, a lucky break at a time when he got to port and found that the pepper prices had plunged.
- [14] Nathaniel Bowditch, "Remarks on the North West Coast of Sumatra," reprinted in George Granville Putnam. *Salem Vessels and Their Voyages: A History Of The Pepper Trade With The Island Of Sumatra*. (Salem, Massachusetts: Essex institute, 1922). 49-50
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- [16] Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014). 445-6.
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- [19] Johnson, 131]
- [20] Fichter, 85, on figures compiled from data found passim in American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation, vols I and 2 (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1832).
- [21] According to the depositions, the ship landed in port on the eleventh or twelfth of May.
- Deposition of William Haskell and Hezekiah Wilkins*.
- [22] *Ibid*.
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- [24] Amasa Delano, *A narrative of voyages and travels, in the northern and southern hemispheres: Comprising three voyages round the world, together with a voyage of survey and discovery, in the Pacific Ocean and oriental islands* (Boston, 1817), 200. Cited by Fichter 168.
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- Putnam, 15.
- [26] Original Text: "L'admission des neutres dans ces colonies, en temps de guerre, devient de nécessité. Depuis la guerre. disait-il, il n'est venu ici que des Américains, qui sont presque tous en relation avec les Anglais, et il n'y a pas d'autre moyen d'approvisionner la colonie." Centre des Archives d'Outre Mer, Aix-en-Provence, register 102, as cited in Prentout, Henri. *L'île de France sous Decaen 1803-1810: essai sur la politique coloniale du premier empire, et la rivalité de la France et de l'Angleterre dans les Indes Orientales*. Hachette, 1901. 203-204. <https://archive.org/details/liledefrancesous00pren/page/n16>
- [27] Paraphrased Text: "Dans son rapport sur les trois derniers trimesters de l'an XII, le préfet exprimait les mêmes idées, disant que c'étaient les Américains qui faisaient le commerce le plus suivi avec ses colonies, et qu'eux seuls pouvaient en assurer l'approvisionnement." Here the year 7 comes from the French revolutionary calendar, which corresponds mostly to 1803.
- Centre des Archives d'Outre Mer, Aix-en-Provence, register 104, as cited in Prentout, 204.
- [28] North, 37
- [29] North, 37.
- [30] It appears much of the seizures occurred during the latter half of the period, not during the start of war.
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[40] See James Madison, *An Examination Of The British Doctrine Which Subjects To Capture A Neutral Trade Not Open In Time Of Peace*. 1806. (In particular, pages 168-176 offer Madison's interpretations of Grotius as he argues against the new British legal doctrine.)

[41] Neff, 334-5.

[42] This was originally formulated in 1756 to deal with Dutch ships working with the French colonies.

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[43] Clauder, 50

[44] *Appeals before Lords. Comm. in Prize Causes, Case of Lapwing*. New York Ships As cited in Clauder, 54.

[45] Christopher Robinson, Decisions in High Court of Admiralty, Vol. V, London ed. *Case of Shepherdes*. Cited in Clauder 54-55.

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[48] Robinson, 2. 186-206. Cited in Clauder, 77.

[49] Law of Sept 1, 1789, amended Dec. 31, 1792. *US Statutes at Large*, Vol. I, 55-65 cited in Clauder 18-19

[50] Stephen, 56-69, 94-106. As cited by Neff, 337.

[51] William Crowninshield Endicott and Walter Muir Whitehill. *Captain Joseph Peabody; East India merchant of Salem (1757-1844)*. (Salem, Massachusetts: Peabody Museum. 1962). 84.

[52] Clauder, 88.

[53] British Declaration, respecting the conditional revocation of the Orders of the Council of 1807 and 1809, 21 April 1812, *British and Foreign State Papers*, vol. VIII. 506-7

[54] Grotius states that neutrals were those "against whom no rights of war can exist."

Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace: Including the Law of Nature and of Nations*, translated by A.C. Campbell (New York: M.W. Dunne, 1901), 377.

# CONQUEST AND THE CODE CIVIL DES FRANÇAIS

## Napoleon Bonaparte in the Age of Revolution

*Abstract: Napoleon Bonaparte, a controversial historical figure, is both revered and deplored by modern audiences. Of his many notable modern reforms, the Code civil, a modern reworking of the French legal system, changed the face of Western and Central Europe permanently. While Napoleon is known as a military tactician and conqueror modeled in the image of a bygone era, there is a greater historical force underlying the legendary French Emperor: the Age of Revolution. This paper argues that Napoleon would not have been successful in the delivery of his Code civil to the Rhinebund States on the merits of its Enlightenment reforms alone. The success of Napoleon's Code civil was made possible by his capitalizing on the Age of Revolution throughout Europe and the satellite states in the Confederation of the Rhine.*

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Napoleon Bonaparte was a man both deeply venerated and despised in his time, drawing mixed reactions from his admirers and detractors alike in the two centuries that followed his rule as Emperor of France. Regarded as both a preeminent military tactician and reviled conqueror, Bonaparte instituted his own unitary reign to secure the ideals of the Enlightenment, be it through coercion or brute strength. Napoleon's greatest effort to establish permanent political influence throughout his European Empire was his *magnum opus*, the *Code civil des Français* [civil code of France] – the codification of a modern civil code – which subjected all persons under its jurisdiction to the universality of Enlightenment principles and equality before the law.

Revolutionary France was born of the Enlightenment, a time when humanity's own inherent reason subverted dogma as the engine that drove its understanding of the world and its relationship with government. While the *Code civil* fulfills the promise of modernity and enlightenment for a devastated France, it carries with it the legacy of a conqueror. The irony present in the history of Napoleon's *Code civil* lies not in the code itself but in the military conquest of a bygone age. Rather than earning public appeal and demand for its adoption in Central Europe on the merits of its principles, the code was forcefully delivered to the Rhineland and permanently dissolved the Holy Roman Empire.

This essay works to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory issues. Readers of history must recognize that, while Napoleon's code is an intellectual feat of the Enlightenment, it would not have come to fruition without his capitalizing on the Age of Revolution. Instead of deliberation or modest reforms, reason's precept ordered the tearing down of old regimes and the reconstruction of the foundation on which societies rest.

In 1769, Napoleon Bonaparte was born into a well-to-do family in Ajaccio, prior to Corsica's acquisition by the French; however, the Bonapartes were not nobility themselves. The *Ancien Régime* granted no special privilege to any person or family outside of the noble and priestly castes of France; yet the revolution promised mobility for aspirational young people who lacked connections in French society. By legislative decree, the National Constituent Assembly in Paris made Corsica a department of France in January of 1790. Given Napoleon's tumultuous upbringing, he was optimistic about what this meant, not only for the revolution, but for himself. To Napoleon, the regicide in France marked by the execution of Louis XVI, and the vanquishing of the Bourbon Monarchy, promised a new 'social-order' "built on logic and reason, which the Enlightenment *philosophes* saw as the only true foundation for authority."<sup>1</sup>

As was characteristic of the chaotic French military in the early 1790s, Napoleon quickly ascended through military ranks. This opportunity was only made possible by the constantly shifting conditions of the revolution.<sup>2</sup> The infighting within Corsica and the chaos of the revolution on the mainland, lead to exceptional turnover in the highest strata of military rank. This gave Napoleon ample opportunity to prove his exceptional worth in combat. After serving less than four years of active service Napoleon, at twenty-four years old, was promoted to general, and would oversee extraordinary campaigns within only five years' time.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this remarkable progress, in the failed Egyptian campaign of August, 1799, Napoleon abandoned his army in Egypt without waiting for additional orders. When he returned to Paris, he was hailed a hero by the French people, despite leaving his army in complete disarray. Prior to Napoleon's return several members of the Directory, were already plotting a coup to subvert the Constitution of Year



“Portrait de Napoléon Bonaparte en premier consul” (1803)  
Source: Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres,  
(Wikimedia Commons)

III. Abbé Sieyès, who at this point in the revolution had been a Director in power since May of 1799, believed that the government was simply too corrupt and incompetent to manage the issues at hand in France.<sup>4</sup> While Napoleon and Sieyès shared mutual contempt for one another, Sieyès knew that Napoleon possessed the muscle capable of bringing the Brumaire Coup to fruition.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> day of Brumaire [on the revolutionary calendar], after 10 years of a warring revolutionary France, Napoleon Bonaparte helped orchestrate and lead the execution of the premeditated two-day *coup d'état*. After seizing the opportunity to abolish the Directory, and establish an ‘authoritarian-republic,’ the first French Consulate effectively ended the French Revolution. By convincing the *Anciens*, the upper chamber of the legislative body, that the Brumaire

coup was justified and righteous, the members of the lower chamber of the legislature under the Directory were driven from the chambers by force. The remaining legislators who supported the coup designated Napoleon as the first French Consul, serving alongside Abbé Sieyès and Roger Ducos.<sup>5</sup>

The spirit of the French Revolution was one of an unyielding class-conflict with the most infectious ideals of the Enlightenment spreading rapidly to all corners of France. However, the actualization of Enlightenment principles, as promised to the French people since the dawn of the Revolution, were seldom seen, aside from radical power-grabs and the overthrowing of assemblies and constitutions.

Napoleon, who saw himself a reformer, knew that instituting the *Code civil* would be fundamental in ushering in a new era of enlightened society. As a self-described “man of the Enlightenment,” with the fortitude and will for the task, Napoleon was confident in his ability to bring about reform.<sup>6</sup>

#### BONAPARTE: CONSUL AND REFORMER

Upon becoming the first Consul of France, Napoleon took steps toward the implementation of his legal overhaul less than two years later. The institutions and mandates of Napoleonic Rule would swiftly evince. On December 22, 1799 the *Conseil d'Etat* [Council of State] was instituted to act as both a court in the jurisdiction of the current administrative law, as well as to draft bills for legislative consideration. Only three days later, December 25, 1799, the Constitution of Year VIII came into force – a sturdier and more concise document than the previous revolutionary constitutions.<sup>7</sup>

Napoleon commonly asserted to members of the drafting commission, “law must do nothing but impose a general principle.”<sup>8</sup> Until then, all prior attempts at legal reform and modernization of government had fallen short of lasting success. Jean Jacques Régis de Cambacérès had attempted this kind of reform before in 1792 and additionally authored the *Projet de Code Civil* in 1796. Despite Cambacérès’ futile effort to reform the legal system in 1792 (which Napoleon deeply criticized him for), Napoleon, notwithstanding, enlisted him to be a lead author of the *Code Napoléon* in 1801.<sup>9</sup>

Some scholars emphasize that such an ambitious plan to redesign the French legal system was truly unthinkable ten years prior, as seen in 1792. C.J. Friedrich, formerly of Harvard Law School, wrote that “it was an enterprise meant to change everything at once, in education, in manners and customs, in the spirit and in the laws of a great people.”<sup>10</sup> The Assembly was not confident in Cambacérès’ initial attempt to achieve all of that, hence its rejection. It is important to understand that Napoleon’s *Code civil* was a revival of Cambacérès’ attempt made almost ten years earlier, but with a new zealous advocacy to support it. On March 21, 1804, after years of preparation, the *Code Napoleon* came into force. The inspiration for Napoleon’s successful *Code civil* in the

period of Revolutionary France is the confluence of several forces. Napoleon, an ambitious leader, was entirely familiar with radical Enlightenment *philosophes* and particularly the works of Voltaire and Rousseau. Napoleon was particularly enamoured by Rousseau's Republicanism that is laid out in his famous *Social Contract*. Napoleon believed that Rousseau's Republicanism—the idea that everyone's commitment to a whole [government, constitution, etc. and thus creating a 'general will']—was not only applicable to the spirit of his military but would be indispensable to the future of French governance as well.<sup>11</sup>

While Napoleon's ambitious legal reform is historic in context, codifying a body of law in the early nineteenth century was certainly nothing remarkable in and of itself. Not only was an epoch of written constitutions long underway in the West, but *Corpus Juris Civilis*, the medieval body of law commissioned and enforced under Justinian I, had been in place for centuries, influencing and impacting nations far beyond the Byzantine Empire.<sup>12</sup> What is exceptional about Napoleon's *Code civil*, however, was the means by which it strategically drew together the cardinal ideals of the Enlightenment and how it was forcefully put into place.

The Age of Revolution represented forcefully putting a system of 'natural-law' in place, when all other means had failed – affording to each individual certain natural rights, inherent to them by virtue of one's own humanity. The concept of

in *Napoleon: A Life* to the French Emperor as a 'lawgiver,' Friedrich remarks that while law-giving was certainly Napoleon's intent, the *Code civil* ultimately falls under the natural law model.<sup>14</sup>

The code abolished the manorial system—the legal and systematic means which gave lords jurisdiction over their peasants. The *Code civil* also ended formal tax exemptions for the aristocracy, priority in officeholding and military commands, and establishing a system of meritocracy in the workforce – all issues that necessitated the French Revolution in the first place.<sup>15</sup>

Under the *Ancien Régime*, the inconsistency of the law throughout France was both common and systematic. In southern and northern France, including Paris, written Roman law governed. Marriage and family affairs were exclusively under the domain of the Catholic Church. Decentralization of the law was deliberate, as it was a principle of the *Ancien Régime*. Through decentralization of the law, the nobility and aristocracy easily retained rights and privileges not granted to common people.<sup>16</sup> What is exceptionally remarkable about the *Code civil* was its ability to nationally unify France but also its ability to successfully simplify 14,000 decrees and laws enacted by kings dating back as far as the fifteenth century. Nationally, the code dismantled 42 regional codes into one unified body of law applicable to all citizens.<sup>17</sup>

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## “Decentralization of the law was deliberate, as it was a principle of the Ancien Régime.”

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a complete substitution for an old regime, as opposed to simply reforming it, was made popular by Thomas Paine in his pamphlet *Common Sense* in 1775 and reiterated in his *Rights of the Man and of the Citizen* in 1789.

One school of thought on the formation of codified law is the ideological form by which they manifest. C.J. Friedrich puts forth three primary forms in which codified laws typically exist: one being the simple clarification and systemization of law in a society – a reorganization of existing laws and principles within a polity; another being the natural law model, which systematizes but also *reforms* the law, predicated on the foundation of human reason – the basis for Enlightenment thought; finally, 'law-giving,' which Friedrich defines as setting “out to remake the law in the image of a new and better society.”<sup>13</sup>

Napoleon intended for his new regime to be implemented as a law-giving system, rather than attempting to bring about reforms that the initial French Revolution failed to achieve. While historian Andrew Roberts dedicates an entire chapter

Dissimilar to the Anglo-Saxon tradition, wherein judges interpret the specifics of cases and establish binding precedents for future jurists to adhere to, code systems put great emphasis on the interpretation of law on a case by case basis. This was no exception for the *Code civil*.<sup>18</sup> By offering “wide parameters for judges to work within” in private disputes between parties the *Code civil* effectively modernized the judiciary in France and aided in dismantling the Ancien Régime by seeking to uphold specific rights of the individual as they arise before the law.<sup>19</sup> Andrew Roberts notes that critics of the Code throughout the centuries have deemed it as too socially conservative.

Napoleon's view of both religion and human nature play a central role in what necessitated the code. Napoleon, like many Enlightenment thinkers and writers, believed religion was often a great foundation on which a society rests. Seeing religion as this great utility and the rock on which societies are built Napoleon brilliantly strengthened contract laws through the *Code civil*, through the reinstatement of the Catholic Church under the *Concordat*.<sup>20</sup>



Source: François-Ane David, "Napoléon Bonaparte présentant le code civil à l'impératrice Joséphine" (Gallica Digital Library, 1807) (Curtis Museum) (Wikimedia Commons)

Napoleon's desire for permanently enlightened societies endured, and though he nevertheless stood by his principle philosophy of "legitimately constituted governments," his stance on monarchical power changed. In an age where *absolutism*—both enlightened and absolute—was relegated to history as nothing more than a misstep in humanity's ability to exercise reason over dogmatic authority, Napoleon believed only he and his authority alone could offer Europe what it not simply desired, but needed. This came to total fruition in 1804, when the Consul of France solidified his reign in the form of an empire more akin to Caesar's Rome than any effort recently seen.

News reached Napoleon that loathsome conspirators were out for him, actively plotting to overthrow the regime he built in what history now calls the *Cadoudal Affair*. News of the plot manufactured a deep suspicion and mistrust of those Napoleon once considered his allies. This undoubtedly compelled him to abandon the republican principles that the French Revolution initially fought for.<sup>21</sup> Napoleon said in the *Conseil d'Etat* that, "they seek to destroy the Revolution by attacking my person. I will defend it, for I am the Revolution."<sup>22</sup>

With a great shift from his previous stance, Napoleon reconsidered the legitimacy of monarchy, believing that the power wielded by enlightened-despots was able to effectively curb the negative externalities of revolution after-all. On December 2, 1804, after months of preparation, the French Consul succeeded himself by becoming Napoleon I, Emperor of France. Though the preceding revolutionary governments of France laid the intellectual framework for his empire, Napoleon's coronation was the pinnacle of years in the making of their struggle to effectively wield political power. Napoleon's coronation marked the end of a fifteen-year era of revolutionary governments. Their political weakness enabled his rise to primacy. With Napoleon adding the final pieces, their ideological framework allowed France to change from a besieged state to an empire.

On December 2, 1804, in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, France, Napoleon crowned himself emperor in the presence of Pope Pius VII, his family, and spectators. After the pope had blessed the newly crowned emperor, Napoleon delivered his coronation oath, in which he swore "to maintain the integrity of the territory of the Republic" and to "govern only in the view of the interest, the wellbeing and the glory of the French people."<sup>23</sup> In response to the coronation of Napoleon, William Pitt, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom quickly began signing alliances to form a third coalition to rally several major European powers, including the Kingdom of Austria and the Holy Roman Empire against Napoleon.<sup>24</sup>

### A NINETEENTH CENTURY CONQUEROR

During the brief interim of peace between 1802-1803, Napoleon's desire to impose his highly self-regarded principles of the revolution on other societies materialized. This was clear in every state or territory Napoleon wished to assert his influence. From the Cisalpine Republic, Napoleon installed himself as Italy's 'president.' Napoleon would then reorganize the Helvetic Republic into the Confederation of Switzerland and impose himself as their 'mediator.'<sup>25</sup> Only the financial logistics of France forced Napoleon's hand in selling the reacquired French territory west of the Mississippi River to the United States.<sup>26</sup>

What was the most important to Napoleon as he moved to expand his reign were the vulnerable institutions of the Holy Roman Empire, particularly the ecclesiastical estates in the Rhineland. The Empire never truly regained a sense of total stability since the Peace of Westphalia at the end of the Thirty Years War.<sup>27</sup> Francis II took quick action to secure the Kingdom of Austria from ruination. Regardless, there was no doubt of what Napoleon's next move would be. In a direct provocation toward Francis II of Austria, Napoleon placed the Iron Crown of Lombardy of the Holy Roman Empire upon his own head during his coronation in Italy.<sup>28</sup>



“The Battle of Austerlitz, 2nd December 1805”

Source: François Gérard, (*The Bridgeman Art Library, 19th Century*) (Wikimedia Commons)

According to historian Klaus Epstein, Revolutionary France and the Holy Roman Empire were no strangers to conflict at the time of Napoleon’s coronation. Hostilities between the Holy Roman Empire and France were well underway since the War of the First Coalition broke out in 1792. The enlightened absolutists, always watchful of their old regimes, actively combatted France over a decade prior to Napoleon out of fear to the expanding and radical French Revolution. Napoleon, however, now posed the most severe and immediate threat to the balance of power throughout Europe. By 1804, South German states were already falling under the influence of Napoleon. Francis II’s power was already considerably diminished, as his political will only carried weight in the hereditary Habsburg provinces.<sup>29</sup>

Undeterred by Pitt’s Third Coalition, Napoleon wasted no time moving to expand his vast French Empire, setting his sights on the Rhineland and the greater Holy Roman Empire, as “he insisted with the zeal of conviction on transplanting his *Code civil* to the dependent states.”<sup>30</sup> Napoleon, leading the Grande Armée under his newly devised his corps system, moved east to put down a western advancement by the Third Coalition forces. After trapping the Austrian forces at Ulm, Napoleon pushed forward to the Battle of Austerlitz, where on December 2, 1805 Napoleon’s forces promptly devastated the coalition armies of Austria and Russia, forcing Francis II’s hand and subsequent peace talks.

The official dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire came swiftly after Napoleon’s stinging victory at Austerlitz. What

once bound the German states together for the continuity of commerce and security no longer served the purpose of its initial mandate.<sup>31</sup> Within days of Austerlitz, France signed treaties with Bavaria and Württemberg, acknowledging their sovereignty as kingdoms independent of the Holy Roman Empire, and Baden as a Grand Duchy.<sup>32</sup> After the elevation of these states, talks began which thereafter formed the Treaty of Pressburg, returning the Austrian territories of Venetia to Napoleon’s Italian Kingdom, significantly weakening Francis II’s power.<sup>33</sup>

In the following July of 1806, Napoleon saw that his ‘client-states’ officially form the Confederation of the Rhine [or Rheinbund states], of which Napoleon became the ‘protector.’ On August 6, less than a month later, Napoleon gave Francis II an ultimatum regarding the expansion of Napoleon’s France. Powerless to do anything at this point in the wake of the ailing Holy Roman Empire, Francis abdicated and the Empire was dissolved.<sup>34</sup>

Napoleon knew that the surest way to maintain long term control of his rapidly-growing empire was through the uniform implementation of the *Code civil* throughout it. Unlike any war fought on the European continent before, the expansion of the French Revolution sought to expand the rights and equality of man rather than to clash over the traditional contentions of religion or political dominance. Herein lies the paradox of Napoleon: rather than allowing the ideals contained within his *Code civil* to spread throughout the public-sphere of Central Europe and garner public

## *Conquest and the Code civil des Français*

support through the promotion and dictates of reason, Napoleon imposed legal and political hegemony over the Rhineland to ensure the code's acceptance.

Now, the Confederation of the Rhine was secure, and Napoleon continued to consolidate his authority through treaties, and "strategically replaced traditional dynasties with members of his own family."<sup>35</sup> With the newly established Confederation of the Rhine, Napoleon inherited 63,000 German troops to expand his empire.<sup>36</sup> Some German elites drew deep skepticism, yet many conversely praised it. The *Code civil* in the Confederation, abolished significant aristocratic privilege as it had in France. This gave a new and rational meaning to taxation and standardized weights and measures, as well as modernized the rule of law.<sup>37</sup>

The reaction to the *Code civil* throughout the various German states was complicated, as the implementation of the new code lacked uniformity. The territories reacted differently in ways that reflected what consequences the code would have on their cultural and political interests. More importantly than anecdotal reactions to the code, however, was the greater philosophical implication in the Rhineland, and particularly Prussia and Austria. Radicalism, which Epstein refers to in this context of "forward-thinking-reforms," was under serious scrutiny in traditionally conservative German states and regions until the outbreak of the French Revolution.<sup>38</sup>

The Confederation directly received French institutions, and princes in the middle states "began to curry favor with their French masters by imitating their policies."<sup>39</sup> As was the case for France, one of the predominant factors driving the favor of its popular reception was that "it had become clear to the liberal middle classes that the princes and dukes who still held fast to their sovereign rights would never of their own accord have brought in the uniform legal and social reforms that were a prerequisite for national unity."<sup>40</sup> However, the biggest impact and influence on the German speaking world was Prussia and Austria, both kingdom's with strong traditions and a desire to preserve their enlightened absolutism, were forced to stay in line with Napoleon's wishes to survive.

## CONCLUSION

The legacy of Napoleon's *Code civil* has outlasted the French Revolution – it has long outlasted Napoleon despite his crushing defeat at Waterloo at the hands of the Seventh Coalition. Additionally, while Napoleon was a conqueror of unmatched brutality in the context of the nineteenth century, his *Code civil* made lasting impacts on not only what would become Germany, but all around the globe. Napoleon's *Code civil* survived in the Rhineland until 1900, 85 years after Napoleon's fall. It additionally survived in Belgium and Luxembourg, and Monaco. "Aspects of it [the *Code civil*]" says Andrew Roberts, "remain in a quarter of the world's legal systems as far removed from the mother country as Japan, Egypt, Quebec and Louisiana."<sup>41</sup> Above all, the entire *Code Napoléon* is still the framework for the French legal system today, 214 years later.

From exile in his final years on Sainte-Helene, Napoleon Bonaparte wrote in his memoir that "my true glory is not in having won forty battles; Waterloo will blot out the memory of those victories. But nothing can blot out my Civil Code. That will live eternally."<sup>42</sup> While eternity has yet to deliver its final verdict on the longevity of Napoleon's *Code civil*, it is rightfully considered a cornerstone in the history of law, regarding the Enlightenment tradition.

In conclusion, after careful consideration of Napoleon's complexity as a man, a general, and a statesman, it is difficult to reconcile the forceful conquest by which he delivered his *Code civil* to the Confederation of the Rhine after the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire. Napoleon's conquest is all the more peculiar during the Enlightenment—when, reason, not dogma nor state-sanctioned-coercion—was revered as the guiding force in societal change. Thus, to properly understand Napoleon's method in the delivery of the *Code civil*, readers of history must recognize Napoleon's conquests in the context of the Age of Revolution, where Enlightenment ideals were attained through the forceful removal of old regimes. Napoleon saw it in the best interest of his legacy as a lawgiver to develop modern Europe under a hegemonic legal system—inspired by the principles of the Enlightenment—by force wherever he saw fit. 

## Endnotes

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# “GOD AND LIBERTY”

## Félicité de Lamennais and the French Catholic Faithful’s Disenchantment with Monarchy

*Abstract: In the wake of the the French Revolution and Napoleon’s continental campaign, elite alliances of European clergy and nobility attempted to reconstruct their kingdoms. This conservative alliance between monarchy and the Church was particularly evident in France, where Louis XVIII’s 1814 Bourbon Restoration government ascended to power thanks in part to support from reactionary religious masses seeking a return to a traditional, Catholic order. However, the fervently religious French citizenry soon grew disenchanted with the Restoration’s failure to enact Catholic policies—thanks in large part to compromising with a powerful secular bourgeoisie—and the Holy See’s tacit endorsement of such policies. After witnessing kings and popes sacrifice doctrine for political expediency, many gave up on the creation of a Catholic state from above. This paper follows Félicité de Lamennais, once an ultramontanist and absolute monarchist, through his disenchantment with monarchy and his eventual postulation that democratic franchise held the greatest potential for reflecting God’s will on earth. While many of Lamennais’ followers abandoned their patron upon his excommunication, his experience prefigured that of many other believers whose faith had once kept them dependable conservatives. Their dissatisfaction soon undermined a crucial component of the monarchy’s base and, in the long term, foreshadowed the Catholic religious right’s shift away from secular elites and toward an increased emphasis on the popular citizenry’s rights.*

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The private sitting room of Pope Leo XII (1823-1829) featured only two adornments: a crucifix and a portrait of Félicité de Lamennais.<sup>1</sup> Lamennais’ early ultramontanist manifestos, employing the Enlightenment tenets that many before him had deployed to advocate for secular liberalism, endorsed unquestioning obedience to the papacy. The Vatican could not have asked for a more stalwart ally in its quest to maintain its influence.

By 1834, however, Lamennais had changed his stance on the papacy, and a new pope, Gregory XVI (1831-1846), held a considerably lower opinion of the theologian. He condemned the priest’s “depraved ravings” as “wicked abuse of the word of God.”<sup>2</sup> Lamennais’ new book, *Paroles d’un Croyant*, was a sensation on par with his prior works, selling 100,000 copies in a year. That said, *Paroles* differed starkly from his earlier essays. It professed that “the power of Satan” upheld monarchy, urging readers to reject the notion that any “who possess great power upon the earth [are] your masters,” whether they be princely or papal.<sup>3</sup> Lamennais’ transformation marked a disillusionment not with God, but rather with his lifelong devotion to the idea that the former First Estate would categorically spread doctrine and pursue salvation, regardless of worldly political realities.

In the wake of the Revolution’s Terror and Napoleon’s continental campaign, elite alliances of clergy and nobility attempted to reconstruct their kingdoms across the continent. In France, Louis XVIII’s 1814 Bourbon Restoration

government ascended to power thanks in part to support from reactionary religious masses seeking a return to a traditional, Catholic order. While the Bourbon Restoration regime—and Louis-Philippe’s later July Monarchy to a lesser extent—superficially catered to religious conservatives, many devout citizens grew frustrated with both political leaders’ theological compromises and, despite clerical pleas to the contrary, the Holy See’s tacit endorsement of these leaders. Additionally, secular influences, particularly from a new, tolerant, capitalist bourgeoisie, precluded a return to the Church’s vaunted status during the pre-revolutionary ancien régime.

Lamennais was one such disillusioned convert. Once a strident monarchist and ultramontanist who witnessed kings and popes sacrifice doctrine for political expediency, he gave up on the creation of a Catholic state from above. Instead, he came to believe that the best way to actualize God’s will on Earth was through instilling liberty and popular democracy, not through absolutist clerical and noble alliances. While many of Lamennais’ followers (called Mennaisians) abandoned their patron upon his excommunication for admonishing the papacy, his experience prefigured that of many other believers whose faith had once kept them dependable conservatives. Their dissatisfaction soon undermined a crucial component of the monarchy’s base and, in the long term, foreshadowed the Catholic religious right’s shift away from secular elites and toward an increased emphasis on the popular citizenry’s rights.

## REVOLUTION AND RESTORATION

Under the *ancien régime*, the Church dominated French society and politics. Still considered to have “an intrinsically Christian character,” the state was heavily influenced by the clergy, whose political influence was second only to the nobility.<sup>4</sup> Since Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685, Catholicism had been the only permitted state religion. In its capacity as the “First Estate,” the clergy enjoyed tax exemption privileges, deriving substantial wealth as the country’s largest landholder.<sup>5</sup> However, the French Revolution revealed a powerful strain of anticlericalism rooted in resentment of unearned privileges and clerical corruption. By 1790, a popular political tide had abolished the First Estate’s *ancien* privileges, nationalized church lands, and even forced priests to pledge allegiance to the Republic ahead of the Vatican. Many priests who refused to take the Civil Constitution of the Clergy’s oath were banished; many others perished in the Reign of Terror.<sup>6</sup> While Napoleon’s Concordat of 1801 eliminated the Terror’s worst excesses, many still considered it “anticlerical and... anti-Christian.”<sup>7</sup> Napoleon forced priests to read state directives from the pulpit and gave the First Consul (himself) the right to nominate bishops and monitor church funds, while permanently repossessing seized Church properties.<sup>8</sup>

When Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo and the Congress of Vienna ended the turbulence that began in 1789, many Frenchmen, particularly the nation’s moneyed elites, yearned to reimpose order, harkening back to the pre-Revolution monarchy.<sup>9</sup> The 1814 “Restoration” of Bourbon King Louis XVIII fundamentally reinstated absolutism, riding a wave of popular support of which churchgoers were an integral constituency. While anti-clericalism and secularism had entered prominence during the Enlightenment and Revolution, particularly among urban intellectuals, many Frenchmen were still fervently religious. Domestic insurrections during the revolutionary period, like the Vendée,<sup>10</sup> demonstrated that many felt more allegiance to their Church than their nation. Monarchs thus tied their reign to religion, juxtaposing the order provided by their leadership and Catholicism with the bloody Revolution and its appeals for liberty, which they associated with anarchy. Louis XVIII quickly erected new churches at sites of Terror, including one where revolutionaries “dumped... the bodies of his brother, sister in law, [and] other members of the French royal family.”<sup>11</sup> In the shrine of Saint-Denis, he commissioned “monuments... to the martyred king [Louis XVI] and queen [Marie Antoinette].”<sup>12</sup> He also encouraged religious pilgrimages, highlighting sites damaged during the Revolution<sup>13</sup> to remind citizens of the costs insurrection entailed for religious relics. The Bourbon Restoration also pushed religiously-motivated policies. With the 1825 Anti-Sacrilege Act, Louis’s Bourbon successor, Charles X, made violating Catholic doctrine a criminal offense.<sup>14</sup> While never enforced, this law clearly demonstrates the Bourbon Restoration’s appeal to citizens who felt Revolutionary France had strayed too far from God.

## EARLY LAMENNAIS AND THE DEFENSE OF MONARCHY

Born in Brittany in 1782,<sup>15</sup> Félicité de Lamennais lived through every stage of these upheavals. Surviving a regime that violently persecuted priests—as well as dissenting commoners—while insisting that it was rooted in rationalism, he distrusted states appealing to Enlightenment principles, particularly unconstrained liberties. His early work was decidedly reactionary, welcoming the Restoration. However, early Lamennais was prolific not only for supporting the monarchy, but also for his defense of it on philosophical grounds.

Lamennais’ support of the Restoration derived from his faith in ultramontanism, the belief in the papacy as a categorically supreme authority.<sup>16</sup> He began calling for a universal morality to underpin society. Anything less, he feared, posed a profound threat to society. Without underlying moral unity, he believed “all the bonds... unit[ing] men... [are] suddenly dissolved,”<sup>17</sup> anarchy ensuing.

Lamennais offered faith as the underlying governing fabric solving this dilemma. This argument stemmed from the Fideist conviction that “the Truth is the end of the intellect,”<sup>18</sup> that faith is distinct from and supersedes reason. He also, however, substantiated this assertion through the Enlightenment arguments many used to defend secularization. Since different secular Enlightenment philosophies were derived from conflicting first principles, Lamennais concluded irreconcilable, competing secular arguments meant worldly intellect alone could never identify absolute truth. Instead, he claimed, every successful state achieves an ‘intimate union’<sup>19</sup> of politics and religion. Without God’s “natural law,” we face a “shipwreck of all truths.”<sup>20</sup> He even labeled the Revolution a “rigorously exact application of the ultimate consequences... of the philosophy of the eighteenth century,” blaming its bloodshed on lack of moral foundation by tracing what began with Descartes all the way to Marat.<sup>21</sup> Lamennais tied this condemnation to Luther and Protestantism as well, declaring that when “Luther... persuade[d]... Europe that sovereignty resides in the people... the blood of kings flow[ed] on the scaffold.”<sup>22</sup>

Instead, Lamennais held that “happiness for society as for man, is but the tranquility of order”<sup>23</sup> that derives from following God’s “natural legislation.”<sup>24</sup> To Lamennais, the worldly interpreter of the “common consent of mankind”<sup>25</sup> must be the pontiff, God’s messenger since Peter. However, Lamennais extended the obedience believers owed the pope to “legitimate monarchs,”<sup>26</sup> distinguished by following papal command. So long as monarchs defended the faith as ordained by the Holy See, Lamennais considered them extensions of one united word.

While Lamennais’ theories complicated his early life—Napoleon’s secret police once arrested Lamennais for one of his early essays, and he had to flee England during the Hundred



Portrait du pape Grégoire XVI (1844)  
Source: Paul Delaroche, Musée du Château de Versailles  
(Wikimedia Commons)

Days<sup>27</sup>—he became a sensation throughout conservative Europe. Pope Leo XII received Lamennais in Rome twice,<sup>28</sup> even allegedly offering him a position in the College of Cardinals.<sup>29</sup>

### AN ULTRAMONTANIST’S ALIENATION

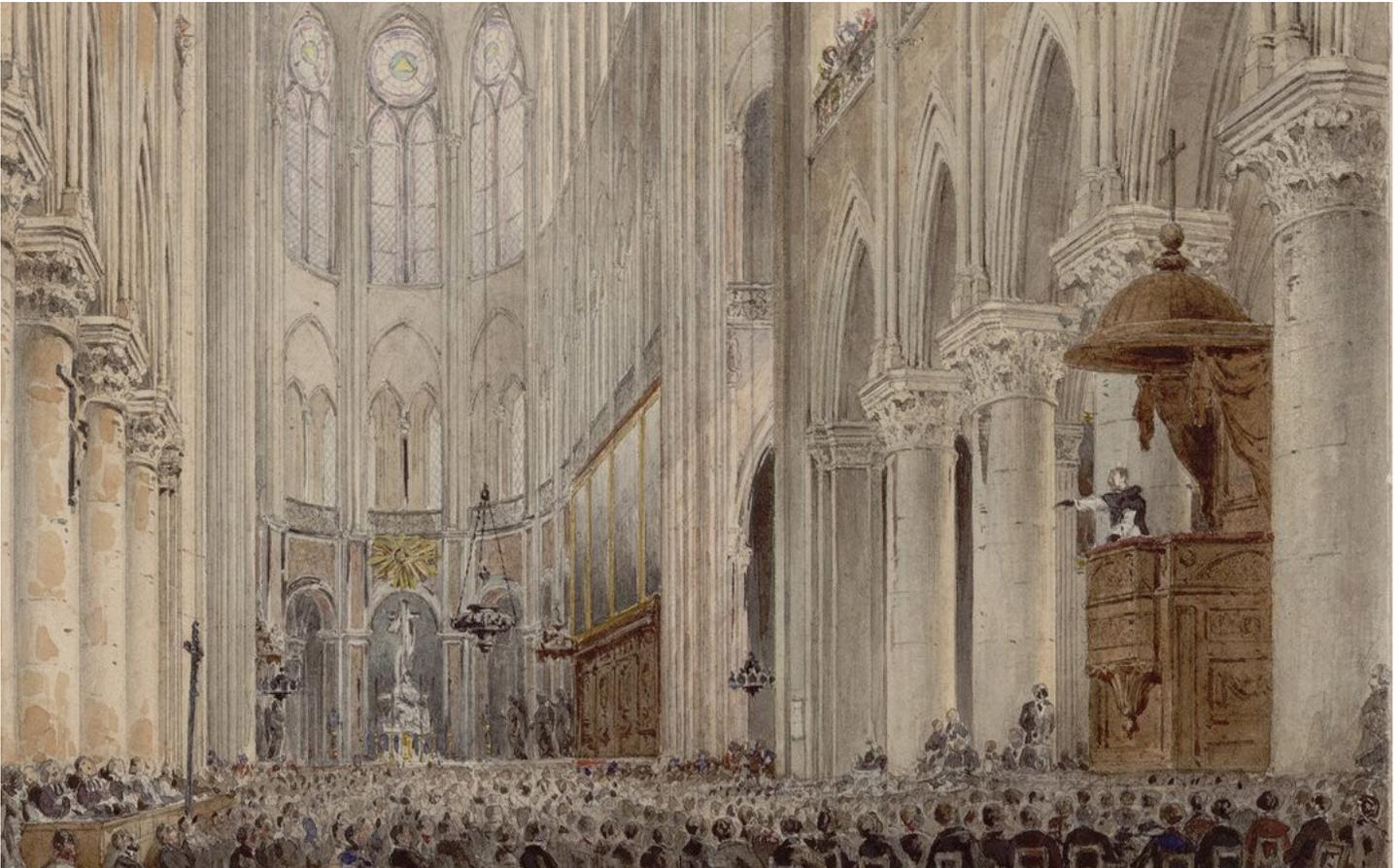
Despite welcoming the Restoration, Lamennais slowly lost faith in the state. The monarchy rhetorically paid homage to the Church and maintained a close alliance with the Vatican. However, the new capitalist bourgeoisie that had acquired vast wealth during the Revolution (often purchasing the Church’s former lands) had no intention to create a “Catholic confessional state.”<sup>30</sup> In practice, the Restoration’s religious policy was eerily similar to that established by Napoleon’s Concordat, an 1801 agreement struck with the Pope that, while ending the Revolution’s persecution of the Church, maintained a largely secular state. While religious toleration persisted under the Restoration, formal institutions were not injected with religion. For example, the Anti-Sacrilege Law of 1825, which decreed acts of blasphemy like stealing from the Church capital offenses, was never enforced. Dissonance between Christian slogans and secular stances became more apparent during Louis-Philippe’s July Monarchy. A well-known Voltairean who “privately scoffed at religion,” the “bourgeois king” advocated for a secular regime, quietly cutting funding for state-ordained religious ceremonies.<sup>31</sup>

Disillusioned with the prevailing regimes, but not with ultramontanism, Lamennais shifted his support away from the monarchy. As early as 1825, he accused Charles X of abdicating his obligation to the Holy See, calling the state “atheist,”<sup>32</sup> as its non-Catholic policies purportedly facilitated Protestantism, the Revolution, and societal ruin. When considering an optimal formation of the state to sustain God’s law, Lamennais began to ask: If Catholics no longer held secular power, how could the faithful best protect God’s message?

To answer this question, Lamennais turned to robust individual liberties, paired with self-governance through democracy. Since the crown would no longer enforce the expectations Lamennais identified as God’s—that is, the pope’s—will, he asserted that true believers must be free to express themselves to maximize salvation, for themselves and their communities. Political self-determination followed in part from the same principle; as individuals should be able to determine their own affairs, they ought have a say in the direction of a society whose leaders have abdicated the papacy, sidestepping corrupted monarchs.

Lamennais thus dedicated himself to increasing liberty. In 1830, he founded the Agency Generale Pour la Defense de la Liberté Religieuse.<sup>33</sup> Later that year, he united with two of his disciples, Jean-Baptiste Lacordaire and Charles Forbes René de Montalembert, to begin a far more ambitious campaign of editing a syndicated publication called *L’Avenir*. Its motto, “God and Freedom,”<sup>34</sup> succinctly summarized its core tenets. In laying out *L’Avenir*’s “demands” of the state, Lamennais argued that “a union with the Holy See... is an essential and indelible characteristic,” while simultaneously insisting that only “liberty of religion” allowed the Church to spread.<sup>35</sup> The advocacy was clear: if the monarchy would fail to defend God’s will, individual citizens would be forced to defend them. Individual liberties were thus rendered necessary. Only through “liberty of the press” could Catholics effectively share “the force of the truth.” Only the “right of suffrage” could allow France to be driven by loyal Catholics, “the mass of the Pope” and reflect God’s desires.<sup>36</sup> (To *L’Avenir*’s editors, even democracy thus complemented ultramontanism.)

*L’Avenir* often explicitly threatened King Louis-Philippe’s regime in its push for democracy. A favorite tactic was claiming that all non-democratic regimes “have failed in their attempts [to hold power] and have come to destruction through tyranny” while an accompanying article discussed a suppressive Orleanist action.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, the Mennaisian trio refused to yield in their convictions. When accused of being “ministers of a foreign power,” Lacordaire boldly embraced being “the ministers of one who is in no place a foreigner- the ministers of God!”<sup>38</sup>



Conférence du Père Lacordaire à Notre-Dame (1835) \*\*Editors Note: this is not the lecture the author refers to\*\*  
 Source: *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* (Wikimedia Commons)

### PAPAL MARCH AND REBUKE

By 1831, Lamennais had abandoned hope in the Orleanist regime. However, still faithful to the papacy, *L'Avenir's* editors asked the Holy See to condemn Louis-Philippe's suppression. They believed Lamennais' Restoration credentials would convince the Vatican to consider their appeal, sending multiple letters directly to Pope Gregory XVI. However, when their letters received only brief acknowledgements<sup>39</sup>—while Gregory explicitly “advised [French] clergy to remain loyal” to Louis-Philippe<sup>40</sup>—the Mennaisians traveled to Rome to force the issue.

Regardless of whether Gregory believed the Mennaisian escort's uncompromising stance, the post-revolutionary papacy's realities rendered such a posture unimaginable. Powerful elite, both within and beyond France's borders, pressured Gregory to condemn Lamennais. One particularly poignant voice was Klemens von Metternich, architect of the Congress of Vienna and Chancellor of the Austrian Empire, who controlled the army defending the Papal States. He explicitly urged Gregory to put a stop to *L'Avenir*.<sup>41</sup>

In August 1832, Gregory released *Mirari vos*, an encyclical denouncing the Mennaisian appeal. Gregory did affirm the expectation that monarchs follow papal dictates, contending that “kingdoms stand... by the restraints of religion... alone.”<sup>42</sup>

However, he declared Catholics owe “trust and submission... to princes.”<sup>43</sup> While not explicitly naming the Mennaisians, Gregory accused “those who desire... to separate the Church from the state” of “treason” and “feigning piety for religion.”<sup>44</sup> He called on the Mennaisians to cease all publication.<sup>45</sup>

While each member of the Mennaisian trio stalled publication upon reading *Mirari vos*, this merely offered Lamennais time to reformulate his theories. The pope had reneged on what Lamennais considered his utmost duty: holding allies accountable to the faith. By the time Lamennais released 1834's *Paroles d'un Croyant*, his formerly democratic and ultramontanist advocacy transitioned its appeals to arbitrate natural law from the papacy to the people.

*Paroles* explicitly condemned royalty. In one of its first parables, Lamennais journeys to a world resembling Adam and Eve's paradise. He encounters three serpents, identifying as “kings,” and discovers they had “paralyzed” the dreamscape's villagers.<sup>46</sup> These men live among “chains,... tears,... blood,... suffer[ing]” under the royal serpents' yoke.<sup>47</sup> To Lamennais, kings and clergy alike, caught up in their fear of losing power, fail to defend God's will and save these sufferers. Thus, “the cry of the poor riseth even unto God, but it reacheth not the ears of man.”<sup>48</sup>



Hugues Felicité Robert de Lamennais (1826)  
Source: Jean-Baptiste Paulin Guérin, Musée du Château de Versailles (Wikimedia Commons)

sovereignty of man.”<sup>51</sup> Though never pursuing communism, he believed that “justice” lay “in the bread of nations” going “to the labourer,” and advocated for everything from unionization to urban sanitation reform.<sup>52</sup>

**CONCLUSION: EXCOMMUNICATION AND LEGACY**  
Upon reading *Paroles*, with urgency compounded by a Lyon silk-worker’s strike, Gregory published a harsh rebuke entitled *Singulari nos*. Explicitly identifying Lamennais and *Paroles* as “false, calumnious, and rash,” the encyclical equated the Mennaisians with infamous heretics like the Hussites.<sup>53</sup> *Singulari nos* used Lamennais’ own early argumentation against him, accusing him of “overconfiden[ce] in seeking the truth outside the Catholic Church.”<sup>54</sup>

Following Lamennais’ official excommunication, many within the theorist’s inner circle—including Lacordaire and Montalembert—abandoned him.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, he remained a public presence. He appeared in French tribunals multiple times, defending other democratic advocates accused of sedition, and was arrested on the same count thrice—in 1836, 1841, and 1846.<sup>56</sup>

When Félicité de Lamennais died on February 27, 1854, French authorities insisted that his funeral procession occur early on a weekday, to prevent laborers from attending.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, such a surge of supporters began following the funeral train that the police had to control the crowds.<sup>58</sup> Though Lamennais himself would bemoan that “o’er my grave no word of hope was said,”<sup>59</sup> this was only true among the French elite. Indeed, his popular

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**“He no longer desired suffrage to elect papally-condoned candidates. Instead, he looked to the common people to reflect God’s will. ”**

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“Since each [person] loveth himself only,”<sup>49</sup> Lamennais concluded that any system that consolidates power in few hands will be corrupted. This realization fundamentally transformed Lamennais’ democratic theory. He no longer desired suffrage to elect papally-condoned candidates. Instead, he looked to the common people to reflect God’s will. While any one individual’s natural law interpretation could have flaws, Lamennais came to believe that, in an election, the “raison generale,” God’s natural law infused into every individual’s subconscious, would prevail.<sup>50</sup> By enfranchising as many as possible, one could circumvent self-interest.

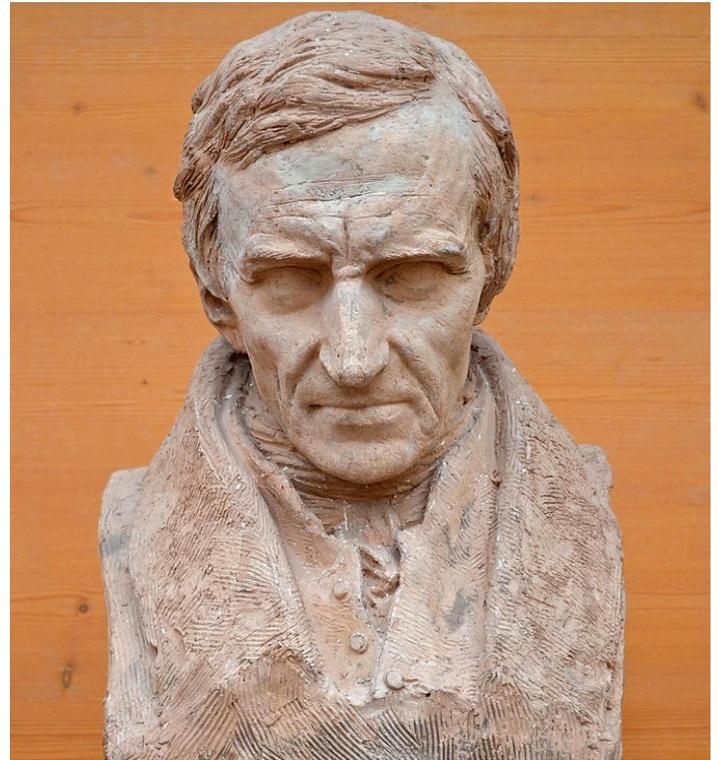
Moreover, when Lamennais empowered the individual, he became concerned with the plight of the French proletariat. He equated the life of the lower classes to “modern slavery” that “destroy[ed]... human personality... liberty... natural

appeals would long survive him. Although they deserted him after his final break with the papacy, Montalembert and Lacordaire furthered Lamennais’ message in politics and religion, respectively. Montalembert joined the Chamber of Peers, famously advocating for democratic reform before vehemently opposing Emperor Louis-Napoléon’s authoritarian tendencies.<sup>60</sup> Lacordaire is best remembered for his famed 1848 sermons at Notre Dame. By arguing that “nature itself... is the form which grace assumes,”<sup>61</sup> these sermons evoked Mennaisian belief in the *raison generale*. In preaching that “all the nations that form mankind... gather into unity” under “Christian truth” and that “mankind, ... all from one man... must be sovereign,”<sup>62</sup> they evoked *Paroles*, suggesting that all men together, regardless of sovereign, must reign to actualize natural law.

Moreover, many of Lamennais' ideas anticipated the pro-labor doctrines that powered the Church's resurgence at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1891's *Rerum Novarum*, Pope Leo XIII called for "some opportune remedy [to] be found quickly for the misery and wretchedness pressing so unjustly on the majority of the working class."<sup>63</sup> Paroles echoes throughout the document; Lamennais called for these measures generations earlier.

Despite the Church's typical association with the reinstated French monarchy's elite, the Mennaisians complicate this narrative by exposing a schism between the spiritual salvation sought by devotees and the political ambitions of the clerical elite. Monarchs tied their reigns to religion, but the relationship had been comparatively marginalized as the state catered to new, more secular bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, many Frenchmen, including an impressive share of the reactionary tide that carried the monarchy's re-emergence, supported the monarchy for its ability to reintroduce a Catholic order. While the Bourbon and Orleanist regimes insisted that they represented Catholics' will, those who expected the state to practice what it preached were disappointed. The monarchs' unwillingness to enforce religious policies led some of Catholicism's most zealous followers, who tied God's will to the core of society, away from the monarchy and the papacy.

This transformation of the faithful, shown through Lamennais, helps explain some of religious conservatism's disillusionment with the restored monarchy. This discounting of what believers could expect from a Church-state alliance pushed those who used to be reactionaries towards the rising tide of republicanism; at least within a model of liberties, they could actualize their own religious duties. The ancien



Bust of Hugues Felicité Robert de Lamennais (1839)

Source: *David d'Angers, David d'Angers Gallery*  
(*Wikimedia Commons*)

régime, and the Church's status within it, would never return. Religious people no longer viewed a holy society as precluded by liberty, but instead as enabled by it. This transformation foreshadowed the transition of the Church from an institution that supported God over political liberty to one which supported both. 🏛️

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- [36] *Ibid.*
- [37] *L'Avenir* (microform), August 1831.
- [38] Greenwell, *Memoir of LaCordaire*, 37.
- [39] Hastings, “Pioneer of Liberty,” 332.
- [40] Wright, *History of Modern France*, 115.
- [41] Owen Chadwick, *A History of the Popes, 1830-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3, 12-21.
- [42] Pope Gregory XVI, *Mirari vos* (1832), §15.
- [43] *Ibid.*, §17.
- [44] *Ibid.*, §20, §17, §21.
- [45] *Ibid.*, §24.
- [46] de Lamennais, *Words of a Believer*, 20.
- [47] *Ibid.*, 21.
- [48] *Ibid.*, 59.
- [49] *Ibid.*, 164.
- [50] Robert A. Nisbet, *Tradition and Revolt*, (New York: Transaction Publishers, 1968), 37.
- [51] de Lamennais, *Modern Slavery*, translated and cited in Barth, “Lamennais’ Philosophy,” 100.
- [52] de Lamennais, *Words of a Believer*, 186.
- [53] Pope Gregory XVI, *Singulari nos* (1834), §2, §6.
- [54] *Ibid.*, §8. Of course, the Pope himself could never take Lamennais’ final step: accusing the Pope of forsaking his duty to defend God’s word.
- [55] Carol E. Harrison, *Romantic Catholics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 145.
- [56] Quilty, “Influence of Lamennais’ Epistemology on His Theory of Democracy,” vii.
- [57] Barth, “Lamennais’ Philosophy,” 77.
- [58] *Ibid.*, 78.
- [59] de Lamennais, “Untitled,” unpublished before death, in Greenwell, *Memoir of LaCordaire*, 273.
- [60] “Montalembert, Charles Forbes René,” *Collier’s New Encyclopedia*, Vol. V (New York: P. F. Collier, 1921).
- [61] Henri-Dominique Lacordaire, *God: Confernces Delivered at Notre Dame* (Cambridge: Chapman & Hall, 1870), 214.
- [62] *Ibid.*, 225.
- [63] Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, §1.

# CASUALTIES OF US GRAND STRATEGY

## ROK Exclusion from the San Francisco Peace Treaty

*Abstract: This paper investigates the American exclusion of the Republic of Korea from the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan. It asserts a new understanding of how Korea occupied American strategic and post-WWII thinking prior to and during the Korean War. Cultural attitudes, American disinterest in discussing postcolonial issues, as well as the crystallization of Cold Warrior mindsets resulted in a peace treaty that failed its purpose as a both a backwards and forwards-facing document. Despite American interests in turning a new leaf in West-East relations, State Department diplomats crucially viewed U.S. Cold War strategic concerns as being of greater importance than post-WWII idealism of reconciling East Asia with Japan's imperialist past.*

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On September 8, 1951 delegations from forty-eight nations gathered in the opulent San Francisco opera house and signed the peace treaty that would formally end the Allied occupation of Japan. Although the Soviet Union walked out in the middle of the conference, the treaty nevertheless formalized the restoration of Japanese sovereignty. “The Japan of today is no longer the Japan of yesterday,” Yoshida Shigeru, the Japanese Prime Minister said before the assembled delegates. “We will not fail your expectations of us as a new nation, dedicated to peace, democracy and freedom.”<sup>1</sup> The peace treaty was a stunning success for the Truman administration, which had authorized John Foster Dulles (soon to be Secretary of State) to lead the U.S. negotiating team in June 1950. The treaty reduced Japan's territories to its home islands and authorized the seizure of overseas Japanese assets, but—unlike the discredited 1919 Treaty of Versailles—largely refrained from punitive reparations and sovereignty restrictions.

In a non-binding clause, Japan merely pledged to “refrain” from the “use of force” in international disputes. Another article encouraged affected nations seeking reparations to initiate their own negotiations with the Japanese government.<sup>2</sup> When a group of Japanese businessmen visited Nebraska in early 1952, they expressed amazement with their American host that San Francisco was not at all “the treaty of a conqueror.”<sup>3</sup> The U.S. would be completing six years of an occasionally tumultuous, but mostly successful occupation of Japan, just in time to repeatedly petition its former wartime foe to rearm in the face of Soviet machinations in East Asia.

While initially praised for its sensibility and generosity, the San Francisco peace treaty is perforated by a controversial legacy. The enduring hostilities of the Cold War, embodied by the Soviet walkout, permeated the conference and its news coverage. The September 8, 1951 issue of *The New York Times* noted uneasily that San Francisco may have

“reconciled” Japan with the Western Allies, but it was “not quite a peace of reconciliation from the point of view of the great powers.”<sup>4</sup> Additionally, with a war still raging on the Korean peninsula—separated from Japan by a strait measuring only 120 miles wide—the Department of Defense was particularly anxious to ensure that the prosecution of the war would not be interrupted by the resumption of Japanese sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, Japan and the United States signed a security treaty on the same day as the peace treaty, granting the U.S. exclusive rights to maintain bases and military forces in Japan.<sup>6</sup> Japan received its sovereignty with a bright red asterisk, asserting its subordination to American security interests in Asia.

The San Francisco Peace Treaty initiated a new political-economic order for the Asia-Pacific region that not only defined relations between Japan and the United States, but also America's place in the region as a whole. International relations scholar Kent Calder popularized the term “San Francisco System” to describe this new Pacific order—an order marked by American dominance of geopolitical matters and a recurring inability among Asia-Pacific nations to reconcile with Japan over unaddressed issues stemming from Japanese wartime imperialism.<sup>7</sup>

One such aspect of San Francisco's troubled legacy was the Republic of Korea's (ROK) absence from the treaty conference, having been denied an invitation despite repeated attempts to seek participation. The San Francisco Peace Treaty was billed as both a backward- and forward-facing instrument that could restore Japanese sovereignty and bookend World War II in the Pacific. Korean exclusion raises questions over how effectively the treaty could satisfy lingering wartime animosities.

Officially, Korea's exclusion from the peace treaty stemmed from its historical context as a Japanese colony, and therefore



Withdrawal of Japanese Troops from Korea (1945)  
Source: *Mainichi Newspapers Company, "Showa History of 100 million people: Occupation of Japan Vol. 1"*  
(Wikimedia Commons)

not a sovereign state, before and during World War II. The Joseon dynasty, Korea's ruling dynastic kingdom since the fourteenth century, became one of the first victims of Japan's imperialistic success when it was annexed as a Japanese colony in 1910. In the first volume of his work *The Origins of the Korean War*, scholar of Korean history Bruce Cumings describes Japan's colonial policy in Korea as "a means of...providing the wherewithal to mobilize and extract resources on an unprecedented scale."<sup>8</sup> Extraction is an apt term. Japanese authorities exploited Korean resources and actively marginalized Korean history, culture, and language. Japan's heavy-handed regime spawned resistance groups in Manchuria and Korea proper as well as overseas movements like the Shanghai-based Korean Provisional Government. Japanese control ended with the Empire's surrender on August 15, 1945, whereupon the Soviet Union and the United States divided occupation responsibilities in Korea along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. Two rival governments crystallized in the North and South after U.S.-Soviet plans to hold unified elections fell apart.

The ROK was the governing authority for the South and only achieved UN recognition (and observer status) in 1948—three years after the end of World War II. The Korean Provisional Government, Korea's government-in-exile during Japanese control, had never been recognized by the United States. In July 1951, Dulles, acting as a special representative of the State Department, informed a stunned Korean ambassador Yang You-Chan that the ROK would not be a treaty signatory. Dulles offered the reasoning that only those nations which

were participants of the 1942 UN Declaration would sign a treaty of peace with Japan.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the ROK was not an "official" Allied Power and could not be a signatory, regardless of Korea's moral claim to victimhood at the hands of Japanese imperialism. However, social historian John Price notes that this reason was flimsy at best, not least because the newly-independent nations of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos would all attend and sign the treaty despite having been part of the French colony of Indochina in 1942.<sup>10</sup> The peace treaty, which supposedly signaled Japan's rehabilitation in the eyes of the world, remarkably eschewed a key victim who would have benefited from "a peace of reconciliation" with Japan.

Yet, the San Francisco Peace Treaty did not completely exclude the ROK. Article 21 included treaty provisions whereby Japan officially renounced its claims to Korea and assented to Korean appropriation of Japanese properties left on the peninsula. Through the treaty, Japan promised to adopt favorable maritime, fishing, and trading relations with the ROK. Dulles summarized Korea's relationship with the treaty in a report for the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations: "[T]he treaty, in many ways, treats Korea like an Allied Power."<sup>11</sup> Significantly, however, the ROK was not included in particular treaty provisions, including clauses that encouraged Japan to negotiate reparations with former enemies. Indochinese participation and the ROK's partial exclusion from the benefits of the treaty underlines the point that the ROK was not denied a place at the table because of its colonial status during World War II. This raises the question: in the minds of American policy-makers, could possibly have formed the evaluating criteria that determined inclusion or exclusion in the peace treaty?

This article argues that American grand strategic interests decisively eclipsed any concerns related to satisfying post-war moral claims of victimhood. The obstacle to Korea's inclusion as a treaty signatory was not its non-sovereign status during World War II. Korea was excluded because, from the time when American post-war planners began drafting a peace treaty to when the peace treaty was signed in September 1951, American interests in the Asia-Pacific had been reified along newfound Cold War lines. Informed by long-standing American disdain for Koreans and justified by the growing Communist threat, Korea's inclusion in the San Francisco Peace Treaty would have involved confronting the fundamental tension between American grand strategic priorities and divided opinions over what constituted justice for Japan's imperialist wartime behavior.

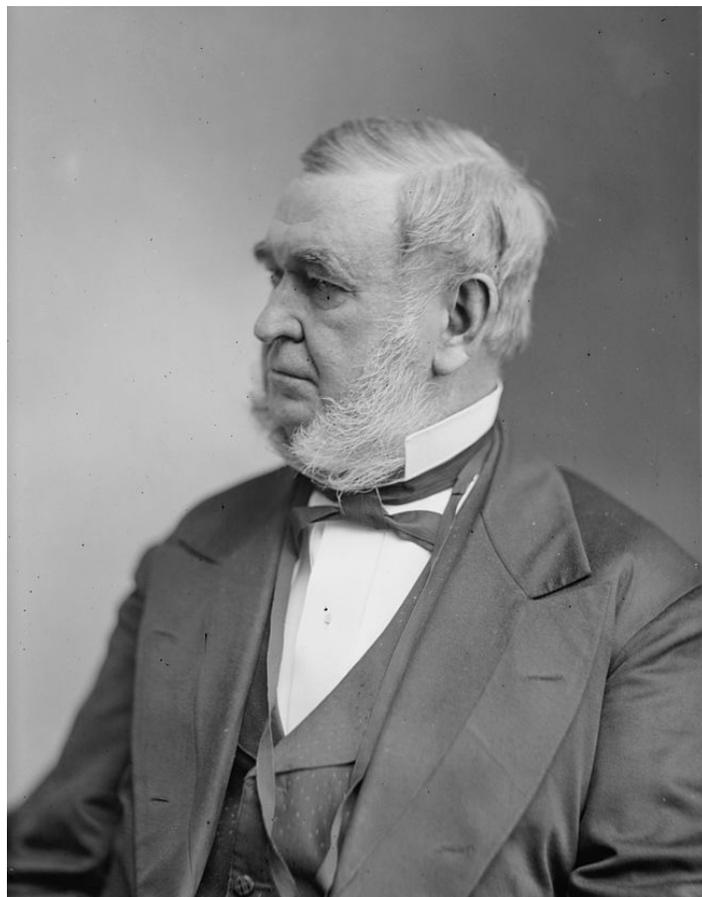
In this way, Korea's tragic history under Japanese control simultaneously gave it the greatest reason to seek access to the peace treaty negotiations and doomed its self-advocacy from the start. With the Korean War still raging and a unilateral grand strategy crystallizing, American diplomats and policy-makers would value expediency above all else.

**“THE SITUATION IN THE WEST PACIFIC WILL BE GRAVE FOR A LONG TIME”:**

**ADDRESSING KOREAN ENTITLEMENT**

The San Francisco Peace Treaty was an American-led enterprise. Early U.S. diplomatic efforts involved negotiating through the Far Eastern Commission—a body of former Allied Powers designed to collaborate on postwar issues. However, these efforts ultimately failed in 1947 as the Chinese Civil War produced two separate “Chinas,” poisoning U.S.-Soviet cooperation in the commission. Thereafter, the State Department drafted plans based on the assumption of American domination of treaty negotiations—an assumption to an extent justified by American perception of their own outsized role in the Pacific theater. To this end, John Foster Dulles, as head of the U.S. negotiating team, traveled to the nations that would sign the treaty and negotiated with each government individually, essentially crafting a multilateral document out of a series of bilateral conversations. John Allison, a career State official who served prominently on Dulles’ team, wrote after the fact that Dulles’ strategy was designed to avoid Soviet obstructionism.<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that deploying bilateral means for a multilateral end also would have enabled Dulles to maximize American leverage, as a dyadic interaction limited the chances for smaller powers to cooperate with one another against the United States.

It was this context that enabled the United States to act as the primary gatekeeper for potential signatories for the treaty, although State Department officials remained cognizant of the interests of other major powers such as Great Britain and the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> Even before the *de facto* collapse of the Far Eastern Commission in late 1947, a State Department working group produced a treaty draft in 1947 that included Korea and Indonesia as signatories, despite neither being Allied powers. An accompanying commentary justified Indonesian inclusion on the basis of its significant “human and material losses” and its status as a colony of an Allied Power during the war. In contrast, the statement justified Korean inclusion by noting that “as a liberated territory with a decades old resistance movement...and with an important interest in the treaty, [the ROK government] would doubtless feel entitled to participate, and would be resentful if the U.S. did not favor its participation.”<sup>14</sup> This language is compelling. Indonesia was included simply because of its “losses” during the war. But the motivation to include Korea stemmed from the belief that the ROK would be resentful if excluded. Although the commentary does include Korea, it significantly believed that appeasing the “entitled” attitude of the ROK government was equally, if not more important than any moral standpoint that Korean losses during the war had earned the ROK a place at the table. Although the commentary does include Korea, it was significantly motivated by the effort to appease the ROK government’s “entitled attitude,” rather than by an assessment of Korea’s World War II experience.



Allison, John Treasury Dept. (1865-1880)

Source: *Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Brady-Handy Photograph Collection (Wikimedia Commons)*

Depicting Korean interests as underserved entitlement harmonized with other existing American generalizations about Korea. American military occupation authorities in Korea cooperated with prevailing Japanese colonial bureaucrats in part because they viewed Koreans as

obstreperous, obnoxiously nationalistic, and politically immature.<sup>15</sup> The Rhee government was also plagued by the image that its diplomats were headstrong and uncaring of sensitive norms of diplomacy. A report dated October 29, 1949 from a Japan-based State Department official advised against encouraging Korean-Japanese cooperation, citing the Korean ambassador’s “repeated and somewhat-aggressive attempts to deal directly with Japanese officials” as evidence that the ROK was only interested in extractive bargaining rather than rapprochement.<sup>16</sup> Even before the start of the Korean War, the State Department viewed the ROK government as a potential bull in a china shop, prone to damaging careful American designs and motivated by inappropriate levels of undisciplined nationalism. Consequently in the American view, a Korean delegation would be involved in the treaty negotiating process, albeit solely on a consultative basis, as the ROK’s exclusion risked causing a troublesome outcry from Seoul and the Korean public.<sup>17</sup>

## Casualties of US Grand Strategy

### NEW STRATEGIES

By 1950-1951, geopolitical developments and the intensification of Cold War tensions changed the American calculus. In particular, American treaty planning for Japan evolved from a desire to prevent a vengeful resurgence of Japanese militarism (*a la* post-Versailles Germany) into a need to establish a friendly and strategically-additive nation to the American defense perimeter in the Pacific. American occupation authorities feared the possibility of anti-Americanism developing in Japan after either a prolonged occupation or a punitive peace treaty, and this ideological bent of avoiding historical mistakes slotted nicely into geopolitical concerns of checking the rise of Communism both in Asia and Japan.<sup>18</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Japan was a key element of the Truman Administration's policy of containment in Asia. "[T]he basic U.S. military objective in Japan," summarized a State Department assessment of the merits of a peace treaty, "[is] to ensure that in the event of a U.S.-USSR conflict, Japan is 'on our side' with its resources available to us and denied to the Soviets."<sup>19</sup> To that end, the United States had to fend off internal Communist "subversion" in Japan, ensure that Japan re-emerged onto the world stage on the side of the West, prevent the growth of anti-American sentiment, and optimize American control over Japanese policy.

A proper and speedy peace treaty, supplemented by a security agreement, could accomplish those goals and be the foundation of a new, comprehensive American defense strategy in Asia. Waiting too long, American occupation and treaty planners feared, could be catastrophic if a Japanese Communist movement were augmented by general Japanese resentment of a prolonged occupation. This fear was only amplified with North Korea invading the South in June.<sup>20</sup> Rearming Japan, or otherwise building up Japan economically and politically to be a reliable strategic bulwark in Asia, was already an American priority in early 1950.

An atmosphere of *contingency* pervaded the air in Washington. The sense of urgency is perhaps best expressed by Dulles' words in a March 18, 1951 letter to General MacArthur. Writing before he entered another round of treaty negotiations, Dulles said, "The United States and Japan are the only significant sources of power in the Pacific, we actual, they potential... If the United States and Japan fall apart, the situation in the West Pacific will be grave for a long time."<sup>21</sup> The U.S. was now evaluating treaty issues through the far more pressing lens of its own imminent security concerns, which would directly affect the question of Korean participation.

### PANDORA'S BOX AND THE KOREAN CASE: AVOIDING "A COLONIAL CHARACTER OF UNFORTUNATE EFFECT IN ASIA"

In some respects, the heightening Cold War did not completely alter American consideration of satellite issues

tethered to the peace treaty. The nature of a peace treaty with Japan would not only determine Japan's future, but also shape the American—and by extension, the free world's—image in Asia. In a manner that resembled old Rooseveltian ideals of equality and cooperation among sovereign nations, State Department planners were anxious that a peace treaty avoided the image of a Western imperialist imposition.

As mentioned earlier, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos ultimately signed the peace treaty. State Department reasoning for Indochinese participation reflects American concerns about the makeup of the signatory states. On August 20, 1951, less than three weeks before the San Francisco Conference was slated to commence, Secretary of State Dean Acheson received a memorandum, issued under Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk's name, advocating for the inclusion of the three newly-independent Indochinese states. Previously, invitations had been delayed over concerns that India, Indonesia, and Burma—all non-aligned states that the U.S. had been desperately hoping to include in the peace—would themselves refuse to participate in protest if "French puppets" were allowed in. However, the memorandum referenced new reports that the three non-aligned states might not participate in the treaty-signing regardless. In view of the fact "that in the last analysis India, Indonesia and Burma may refuse to sign the Treaty and as it is believed important for as *many Asiatic States as possible to sign*," the memorandum concluded, "it is considered advisable to issue an invitation to the Associated States as soon as possible."<sup>22</sup> The U.S. accordingly invited Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, which then attended as treaty signatories—India and Burma refused their invitations, although Indonesia still participated.

Rusk's August 20 memorandum reveals that it was considered vital to American interests that "as many Asiatic states as possible" participated in the treaty-signing. His language shows how the State Department deliberately crafted the peace treaty to appear as a joint document authored by Western and "Asiatic" states. It demonstrates that U.S. planners were doubtlessly conscious of the history of Western involvement in Asia. Earlier that year, the State Department's Far East Division argued that Asian historical memory of European colonialism demanded the exclusion of some European allies from any potential security pact in Asia. "For example, the participation of the United Kingdom might imply a commitment regarding Hong Kong that the United States is not prepared to assume," the memo stated, also suggesting American wariness about involvement on mainland Asia. "[UK involvement in an Asian security pact] might also lead to the desire of France or the Netherlands to participate which would give the arrangement a *'colonial' character of unfortunate effect in Asia*."<sup>23</sup> The State Department clearly wished to avoid the appearance of an imposition of Western interests onto Asia. U.S. involvement in Asia needed to be distinct from European imperialism and avoid negative colonialist implications.



U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson signing the Treaty of Peace with Japan (1951)  
 Source: U.S. Dept. of State, published on Flickr in 2008 (Wikimedia Commons)

The same concerns applied to American interests related to the peace treaty. In July, a political advisor for SCAP in Japan sent a telegram to Secretary Acheson, urging that the Americans avoid any behavior during the conference that might be perceived as belittling or discriminatory against the Japanese: “We [should] also constantly bear in mind that Japan is an Asiatic nation and that eyes of Asia will be upon San Francisco and upon [the] manner in which each and every Asiatic nation, including Japan, is [received] and treated by [the] United States and other ‘white’ nations.”<sup>24</sup> There could be no characteristically “colonial” behavior during the conference proceedings. Having many “non-white Asian” nations signing a peace treaty with Japan could plausibly promote the image that this treaty was the product of a collective, global effort rather than just American power and interests. Additionally, reinstating Japan as a member of the Asian community would require the “approval” of other Asian nations.

“Asianizing” the treaty by increasing non-Western representation, however, raised additional questions about the eventual exclusion of the ROK. A Korean delegation might have been well-suited for the conference. For a Western audience, Korea was visibly an “Asiatic” and alien nation. In the broadest possible terms, Korea slotted nicely into the role of a token foreigner that could legitimize the American-led peace treaty by simply being present in the conference hall. Less cynically, Korean participation could fulfill the Rooseveltian vision of transforming the independence movements of oppressed peoples into sovereign nation-states, each equal to one another. The peace treaty could have contributed an ember to the wider hearth-fire of what Elizabeth Borgwardt described as “America’s multilateralist moment” during the waning days of the final Roosevelt administration, when the U.S. labored to ensure that the weak had at least a voice on the international stage.<sup>25</sup>

## Casualties of US Grand Strategy

But while maximizing Asian representation at the peace conference was beneficial in public relations terms, such “Asianization” could not compromise security priorities. Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos were ideal signatories: they were visibly Asian and had comparatively little stake in the provisions of the peace treaty, thus posing no obstructions to American security designs that were linked to the treaty. Korea may have been an Asiatic state, but it was most certainly deeply interested in a treaty with Japan and vocal about its concerns.

### A KOREAN PROBLEM

Reparations, for one, were a major sticking point in the peace treaty negotiations. The ROK government demanded repayment for what it depicted as forty years of lost development and prosperity. But reparations ran counter to both American ideological concerns about avoiding the mistakes of Versailles *and* its forward-looking interest in rebuilding Japan as an ally amenable to American grand strategy. Furthermore, the State Department never fully believed in the “legitimacy” of Korean demands for reparations. Their reservations were summarized in a December 12, 1949 report published by the department’s Division of Research for the Far East:

While the claim of the Republic of Korea for participation in the Japanese peace settlement is based on its alleged status as a belligerent during the war and many of the present officials of the Republic of Korea have considered themselves belligerents against Japan since the annexation of Korea in 1910, the interests of Korea in the peace settlement appear to arise *more from the consequences of annexation and forty years of exploitation than from the war itself*, which was merely the incident that separated Korea from Japan.<sup>26</sup>

The report concluded: “[R]egardless of Korea’s legal status, Korean interests in the Japanese peace settlement are not derived primarily from belligerency against Japan in World War II...Instead, Korean interests are derived almost wholly from Japanese imperial rule over Korea during the period 1910-1945.”<sup>27</sup> Korea’s claims for war reparations and its signatory aspirations, the report declared, belonged to a separate conflict—the Japanese Occupation of Korea—whose sole relation to World War II was that it bore the same termination date.

Notably, the report does not immediately suggest that the United States dismiss the Korean position out of hand. Instead, Korea’s status vis-a-vis the peace settlement would depend on “an estimation of the *line of conduct* likely to be followed by the Republic of Korea...”<sup>28</sup> The report revealed the criteria by which the State Department evaluated ROK claims that could have garnered Korea signatory status, albeit six months before the start of the Korean War. In other words, the “line of conduct” of a Korean delegation would have to be compliant with American priorities.

The ROK was not the only party involved that saw reparations as an important issue. The Philippines, too, lobbied heavily for reparations from Japan, which proved to be a point which the United States had to repeatedly fend off, usually by asserting that Japan’s brittle economy had no ability to pay.<sup>29</sup> Concerns about burdening Japan with reparations, for both ideological and strategic reasons, meant that even those nations whose claims of wartime damage the U.S. deemed more “legitimate” were nevertheless hard-pressed to find sympathetic American ears.

It was in this same vein that State Department officials gave the ROK’s claims for damages short shrift. As the 1949 State Department research report described, “[The ROK’s] claims appear to be excessive, as currently stated, and also pose a peculiar problem because of the long time period covered.” The report goes on to conclude that if the U.S. allowed the ROK to participate in peace negotiations, Korean diplomats would likely demand a punitive treaty, due to both the Korean public’s anti-Japanese sentiment and the ROK government’s need to appear more anti-Japanese than the North. Ultimately, the report’s authors advocated that the ROK be given a consultative, but *ultimately meaningless*, role in the peace settlement—something that would allow the United States to shut down any demands for excessive reparations but nevertheless satisfy the Korean public’s “sensibilities on the question of participation.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, limit the ROK’s role in a peace treaty to the minimum necessary to prevent rampant anti-Americanism in Korea.

Changing American priorities prompted by an intensifying Cold War would have further lowered Korean chances of participation given the ROK’s rhetoric on the matter of reparations. But an argument can be made that the Korean War dramatically raised the prominence of the ROK government—Korea was no longer an Asian backwater; rather, it was part of the new front line against a monolithic Communist threat. Surely, on the basis of prosecuting the Korean War, the United States should have a greater incentive to curate positive feelings among the Korean public and the ROK government towards the West.

Indeed, the U.S. evaluated ROK advocacy for its participation in a peace treaty on slightly more expanded grounds. Cheong Sung-hwa argues that the U.S. was more receptive towards ROK participation in early 1951. Dulles had expressed an interest in “building up” the ROK’s international presence and legitimacy. Bringing Seoul onto a multilateral treaty that symbolized the end of World War II and global reconciliation would give the ROK a boosted status of working within the international system.<sup>31</sup> The ROK’s international legitimacy in 1951, then, was of enough importance that Dulles was utilizing it as a criterion for determining signatory status. Subsequently, the U.S. team initiated discussions with Japan and its allies to obtain approval for the ROK’s participation in the peace treaty.

Japan resisted the matter, largely due to concerns about the status of ethnic Koreans residing in Japan. If the ROK was a treaty signatory, Japan feared that the 600,000 ethnic Koreans within Japan would then be considered nationals of an Allied power. The treaty had provided for nationals of Allied powers to be compensated for any property or wealth in Japan seized during the war. The Koreans living in Japan included both long-time residents and recent immigrants, but their legal status was now ambiguous, and the ROK government claimed all of them as “Korean nationals.”<sup>32</sup>

The Japanese government, led by Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru, was determined to prevent Koreans in Japan from accessing the treaty compensation clauses for Allied nationals, which was motivated both by Japanese concerns about having to compensate wartime victims and a long history of Japanese racism and mistrust towards its Korean minority.<sup>33</sup> Still, on April 23, 1951, Japan informed the United States that it would acquiesce in Korean participation “if it is definitely assured that by the said treaty Korean residents in Japan will not acquire the status of Allied Powers nationals.”<sup>34</sup> The most obvious source of obstruction had been cleared. Why then, after American treaty negotiators met with British diplomats later that month, did the U.S. inform the ROK on July 3rd that Korea would not be allowed to sign the treaty after all?

concurrency indicates that the United States was already inclined to deem the Korean case “illegitimate” and only gave it a second glance when Dulles believed that inclusion might boost the ROK’s international status. For Dulles and other American negotiators, Korean participation might have had some merits, but by no means was it a hill worth dying on.

There were enough issues to make Korean participation in the treaty inconvenient and problematic. Korean demands for “excessive” reparations, the ambiguous status of the 600,000 Koreans living in Japan and whether they would be eligible for compensation for wartime mistreatment, and British opposition to Korea’s participation all meant that involving the ROK could delay the peace treaty, which was scheduled for September 1951. The peace treaty effort, a time-sensitive matter and a vital part of US strategy in Asia, could not be delayed by what Washington thought was Korea’s extortionate nationalistic interests. Korea might have been the land where American troops battled against the tide of Communism, but it was not the cornerstone of American grand strategy. Korea’s prominence in the American psyche was acutely circumscribed.

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**“For Dulles and other American negotiators, Korean participation might have had some merits, but by no means was it a hill worth dying on.”**

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Cheong speculated that British lobbying against the ROK likely played a significant role. On May 16, John Allison issued a notice to Dulles that the United States, after conferring with the British ambassador, was now prepared to drop the issue of ROK participation. Instead, a new clause would be drafted to grant the ROK certain benefits of the treaty.<sup>35</sup> No records, to this author’s knowledge, exist of the final meeting between the British and the Americans that tipped the scales against Korean participation. In the State Department’s published volumes of selected diplomatic documents, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, there is merely an editorial note that “Other reference of this talk has not been found in State Department files.”<sup>36</sup> Despite the absence of documentation, it is nevertheless significant that the U.S. team dropped the matter of ROK participation after only a handful of meetings with its British counterpart.

Rhee and other ROK leaders had been arguing for Korean signatory status for almost two years, so it was clear to Washington that this was an emotional issue that mattered deeply to both the Korean leadership and public. Regardless of British views, the rapidity of U.S.

The ROK Ambassador to the United States Yang You-chan would repeatedly seek reconsideration for Korea’s case between July and September 1951. His efforts were met with a mixture of responses, from sympathetic but firm refusals to outright scolding for making a fuss. At a July 19 meeting between Yang and Dulles, Dulles expressed frustration that Yang had made a press statement in which the disgruntled ambassador had asserted that Japan was not fully rehabilitated and had not satisfactorily made amends for its imperialist behavior in Korea. “Mr. Dulles pointed out the difficulty and delicacy of the position of the United States in its efforts to obtain a reasonable and satisfactory treaty with Japan...and stressed the importance, in this matter, of Korean understanding and cooperation.”<sup>37</sup> In August, Yang met with Assistant Secretary Rusk, making another pitch to the effect that Korean exclusion would be damaging at a psychological level to both the ROK government and the Korean people. Rusk brushed off Yang’s points, responding “that the absence of a Korean delegation should not be considered as a loss of prestige for [the] ROK, and that it might be wiser for [the] ROK not to make such an issue of the matter...”<sup>38</sup>

## *Casualties of US Grand Strategy*

The chief attitude of the American responses was “annoyance,” as American officials had to devote energy to damage control after the decision to exclude the ROK. Dulles attempted to impress on Yang the importance of a cause larger than Korean issues. Rusk implied that repeated Korean lobbying was unnecessary squawking for the sake of national pride. Dismissiveness among American diplomats towards “excessive” Korean nationalism was clearly still as prevalent in 1951 as it had been in the late 1940s, and dovetailed with their overall unreceptiveness to emotional Korean appeals.

As the date of the San Francisco conference drew closer, one State Department official did submit a proposal to have the ROK attend the conference as an observer, seeking to smooth over ROK-Japan relations by diminishing any reason for the ROK to have a “chip in[sic] its shoulder.” The proposal author went on to say, “From a strictly moral point of view, it would seem only fair that the Koreans, who have suffered from Japanese oppression for more than 40 years, should be represented in some capacity in San Francisco.” Dulles personally responded to the proposal with a handwritten note, merely stating, “While from a strictly Korean point of view I agree with the above, I believe such actions would get us into many difficulties and open a Pandora’s Box which we would regret.”<sup>39</sup> The State Department instead offered the ROK a downgraded invitation of being informal guests to the conference who could receive some assistance in booking their hotels—an offer which the ROK did not deign with a response.<sup>40</sup>

Dulles did not elaborate on what he believed was within that proverbial “Pandora’s Box.” But in an environment imbued by the need to implement American grand strategic plans as quickly as possible, we may speculate with some confidence that he had already decided that Korean exclusion was the path of least resistance. In his mind, Korean issues and moral claim to wartime victimhood were wholly insignificant compared to the needs of the free world as interpreted by the U.S.

### **CONCLUSION**

The narrative of ROK exclusion from the San Francisco Peace Treaty reveals the tension between varying roles that the peace treaty could have performed. It was a grand strategic device that ushered in a political-security perimeter in the Pacific, but it also symbolized at least a modicum of rehabilitation, reconciliation, and redress for the past. It could deliver due attention to those nations affected by WWII yet marginalized by outdated “Allied power” designations. Additionally, the treaty presented an opportunity for American diplomats to try to cast away the historical memory of Western colonialism. Unsurprisingly, the treaty failed to operate in all of its ideal ways. For the ROK, its moral claims to have a seat at the table with Japan suited neither American post-war intentions or Cold War strategy.

Korea arguably always had at least a small chance of achieving signatory status on the peace treaty. State Department planners

struggled to fit Korea’s historical experience within the confines of the American understanding of World War II. American negotiators later latched onto the conclusion that Korea did not belong among the ranks of Allied powers when Korea’s claims of victimhood conflicted with the desired course of Japanese rehabilitation. Similarly, the process of “Asianizing” the peace conference was impersonal and not tailored to the specifics of individual Asian nations. It was ultimately guided by public relations concerns rather than a motivation to resolve the root causes of anti-Western and anti-colonialist attitudes in Asia. Consequently, Korea’s absence did little to delegitimize the U.S.-led venture, given the presence and tokenization of other “Asiatic” delegations in the conference hall.

Presented side-by-side, Korean moral claims also paled in comparison to U.S. and other Western security concerns, at least from the perspective in Washington. Korea had always had a moral claim to being involved with the treaty, yet the United States only came close to inviting the ROK after the Korean War had begun and concerns arose about the ROK government’s international prestige. The American interest in corraling potential sources for anti-American sentiment argued in favor of Korean inclusion, but was also subordinate to security concerns. Longer-held assumptions that the ROK might be unruly and muddle the treaty process came to the fore as Korea proved to be a less-than-ideal participant. Even though Korean participation in the San Francisco Peace Treaty might have built up the ROK’s international legitimacy and the occasional American diplomat believed that the ROK had a moral right to be represented, most American negotiators essentially believed that the strategic advantage of the peace treaty was far greater than any matter of Korean national pride.

The result was a smoothly-run peace conference that concluded within two days but left the ROK government and public frustrated and resentful. Japan had formally recognized Korean independence and assented to the seizure of Japanese assets left in Korea. But Korea had been denied a chance to address Japan directly about its forty years of colonial status—a status that traumatized Korea long before any other nation came into full contact with Japan’s imperial ambitions. Basic diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea would not exist until 1965, fourteen years after the peace treaty and six years after Dulles had already died.

When there was a historic moment for the United States to engineer ROK-Japanese reconciliation, American officials balked. As the image of Communism rolling across Asia burned itself in their minds, resolving the bitter legacy of Japanese control of Korea was a low priority. The requirements of the Cold War, mixed with inadequate American appreciation for what constituted a valid World War II experience in the Asia-Pacific, culminated in the decision to exclude the Republic of Korea from the San Francisco Peace Treaty. When the lingering echoes of wartime victimhood reached Washington, Foggy Bottom had no response. 🏛️

## Endnotes

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- [6] "Security Treaty Between the United States and Japan," signing date September 8, 1951.
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- [12] "The Negotiation of the Japanese Peace Treaty and Possible Lessons it has for Today," (n.d.), Box 7, Folder "Japan Subj File [2 of 2], Allison Papers, Truman Library; Allison, John M. (1905-1978); 1969; John Foster Dulles Oral History Collection, Public Policy Papers, Dept. of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library, esp. pgs. 24-26.
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- [16] Report from W.J. Sebald to the Secretary of State, 29 Oct 1949, Box 4037, Central Decimal Files 1945-1949, RG 59.
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- [18] John W Dower. *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), esp. pgs. 438-439; Michael Schaller. *The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), esp. pgs. 163-168.
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- [20] For more information about the growth of Japan's leftist movement during the occupation see Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 268-273.; W. Butterworth notes that the State Department obtained the Pentagon's support for a peace treaty by arguing that the sooner a peace treaty was concluded, the sooner it would be politically feasible for Japan to be rearmed. *FRUS 1950*, Volume VI, East Asia and the Pacific, 1950, Document 689.; *FRUS 1950*, Volume VI, East Asia and the Pacific, 1950, Document 728.
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- [24] SCAP refers to the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers—the U.S. occupation authority in Japan; *FRUS 1951*, Volume VI, Part 1, Asia and the Pacific, 1951, Document 663.

## *Casualties of US Grand Strategy*

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[36] In addition, I personally traveled to the National Archives at College Park and searched in vain through the relevant State Department records, but also encountered the same absence of documentation as to what was said that indicated British reasoning for Korean exclusion; *FRUS 1951*, Vol. VI, Part 1, Asia and the Pacific, 1951, Document 576.

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# MOTHER COLUMBIA AND UNCLE SAM

## Transnational Korean Adoption as a Form of Cold War Soft Power

*Abstract: In the aftermath of the Korean War, American couples and families across the nation mobilized to provide homes for Korea's newly orphaned population. Although largely driven by humanitarian concern, the transnational adoption of Korean children also held strategic value for America's post-war foreign policy objectives and international prestige. This article examines the mechanisms through which the United States harnessed the symbolic power of Korean adoptees and attempts to place this particular wave of transnational adoption within an explanatory ideological framework.*

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When the Korean War came to a close in July 1953, forces on both sides of the 38th parallel suffered 1.8 million casualties.<sup>1</sup> Although a staggering statistic in and of itself, the casualty rate alone does not speak to the equally tragic impact of the war on Korea's children. An estimated 100,000 Korean children, either the children of the deceased or children separated from their parents in the confusion of war, found themselves alone on the streets or in orphanages.<sup>2</sup> The response to this humanitarian crisis was transformed into an impetus for both the symbolic and actual emergence of transnational Korean adoption by predominantly white American couples.

From the humble beginnings of Holt International in Eugene, Oregon, to the cumulative adoption of over 200,000 Korean children by North American, Western European, and Australian families since 1953, transnational Korean adoption has long-served to reproduce paternalistic relationships and political involvement in South Korea by its Western allies, particularly the United States. Through a coordinated system of propagandized images, mass media representations, and a reductive ideology of globalized ethics, Korean adoptees came to concurrently symbolize and depoliticize the interdependency of Korea and the United States throughout the 1950s and into the Cold War.<sup>3</sup> In a phenomenon that is best explained through an intersecting lens of military humanitarianism and Cold War Orientalism, the juxtaposition of the images of the benevolent American adoptive parent and the innocent Korean war waif made Korean-American relations more palatable while providing a focal point for righteous outrage against presupposed communist aggression.

### GOOD GUY, BAD GUY: MILITARY HUMANITARIANISM

In the aftermath of the Korean War, the perception of the United States' presence in Korea and in the broader international community was very much in flux. Partially as a response to this phenomenon, and partially out of a necessity created by its own troops' sexual activity while deployed, the United States engaged in a policy of military humanitarianism in South Korea.<sup>4</sup> Military humanitarianism,<sup>5</sup> in broad terms, refers to a doctrine in which

military intervention is dressed up as humanitarian salvation, justified according to depoliticized, universal human rights, such that anyone who opposes it is not only taking the enemy's side in an armed conflict but betraying the international community of civil[ized] nations.<sup>6</sup>

The United States' post-war military occupation of South Korea was comprised of activities directed toward both nation building and national branding. The pure and hopeful image of the rescued Korean child functioned as the obvious symbolic choice for this dual mission, while transnational adoption served as the vehicle through which the intended parent-child relationship between the American military and the Korean people could be miniaturized and replicated at home.

By the time the United States brought the Korean child into its foreign policy schematic in East Asia, he or she was already a familiar trope and psychological bargaining chip from the preceding Korean War. Leaflets designed by the U.S. Army's Psychological Warfare Division often associated United Nations forces with domestic contentment in an Americanized style. One such leaflet, part of a "Defection



U.S. Government leaflet attempting to demoralize Chinese enemy in Korean War by showing how their families missed them back home (1953)

Source: Federal Government (Wikimedia Commons)

Bandwagon” series, depicted three contrasting panels of life under communism and life under the United Nations, with captions like “Useless Death” and “Happy Life” placed side by side.<sup>7</sup> Two of the three United Nations panels, captioned with “A Normal Future” and “A Happy Home,” show images of a jocular two-parent, two-child family embracing one another and holding hands as they walk through a village.<sup>8</sup> That the image of normality communicated to the Korean people is the nuclear, middle-class family of American ideals is particularly telling. With little consideration for how family might be understood in Korean culture, American propaganda sought to export domestic familial ideas abroad while obscuring any notable differences in the American and Korean construction of this most basic societal unit.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, American wartime propaganda sought to create quite the opposite association between communism and the familial paragon. One particularly striking Psychological Warfare Division leaflet from 1952 features an image of a crying mother looking out woefully over the countryside as she tries to comfort a screaming baby in her arms.<sup>9</sup> As emotionally and symbolically loaded as this warped Madonna is, it pales in comparison to the poem printed on the reverse. Meant to be sung in “jingle form,” the poem informs the baby that the “devilish Chinese may intrude into our house and...may violate your mother.”<sup>10</sup> This portrayal of a starving child at risk of witnessing his mother’s sexual assault is as strategic as it is harrowing, casting the communist way of life as monstrous toward the most vulnerable and antithetical to a wholesome family and childhood. Such imagery likely conditioned Korean parents to view their country as inherently unsafe for their children while engendering a sense of righteous responsibility among Americans for the traumatized and victimized children of Korea. The stage thus set, the plight of Korean

children and the communist assault on the Americanized family ethic, whether real or imagined, was already accessible to the collective American awareness prior to the institutionalization of Korean adoption.

The United States was not immune to this powerful hyperbole, nor was it able to fully dominate the dispersion of such narratives. In an inversion of the United States’ own rhetoric, communist countries accused the United States of unimaginable cruelty and callousness toward its child victims in proxy wars and occupations. Under Kim Il-Sung, broadcasts out of Pyongyang labelled America-backed South Korea as a land of unspeakable horrors, where “South Korean youth were killed as cheaper cannon fodder and many women and children were slaughtered.”<sup>11</sup> The victimization of mothers and children at the hands of Americans was echoed in the rhetorical strategies of China, the Soviet Union, and various satellite countries as they attempted to woo non-aligned nations to the communist camp. Xinhua News Agency, the official state-run press outlet of China, reported that Korea was a land of orphans, where “every child has a tragic history.”<sup>12</sup> The American and United Nations forces responsible for the murder of the orphans’ parents stood in sharp contrast to Chinese army men “[carrying] children on their backs from south of the 38th Parallel.”<sup>13</sup> Characterized as indiscriminate killers with an open secret of human rights violations, the symbolic American soldier could be easily transformed from the World War II-era beacon of hope to a calling card for imperial intentions and brutality.

The Soviet Union, China, North Korea, and other communist countries also leveraged the image of the child in their critiques of actions and attitudes inherent to the American racial hierarchy. A number of historians and scholars have explicated on the relationship between American race relations and Cold War geopolitics, particularly those designed to win over non-white nations of the Global South.<sup>14</sup> Segregated spaces, Jim Crow laws, structural poverty and social immobility in black communities, and public lynchings coalesced into an effective argument against aligning with the United States, one so deeply persuasive that Secretary of State Dean Acheson referred to America’s racial system as “a source of constant embarrassment” that “jeopardized effective maintenance of [American] moral leadership of the free and democratic nations of the world.”<sup>15</sup> Acheson’s recognition of the need for visible “moral leadership” as a crucial element of Cold War strategy, as opposed to only military or economic leadership, was a significant step toward fully embracing military humanitarianism. The Korean child would later prove to be an effective canvas on which to project Acheson’s vision.

In a more tangible sense, the issue of so-called “GI Babies” in South Korea was another significant blow to the American military’s reputation abroad and an obstacle to achieving the Armed Forces Assistance to Korea’s goal of producing the



North Korean refugees on board a U.S. Navy fast transport, U.S. Navy photo 80-G-K-14209 (1952)  
 Source: U.S Navy, "Operation Fishnet," Korea, (Wikimedia Commons)

"realization by Koreans and other free peoples of the nature of [American] intentions."<sup>16</sup> While it is difficult to ascertain the total number of GI babies born during American occupation in Korea, inferences can be drawn from the sheer number of personnel involved: six million American soldiers served in Korea between 1950 and 1971, while up to one million Korean women provided sexual services for American military "camps" during this period.<sup>17</sup> Whether conceived via genuine relationships between American soldiers and Korean women or via prostitution and exploitation, GI babies represented a complex legal issue and an even more challenging social issue. Babies born to American fathers and Korean mothers often lacked citizenship in both of their parents' native countries and, worse still, faced permanent social stigma and rejection in Korea. Not unlike the United States at this time, Korean society emphasized racial purity and actively discriminated against these so-called "t'wigi," or "half-breed," children.<sup>18</sup> In the context of emerging American neocolonialism in South Korea, GI babies also functioned as a permanent and highly visible symbol of a weak and effeminate Korea, forced to exchange its racial and national independence for American protection.

To aid in the reparation of the American military's reputation in Korea and elsewhere, the United States' governmental and military agencies relied on transnational adoption to resurrect the powerful ideology of what historian Karen Dubinsky refers to as "hybrid babies."<sup>19</sup> The hybrid babies first emerged as a categorical

and symbolic child among white adoptive parents in the United States, Canada, and other economically dominant nations immediately following World War II. Civic society campaigns urged the adoption of multiracial children fathered by Allied troops, particularly those fathered by black American soldiers, from Germany and elsewhere. These children came to represent "a hopeful sign of cross racial tolerance, unfortunate[s] to be rescued by tender white care, or a...measure of superior social values," with little recognition of the political and economic factors that created their circumstances.<sup>20</sup> The hybrid child served as a useful platform on which to build when leveraging Korean orphans, who could expand the American racial lexicon to include Asian, black-Asian, and other heretofore peripheral lineages while reinforcing a broad-based view of American society's universality and plurality. Unlike his communist equivalents and his peers in the Republic of Korea, the American soldier, backed by progressive values at home, could reach across racial and national lines for the good of innocents.

The benevolent American soldier and his non-white charge, however, could only be of use in American brand-building and anti-communist strategies if imagery of the two could be effectively communicated to the public. Though it would be overly simplistic to condense this mass undertaking into a single distributive channel, it would also be amiss to minimize the role of the so-called "middlebrow" media in repackaging and disseminating a sterilized image of military-enabled transnational Korean adoption. The

term “middlebrow” was first introduced in America in a 1926 *New York Times* article, but it was not until the post-World War II era that it fully emerged in tandem with a burgeoning American middle class. The cultural and societal understanding of what constitutes “middlebrow” is fluid, but Russell Lynes’ description of the quintessential middlebrow vision as

the typical American family - happy little women, happy little children, all spotless or sticky in the jam pot, framed against dimity curtains in the windows or decalomania flowers on the cupboard doors...a world pictured without tragedy...a world that smells of soap

does it sufficient justice.<sup>21</sup> This image of the wholesome, child-centric nuclear family, fully shielded from the messiness of the outside world by American materialism and relative wealth, permeated American broadcasts, entertainment, literature, and periodicals. It provided a perfect venue in which to acquaint domestic audiences and international consumers of American culture with the new American soldier and the repurposed Korean child.

One need look no further than popular coffee table magazines of the 1950s to observe the ubiquity of the American heroism message with respect to Korean children. A 1953 article in *Collier's*, for example, encapsulates the essentialism of the American gentle giant motif as it relates to the individual soldier and international opinion of the nation. Written shortly after the Korean War armistice officially took effect, the article details the heroics of American Sergeant First Class Werner Kranzer, who spent his free time on deployment rescuing Korean orphans from the street and bringing them to a United Nations center, from which many were sent to

charged with the task of rehabilitating and reintroducing its troops to the world in the wake of the Korean War. Transnational adoption of Korean children, particularly adoption enabled by American soldiers’ selfless rescue efforts, emerged as a critical method through which to effect this change. By participating in such endeavors, among other relief-centered campaigns, the American soldier acted as less of an expression of his country’s military might and more of a de facto ambassador for American altruism and moral superiority. Having already been used as a familiar and emotionally-charged figure in the Soviet-American battle for narrative dominance, the Korean child was symbolically redesigned as a central beneficiary and activating mechanism of American military humanitarianism.

#### “LIVING DOLLS”: COLD WAR ORIENTALISM

While military humanitarianism had implications for, and effects on, the American people, its primary audience was the global community, particularly those countries thought to be in danger of falling into the communist sphere of influence. At home, the United States relied on various branches of civic society and social impulse to increase acceptance of ongoing American involvement in the Korean Peninsula after a fairly unpopular, or at least undesirable, war. Between 1951 and 1953, the percentage of Americans that disapproved of the Korean War, despite some volatility, remained significant. In February 1951, 49% of Americans believed the United States “made a mistake going into war in Korea.”<sup>23</sup> The percentage increased slightly to 50% in February 1952 and, even at its lowest point in January 1953, accounted for over one-third of the American public.<sup>24</sup> Over two decades later, as reported by *The Wilson Quarterly*, retrospective approval of the Korean

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## “The Korean child was symbolically redesigned as a central beneficiary and activating mechanism of American military humanitarianism.”

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orphanages and later adopted abroad. The “quiet, sensitive sergeant [who] collects waifs ... [from] the small-fry underworld” is hailed as the consummate American, even more so because he voluntarily enlisted for another year of service in Korea because “there [was] too much to do.”<sup>22</sup> In Kranzer, one can see an attempt to reclaim American exceptionalism and recast it not only in terms of masculine strength, but also in a construct of feminine compassion. Kranzer is metaphorically both mother and father to the Korean children he rescues, just as the United States wished to be viewed by a dependent South Korea.

Disturbed by the American soldier’s fall from grace in the global moral imagination, the United States Department of State and Armed Forces Assistance to Korea, or AFAK, were

War stood at only 36%.<sup>25</sup> General knowledge of Asia was also lacking, with journalist and author Harold Isaacs asserting in his book, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Views of China and India*, that “vagueness about Asia had been the natural condition even of the educated American.”<sup>26</sup> For the Eisenhower Administration’s multifactor anti-communism strategy, however, domestic support was critical. This necessitated a jolt to the collective American conscience and awareness, which seemed to be fairly blase about the Korean War, its representative significance, and Asian peoples in general.

In his speech on the occasion of the Korean War Armistice in July 1953, President Eisenhower laid out two distinct elements that would soon form the basis of American attitudes toward



A war weary Korean girl trudges by a stalled M-26 tank (1951)  
 Source: Maj. R V. Spencer, *National Archives and Records Administration* (Wikimedia Commons)

Korea in a post-war world. First and foremost, Eisenhower emphasized the possibility of a natural and strong alignment between the United States and its pockets of allyship in East Asia, commenting that “men of the East and men of the West can fight and work and live side by side in pursuit of a just and noble cause.”<sup>27</sup> Concurrently, though, Eisenhower reinforced the otherness of Korea and the Korean people, referring to the country as “that faroff land” for which many American families had sacrificed.<sup>28</sup>

The juxtaposition of these two conceptual frameworks, in which Korea was at once within and without the locus of the American community and imagination, persisted throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. Of particular interest is the way in which it fed into an emerging foreign policy framework that historian Christina Klein refers to as “Cold War Orientalism.” Building on previous definitions of a broader Orientalism, Klein defines Cold War Orientalism as the process by which “middlebrow intellectuals and Washington policymakers produced a sentimental discourse of integration that imagined the forging of bonds between Asians and Americans both at home and abroad.”<sup>29</sup> Although Klein cites literary and cultural works like *The King and I* and *The Bridges at Toko-Ri* as the dominant medium through which Cold War Orientalism was expressed, there were arguably also active, rather than consumptive, modes through which Cold War Orientalism manifested. Transnational Korean adoption by American families, particularly white Christian families, was one such mode.

Central to the confluence of Cold War Orientalism and transnational adoption stood Henry and Bertha Holt, the first known American couple to adopt children from Korea and the founders of what is now known as Holt International. After participating in a child sponsorship program to provide

funding for the care of Korean orphans, the Holts formally adopted eight Korean children into their Oregon home and subsequently arranged for hundreds of other couples to do the same. From a structural legal perspective, the physical process by which the Holts first adopted from Korea is critical to understand the larger paradigm of transnational Korean adoption. For example, it was only through a special act of the United States Congress in June 1955, officially entitled “A Bill for Relief of Certain War Orphans” but better known as “The Holt Bill,” that the Holts were able to bring children from Korea to the United States. The bill allowed for their adoptive Korean children to be naturalized before reaching the United States.<sup>30</sup> The willingness of Congress to carve out such an exception to overarching immigration policies and theories is quite significant and exemplifies the partnership between policymakers and agents of the middlebrow that was so crucial to the perpetuation of Cold War Orientalism.

Second, the Holts and those for whom they eventually coordinated Korean adoptions made use of proxy adoption, through which parents adopted children sight unseen via non-governmental agents already in Korea. The children would then be flown to an airport on the West Coast, where they would meet their new family for the first time.<sup>31</sup> In addition to concerns about the welfare of children adopted in this fashion and the fitness of those by whom they were adopted, proxy adoption essentially removed Korean families and birth parents from the adoption equation while distancing the American government from the process and any associated liability. Furthermore, proxy adoption commodified the Korean child, treating him or her as no different than the child in the orphanage’s next bed and essentially interchangeable in the eyes of his or her soon-to-be American parents. Indeed, a witness to the disembarking of 107 Korean adoptees from the Holts’ “Flying Tiger” airplane noted that the infants had traveled in white cardboard boxes with holes cut into either end “to enable the boxes to be stacked one above the other.”<sup>32</sup> The Korean child as a product, rather than as a person, was an unfortunate, but not uncommon, trope among adoptive parents and their supporters.

Exoticism, both positive and negative, was utilized extensively by Holts and other proponents of Korean adoption in American civic society. For the Holts and other Christian individuals and organizations that figured prominently in the spread of Cold War Orientalism, Korea was exoticized not as a foreign curiosity, but as a dystopia hidden from God’s salvific light. In her recollection of the events that led to the adoption of her eight Korean children, Bertha Holt, known as “Grandma Holt” by prominent politicians and average Americans alike, promulgated anecdotes of Korean orphans found in Army dumps, recognizable only as “a human form beneath garbage and flies...beneath grime and indescribable dirt.”<sup>33</sup> Her memoir is rife with further references to Korea as a hellscape for its most vulnerable, such as her and her husband’s heartache at the thought of “those poor little babies starving to death, or being thrown into dumps to be gnawed by rats.”<sup>34</sup>

## *Mother Columbia and Uncle Sam*

Holt's disquieting imagery was profoundly important for forging the "sentimental bonds" of Cold War Orientalism and engendering in the compassionate American a sense of moral responsibility to rescue the Korean people. While this type of affective exposure fulfilled the mission of gaining support and resource mobilization for the ongoing American occupation of Korea, it failed to acknowledge America's role in bringing about these circumstances. Self-blame thus removed, Americans were free to channel their emotional labor into sympathizing with South Koreans and promoting a blanket hatred of communist influence.

The inverse of Bertha Holt's dystopian exoticism came in the form of an equally impactful strain of civic religion with Christian features, largely popularized by Harry Holt and spread by those for whom the Holts had secured adoptees. In a notable contrast to the suffering child of his wife's narrative, the Korean child of Harry Holt's imagination was a child of God no different than the biological Christian children to whom adoptive parents had already given birth. In his letter to supporters and potential adoptive parents, Holt, after expressing gratitude to televangelist Billy Graham for his work on behalf of Korean orphans, implored recipients to "pray to God that He will give us the wisdom and the strength and the power to deliver His

for the Korean and American people. Echoing America's perception of a protector-protectee relationship, author and adoptive father Jan de Hartog monolithically described Korean and other Asian adoptees as obedient "little Mr. Chinatown[s]" and "miniature Doctor Fu Manchu[s]."<sup>36</sup> In order to be fully invited into the individual and national American family, Korean adoptees were required to fit into the appropriate relational role established by the aforementioned perspective of the American soldier overseas.

Whether intentionally or not, adoptive parents often applied to their adopted Korean daughters the stereotypical subservient sexual roles assigned to Korean women in and around American camptowns in South Korea. When asked what characteristics she would be looking for in a child, one adoptive mother recalled that her first response asked for "someone exotic and beautiful."<sup>37</sup> de Hartog drew the sexualized female paradigm even further, writing,

Many fathers of little girls may be similarly enslaved, but I suspect that little Korean girls are the experts at this form of lion-taming. Like all women from countries where the male rules the roost, they have the magic power of making our breeches drop at the crest of our strutting self-confidence.<sup>38</sup>

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**“Korean transnational adoption was less of an altruistic effort than it was a powerful tool in a broader strategy to construct, or perhaps reconstruct, Korea in the American mind.”**

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little children from the cold and misery and darkness of Korea into the warmth and love of your homes.”<sup>35</sup> Holt's view of transnational adoption was less about successfully crossing racial and national boundaries and more about uniting God's family in the United States, understood in this context as the closest substitute for the heavenly utopia of the Judeo-Christian theological tradition. With such a perspective, Holt and other adoptive parents collapsed into their adopted Korean children a complex syncretism of American exceptionalism, elements of preordainment from a globalized Manifest Destiny, and a Christian family ethic.

It is important to note that Cold War Orientalism did not apply only to Korean orphans living in Korea. Instead, the mindset followed these children long after they had arrived on American soil to become part of their adoptive families. Every facet of the Korean adoptee, from his or her physical appearance to the way in which he or she assimilated into his or her American family, was scrutinized, stereotyped, and regurgitated as evidence of the integrationist possibilities

Korean adoption, then, was not a union of equals, but a carefully orchestrated reproduction of geopolitical Korean-American relation on an individual scale, with the Korean adoptee expected to neatly fulfill American fantasies and power dynamics.

When viewed through the lens of Cold War Orientalism, Korean transnational adoption was less of an altruistic effort than it was a powerful tool in a broader strategy to construct, or perhaps reconstruct, Korea in the American mind. Images of a remote land of little interest to America or an ineffectual country siphoning American treasure and troops were replaced by a vague notion of a charity nation in need of American assistance. Rallied behind this hazy cause, individual Americans were inspired to adopt Korean children as a demonstration of their anti-communist and pro-South Korea attitudes. A tremendous amount of emotional, cultural, and narrative labor was expended in an effort to simplify integrationist foreign policy goals into a symbolically binary choice between rescuing and abandoning a Korean child.

### A NOTE ON KOREAN AGENCY

It is critical to note that South Korea was not an entirely passive player in the emerging 1950s phenomena of transnational Korean adoption. South Korean and American policy often worked hand-in-hand to enable the flow of children between the two countries, and the combination of South Korea's economic development goals and aforementioned racial politics set the backdrop for national participation in a broader adoption scheme. The idiosyncrasies of the sitting South Korean government's strategic goals, rather than any particular theory of social welfare, had the greatest influence on Korean adoption policy. In 1976, for example, Park Chung Hee's administration implemented the Five-Year Plan for Adoption and Foster Care amidst stringent criticism from North Korea, which accused South Korea of selling children to foreign imperialists and enemies. The plan called for specific annual reductions in foreign adoptions, annual increases in domestic adoption, and a more restrictive list of countries to which Korean children could be sent.<sup>39</sup>

While Park's intentions may or may not have included greater protection for his nation's children, the Five-Year Plan for Adoption and Foster Care fit squarely within Park's national *yushin* ideology. In addition to its authoritarian domestic elements, *yushin* included reformatory efforts with respect to North-South relations and increasing South Korean autonomy in the face of American influence and in-country involvement.<sup>40</sup> With this governance theory in mind, a reduction in transnational Korean adoption, of which American couples had historically been the primary beneficiary, exported a stronger South Korean image to both North Korea and the United States. Still, Park's policy toward Korean adoption, like the policy of administrations both preceding and succeeding him, were crafted in response to corresponding American intentions, policy, and behavior. Even in decisions regarding its own children, South Korea was relegated to the role of recipient and secondary actor.

To more clearly understand the limited agency of individual South Koreans in the transnational adoption process, rather than that of the macro-level South Korean state, the voices of adoptees brought to America form an important body of evidence. Despite public projections to the contrary, American adoptive parents and the agents and institutions that serviced them possessed a "core anxiety concerning the racial, cultural, national, and biological difference between the adopted child and her adoptive parents."<sup>41</sup> Many adoptee narratives, as logical vehicles for this anxiety, feature the same foundational elements: a certain level of mythology used to justify their initial adoption, attempted normalization, and a persistent, albeit often repressed, sense of otherness.<sup>42</sup>

Deann Borshay Liem, a Korean adoptee and the acclaimed documentarian behind *First Person Plural*, gives voice to this

"cultural dysphoria" and the harrowing discovery that her identity was switched with that of another child to facilitate her proxy adoption by an American couple.<sup>43</sup> Liem's experience of so-called 'orphan switching' was arguably rare, but the mismanagement and even doctoring of South Korean adoption records was not. While few statistics exist in this regard, anecdotal evidence abounds. Years after adopting her daughter, for example, American Maggie Perscheid learned that, contrary to the presented narrative of an unmarried couple giving up their child, her daughter was placed from an "intact family [in South Korea] and had siblings."<sup>44</sup> Liem and Perscheid's stories have been echoed many times over by members of such adoptee communities as Adoptee Solidarity Korea and Truth and Reconciliation for the Adoption Community of Korea.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, adoptee Laura Klunder describes herself as "a transaction...a number in the same way that people who are criminalized and institutionalized are given numbers."<sup>46</sup> Her bond with her adoptive parents aside, Klunder viewed herself as the product of a selfish market exchange system introduced by the United States and unquestioningly accepted by South Korea. Prior to being brought to the United States, Klunder lived with a native Korean foster family in South Korea for over a year. The transnational adoption process ignored this and other potential options for domestic adoption, choosing instead to export Klunder abroad with no acknowledgement of the racism, alienation, and perpetual foreigner stigma that she inevitably faced as the only Korean child in her new Midwestern town.<sup>47</sup> Klunder's story is one of many that demonstrates the presence of a problematic naivete and a lack of cultural awareness among those who advocated for, facilitated, and benefited from transnational Korean adoption by American families.

### CONCLUSION

Though cast as a simple moral decision by generous American couples, the transnational adoption of Korean children in the aftermath of the Korean War reflected a complex system of cultural and social factors jointly leveraged to seek approval and support for ongoing American involvement in the Korean Peninsula. Transnational Korean adoption was an effective method of national brand-building both at home and abroad for the United States. The Korean child, already a familiar symbol in the American imagination, was repackaged to sterilize the nature of American military power in East Asia and emerging neocolonialism in South Korea. Through the Korean adoptee, soldiers became saviors, and the United States became both mother and father to its newly adopted Korean charge south of the 38th parallel.

While it is impossible to encapsulate the depth and breadth of all factors that enabled transnational Korean adoption, it is useful to evaluate this system at the intersection of both military humanitarianism and Cold War Orientalism.

## Mother Columbia and Uncle Sam

Transnational Korean adoption was not the first sign of these frameworks active in a Cold War world. It did, however, become a critical element in the ongoing feedback loop of de facto American imperialism, domestic support, and a carefully crafted reputation of benevolence projected to the international community -- particularly non-aligned and developing nations. By leveraging stereotypical tropes of Asian docility and exoticism, a nascent middlebrow media at work in the homes of the middle class, and appeals to a Christianized civic religion, the United States used the image of the Korean child to align its Cold War foreign policy goals with the moral impulses and global ethics of its citizens.

Although South Korea was an active participant in the transnational adoption of its children, it is more accurate to characterize South Korea as a party limited in its agency by overwhelming American influence in its politics, economic reconstruction, and border integrity. The Korean child, in comparison, was stripped of his or her autonomy and pushed into the mold of broader American expectations about what would constitute an ideal adoptee and, by extension, an ideal national dependent. With a significant amount of emotional and narrative labor, an otherwise humanitarian concern was transformed into a normalizing vehicle for American-Korean power dynamics. Quite a burden was placed on little shoulders. 🏛️

## Endnotes

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[3] While political ideology and the coordinated evolution of immigration and emigration policy in the United States and South Korea are undoubtedly vital elements in understanding transnational Korean adoption, they are beyond the scope of this paper. This analysis will focus mainly on the social and cultural factors that enabled mass adoption of Korean children by predominantly white, Christian families in middle-class America.

[4] Soojin Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee: U.S. Empire and Genealogies of Korean Adoption* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2014), 34.

[5] Pate prefers to use the term "militarized humanitarianism" when discussing the theoretical application to Korea to make clear that military fusion with humanitarian elements is an appropriate process, rather than a new and equal strain of humanitarianism. As there is no shared consensus about which is the more accurate term, this paper will use military humanitarianism. This is the original term coined by Slovenian philosopher and professor Slavoj Žižek.

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[13] Ibid.

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[15] Qtd. in Ibid.

[16] Qtd. in Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 35.

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[19] Karen Dubinsky, "Babies Without Borders: Rescue, Kidnap, and the Symbolic Child," *Journal of Women's History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 142.

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[21] Russell Lynes, "Highbrow, Middlebrow, Lowbrow (Reprint)," *The Wilson Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1976): 157.

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- [25] Alonzo L. Hamby, "Public Opinion: Korea and Vietnam," *The Wilson Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (1978): 137-139.
- [26] Qtd. in Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee*, 99.
- [27] Dwight D. Eisenhower, "The President's Hand-Edited Draft of His Public Statement on the Occasion of the Armistice, July 26, 1953" (address, Washington, DC, 1953), *The Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home*, National Records and Archives Administration, [https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online\\_documents/korean\\_war/Armistice\\_Draft\\_1953\\_07\\_26.pdf](https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/korean_war/Armistice_Draft_1953_07_26.pdf) (accessed November 17, 2018).
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# DIVIDED BY POPPY

## A Rhetorical Conflict between Missionaries and the British Government on Opium

*Abstract: Religion and commerce are often discussed as independent and distinct fields of study, each governed by their own rules and histories. Yet, it is becoming increasingly apparent within the study of global history that these two forces are critically interconnected and interdependent. Indeed, history is abound with examples of faith and trade sometimes warring as enemies and other times working as an inseparable marriage, with all manners of interaction extant in between. A brief examination of the British opium trade may provide some insight into one instance of this relationship. This essay considers rhetoric used by pro-opium representatives of the British government and anti-opium Protestant missionaries with regards to the late 19th century opium trade in China.*

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*The Christian religion, as professed by Protestants or Roman Catholics, inculcates the practice of virtue, and teaches man to do as he would be done by. Persons teaching or professing it, therefore, shall alike be entitled to the protection of the Chinese authorities, nor shall any such, peaceably pursuing their calling, and not offending against the law, be persecuted or interfered with.<sup>1</sup>*

*British subjects are hereby authorized to travel, for their pleasure or for purposes of trade, to all parts of the interior... They are permitted to carry on trade with whomsoever they please, and to proceed to and fro at pleasure with their Vessels and Merchandise...<sup>2</sup>*

Set to paper on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1858, these two clauses of the Treaty of Tientsin best demonstrate the extent of British hegemony over imperial China during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Following the end of two Anglo-Chinese wars now labeled as “The Opium Wars,” these conflicts fully opened the gates of China to British proselytism and trade. These two forces would work in tandem in the following decades in an attempt to propagate British influence over the Chinese people—that is, with one critical exception that would become a major point of controversy: the opium trade.

In its refined state, opium is a stimulatory and pleasurable paste that can be smoked or ingested.<sup>3</sup> Although it has a long history as a recreationally used substance in China, its prevalence and notoriety were greatly magnified following the establishment of an opium trade between the British Raj and Imperial China in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, a significant opposition to the opium trade would arise both domestically in England and among its expatriates in China. This anti-opium movement was bolstered by immense

support from the Christian clergy and in particular, Protestant missionaries within China. Writing on the topic of the opium trade, a Reverend Silvester Whitehead would say the following: “The missionaries in China are absolutely one on this important question...the whole six-hundred of them with one accordant voice proclaim the opium a curse, and they tell you that the trade in the past was a monstrous wrong, and thus it is still a gigantic evil.”<sup>5</sup> Regardless of sect or denomination, western missionaries would become some of the most vocal opponents of the opium trade, going as far as to create the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade, a prominent activist and political lobbying group based in England.<sup>6</sup> But despite their outrage and activism, missionaries would be met with equal vigor by pro-opium representatives sourced from both the royal government and private industry. As such, the Anglo-Chinese opium trade would persist until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, an instance of profound disconnect between the Protestant religious community and the British government/merchant class can be identified by examining three key points of contention on the opium trade: (1) the harmful physical and mental effects of opium on the consumer (2) the effects of opium’s trade and consumption on the spread of Christianity, and (3) the role of the British crown and people in propagating opium addiction. In pursuing this goal, this paper will utilize publications and correspondences from both anti-opium and pro-opium figures alongside secondary sources from later historians. Of particular note are John Dudgeon, a prolific contemporary anti-opium writer and medical missionary representing the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade, and William H. Brereton, a pro-opium representative of the British Raj who served as a lawyer in Hong Kong for several years.

## OPIUM – POISON OR SUPPLEMENT?

Central to the debate on the morality of the opium trade was a complete disagreement over whether opium was at all a harmful drug. Missionaries of the 19th century associated the recreational abuse of opiates with activities of the depraved and undisciplined and in a manner similar to popular opinion in modern western society. In contrast, proponents of the opium trade fiercely argued that refined opium as it was sold to the Chinese was not harmful or addictive, but rather was a beneficial supplement to one's physical and mental health.

The writings of missionaries in China abound with reports on the allegedly destructive effects of opium on the health of the consumer. Although opium was best known to be a stimulant, its opponents lamented that continued consumption of the paste would lead to the onset of negative physical symptoms. In an effort to prove this claim, anti-opium activists assembled reports from over 100 physicians on the use of opium:

“The digestion becomes weakened, the appetite fails, the liver inactive, and the bowels constipated. From the inability to get or take or digest sufficient food, emaciation results. The skin becomes dry and shriveled, the face sallow, the cheeks sunken, and the eyes dull. The pulse becomes weak, quick, and irritable, except when opium has just been taken. The bronchial tubes become irritated, causing cough, and often an asthmatic condition. The effects on the brain are at first stimulating and exhilarating, but in time a dull, stupid, languorous condition is induced, rendering the man unable for active work...”<sup>8</sup>

There is a dense amount of information within this consultation, meant precisely to convey to the reader an understanding of opium as a poison rather than a recreational drug. John Dudgeon cites another writer from the city of Nanking who describes opium addicts as “corpses – lean and haggard as demons... their skin hangs down like bags and their bones are as naked as billets of wood.”<sup>9</sup> Opium was thus viewed by the missionaries as a harmful substance that directly destroyed the lives of its consumers. The missionaries intended for their readers at home to share this same interpretation. Missionaries sought to further develop this characterization of opium by emphasizing not only its immediate physical effects, but also its addictiveness. Medical missionaries or missionaries who spent ample time around opium addicts often noted an incurable addiction to opium and the onset of an “opium diarrhea” associated with withdrawal from the drug.<sup>10</sup> Reverend John Griffith, when asked whether opium addicts could break themselves of the opium habit, wrote the following: “Many come to our hospitals with the view of breaking it off, and are cured for a time. The permanently cured, however, are exceedingly few. By far, the majority of cases fall back within a year or two.”<sup>11</sup> Because of opium's side effects and its addictiveness,



Making of Opium Cakes, 1908 (2013)

Source: *Drugging a Nation: The story of China and the Opium Trade*. Fleming H Revell Company (Wikimedia Commons)

missionaries believed that the British Empire was morally responsible for any suffering of Chinese opium smokers.

Beyond the effects on the individual consumer, missionaries also saw opium as a plague on entire Chinese communities. Opium was believed to loosen one's morals and self-discipline, leading to unproductivity and crime. Citing the testimony of the Superintendent to the British Indian Government of the tea plantations in Assam, one missionary describes the effects of opium as “that dreadful plague which has depopulated this beautiful country, turned it into a land of wild beasts, and has degenerated the Assamese from a fine race of people to the most abject, servile, crafty, and demoralized race in India.”<sup>12</sup> Other missionaries looked to opium dens, commercial buildings where smokers would collectively gather, to draw their conclusions on the societal effects of the drug: “...several schools showed that education was not altogether neglected; but the opium dens were more numerous than the schools and the habit of smoking seemed almost universal among the men.”<sup>13</sup> An article from the *North China Herald* reads that “[opium dens] harbor all sorts of thieves and vagabonds and depreciate the value and security of property and seriously add to the number of petty robberies in the neighborhoods in which they are opened.”<sup>14</sup> John Dudgeon, one of the most vocal members of the anti-opium movement, cites a visitor to an opium den who described the building as “an ante-chamber to hell.”<sup>15</sup> Clearly, anti-opium missionaries and figures interpreted the opium problem as an epidemic, destroying both the individual and the society in more ways than one.

## *Divided By Poppy*

Pro-opium representatives responded to these outcries by shifting their reader's focus to the positive effects and uses of opium, and by denying the addictiveness of the drug. In his lectures titled "The Truth about Opium Smoking," long-time Hong Kong lawyer and representative of the British Raj William Brereton sought to dispel what he called "the mischievous fallacies" of anti-opium figures. In addressing the alleged physical symptoms of opium consumption, he draws on the testimony of a Dr. Philip Ayres, who denies nearly every negative physical effect of opium smoking.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, Brereton asserts another claim espoused by many pro-opium writers— that is, that "opium smoking may become a habit, but that that habit is not necessarily an increasing one."<sup>16</sup> Pro-opium writers maintained that opium smoking was an easily manageable habit and not at all a malicious one that drove its consumers to find greater and greater doses of the drug. Historian Frank Dikötter is a modern historian that has reiterated this same stance, writing that opium users did not suffer from increasing tolerance to the drug, thereby allowing them to consume relatively similar amounts of the drug for long periods of time.<sup>17</sup> Although Dikötter does not reject opium as a potentially noxious narcotic outright, he breaks from consensus by highlighting and defending some of the arguments historically made by pro-opium writers of the 19th century.

To further minimize any criticisms of opium, many writers developed the common argument that opium is no worse of a substance than alcohol frequently consumed throughout Europe. Such a stance can be found in the official reports by the 1895 British Royal Commission on Opium, charged with assessing the harmfulness of the opium trade.<sup>18</sup> Pro-opium writers rejected moral condemnations of "peddling poison" to China, reasoning that opium smoking was no less evil than the average Englishman's post-work drink. Their goal was to normalize opium smoking by placing the drug in the minds of the public alongside other common social activities. The Protestant religious community would lambast pro-opium writers for this argument although a deep review of their comments is beyond the focus of this paper.<sup>19</sup>

Defenders of the opium trade have even argued that opium was not only harmless, but in fact a greatly beneficial drug that provided an essential health service for China. In his book, Historian Frank Dikötter notes, citing the observations of a doctor from Fujian province in 1911, that opium smoking was often used as a treatment for minor ailments such as itching, dyspepsia, and bronchitis.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Brereton argues in his lectures that opium was commonly used as a daily supplement akin to coffee:

"The Chinaman takes opium just because he likes it, and knowing it will act at once as a pleasing sedative and a harmless stimulant. A man who is working hard all day in a tropical climate, whether at bodily or mental work, finds, towards the close of the day, his nervous system in an unsettled state, and looks for a stimulant, and the most harmless and most effectual one he can find is the opium pipe."<sup>21</sup>

Interestingly, it was argued that the aforementioned opium diarrhea was not a symptom of withdrawal, but rather a common pre-existing condition that opium helped to resolve. By removing themselves from opium, former users once again began to suffer from this diarrhea. Sir Lepel Griffin, an administrator in British India, used this same argument but with a more radical rhetoric. He writes that "It was an astonishingly sad thing to see, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, a Society possessed of such mischievous, homicidal characteristics as the Anti-Opium Society. If their convictions were to prevail, they would rank as destroyers of the human race with cholera and famine, because a very large part of the population of India was only preserved from death by the habitual use of opium."<sup>22</sup> Regardless of intensity, it seems that supporters of the opium trade have used a variety of rationales to completely defy and refute the findings and arguments of Christian missionaries.

### **THE OPIUM TRADE AS A BLOCKADE TO THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY**

The disputed physical, mental, and societal effects of opium consumption also directly tie to the missionaries' concerns of the deleterious effects of the opium trade on the spread of Christianity. Taken from historian Michael Adas in his book *Dominance by Design*, "...Christian preachers remained reviled outsiders [in China]. The number of converts was still miniscule at the end of the century – 100,000 in a population of approximately 500 million in 1900."<sup>23</sup> Although Christian missionaries did not blame all of their struggles on the opium trade, they certainly saw it as a destructive evil that inherently opposed and obstructed the spread of the Gospel. For example, missionaries were undoubtedly concerned that they were physically indistinguishable from British opium merchants, or that their efforts at conversion were being conflated with opium peddling: "[The Chinese] believed the extension of this pernicious habit [that is, opium addiction] was mainly due to the alacrity with which foreigners supplied the poison for their own profit, frequently regardless of the irreparable injury afflicted, and naturally they felt hostile to all concerned in the traffic."<sup>24</sup> Although missionaries would have been rarely, if ever, directly involved in the opium trade, they felt that the trade brewed general resentment against all westerners. Notes from Reverend John Griffith in his essay, "On Opium in China," corroborate this sentiment: "The [Chinese] people generally look upon the opium vice having been introduced by foreigners, without distinguishing between one nation and another, and they look upon its introduction as an immoral and hostile act..."<sup>25</sup>

Even when the distinction between proselytizer and opium merchant was made clear, missionaries were also aware of the hypocrisy associated with the export of opium, an abusive and potentially harmful substance, by a civilization that also preached the virtues of a pious life. A contradiction between the values of Christianity and the actions of its followers was apparent to both missionaries and the Chinese. A quote from one Dr. Medhurst working in China puts it best:



China, Opium smokers by Lai Afong, (1880)  
 Source: Lai Ah Fong (Wikimedia Commons)

“Almost the first word uttered by a Chinese when anything is said concerning the excellence of Christianity is, ‘Why do Christians bring us opium? The vile drug has destroyed my son... and well-might lead me to beggar my wife and children. Surely those who import such a deleterious substance... cannot be in possession of a better religion than I.’”<sup>26</sup>

Another quote from Reverend W. H. Collins illustrates the internal conflict that missionaries likely felt in confronting their home-nation’s involvement in the opium trade: “[I] unfortunately am obliged to admit that both my sovereign and my fellow countrymen are deeply implicated in the trade, and that in pursuit of gain they ignore the terrible evils which result from such unrighteous traffic.”<sup>27</sup> Thus in their work with the Chinese, many missionaries feared that the opium problem would serve as a poison pill to an otherwise glowing path of Christianity. These fears may have been heightened in the case of an encounter with missionaries of another faith; an essay by anti-opium writer J. Spencer Hill notes that “missionaries of other nations can, when pressed with the opium trade, say they are free from the stain, that their hands are clean...”<sup>28</sup>

Missionaries also directly impeded the conversion of Chinese natives if they were found to have consumed opium. Reverend W. H. Collins briefly mentions in one of his essays that opium smokers were forbidden from joining in Christian communion.<sup>29</sup> The rationale behind this rule was likely an uneasiness about immoral or undesirable characters, i.e., opium smokers, joining the congregation. An article published in London titled “Missionary Magazine” includes an anecdote about a young Chinese Christian convert whose baptism was postponed following allegations that he was an opium smoker.<sup>30</sup> These two examples show that, to missionaries, opium smoking not only drove away potential converts, but also was considered a serious enough doctrinal offense to interrupt or prevent successful conversion of willing Chinese natives.

The characteristic pro-opium response to these concerns was denial that the opium trade played any significant role in the failures of Christian proselytization and conversion. In the first of his lectures, Breton argued that many factors existed in influencing the Chinese opinion of western foreigners and Christianity.<sup>31</sup> Any hypocrisy or associations relating to the

opium trade played a relatively minor role in affecting the likelihood of Chinese conversion.

Brereton takes this argument further by dismissing any genuine Chinese interest in Christianity, effectively condemning the efforts of Protestant missionaries as futile. The following excerpt from his lecture encapsulates his opinion on the work of Christian missionaries:

Still, our Chinese friends are a very polite people, and no doubt they are and will continue to be outwardly very civil to missionaries, and, although they may consider them impudent intruders, will give courteous answers to their questions; but it does not follow that they will give true answers. A respectable Chinaman, such as a merchant, a shopkeeper, or an artisan, would consider himself disgraced among his own community if it were known that he had embraced Christianity, or even entertained the thought of doing so. I do not think that, long as I was in China, I had a single regular Chinese client who was a Christian.<sup>32</sup>

it inculcates, and, unable to account for their failure, ... they accept the stale and miserable subterfuge that the Indo-China opium trade is vicious and that before Christianity is accepted by the country, the trade in question must be abolished.<sup>33</sup>

#### **SHIFTING THE BLAME – WHO BEARS THE BURDEN OF THE OPIUM TRADE?**

In further examining this rift, it is of great interest to also pry into the stances of the British government on actual intervention in the opium trade. In addition to the topics already discussed thus far, defenders of the opium trade fundamentally disagreed with missionaries on the effectiveness of banning the opium trade between British India and China. This manifested in two ways: first, that the quantity of imported British Raj opium consumed by the Chinese was relatively small in comparison to the total population of the country, and second that a burgeoning native Chinese opium industry would continue to drive opium consumption even in the absence of importation.

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## **“Why do Christians bring us opium? The vile drug has destroyed my son”**

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Within this quote, Brereton describes a Chinese society driven so strongly by a collective dislike of the west that missionaries were essentially destined to fail. Moreover, his worldview also asserts that any “successful” converts are actually frauds assuming the costume of a Christian simply to appease missionaries. In a later excerpt, Brereton goes as far as to explicitly claim: “In very rare instances, Chinese professing Christianity will be found holding respectable positions, but, I regret to say, I do not believe that any of such people are sincere.”<sup>33</sup> Such a stance dismisses not only ordinary Chinese Christian converts, but even those Chinese who ascended to positions within the clergy. This specific point is unlikely to be representative of the entire pro-opium camp, but is nonetheless worth examining given Brereton’s prominence and the degree of attention his lectures would receive. Ultimately, what Brereton’s thesis implies, is a lack of faith in British missionaries and therefore the entire Protestant religious community. A final parting quote on this topic exemplifies the apparent rift between British religious interests and representatives of the opium trade:

I hold the missionaries altogether responsible for the hallucination that has taken possession of the public mind on the opium question. With the Bible they revere in their hands, they think the Chinese should eagerly embrace the doctrine

Opium defenders believed that missionaries often exaggerated both the effects of opium, as discussed above, and the prevalence of the drug within the population. An 1881 report by the inspector-general of imperial maritime customs in China, Sir Robert Hart, is frequently cited for the official quantification of Chinese opium consumption. According to Hart’s office, a total of 100,000 chests of imported opium entered China each year as of the year 1881. Following a few lines of calculations, the report concludes that such a quantity amounts to only approximately 3 opium smokers per 1000 people, or 0.3% of the population.<sup>34</sup> In citing this data, pro-opium writers attempted to minimize the role of the British Empire in supplying China with opium.

Furthermore, it was commonly argued that imported opium supplies were overshadowed by native opium production from within China. In the words of Sir John Strachey, a government official from British India, “There can be no greater delusion than to suppose that China depends on India for her supply of opium. If no opium were exported from India, the consumption of China would remain relatively unchanged.”<sup>35</sup> The earlier mentioned 1895 Royal Commission on Opium would ultimately corroborate this stance as well, publishing that “India only sends to China about one-fifth of what that country uses, and that the rest is not entirely home grown, but is imported from other countries, notably

from Persia.”<sup>36</sup> This argument essentially attempts to remove responsibility from the royal crown, placing it instead on the heads of other countries and of China herself.

The pro-opium faction would pursue this re-attribution of responsibility to an even greater extent by citing the failure of the Chinese government to enforce laws banning the production or consumption of native opium. The Royal Commission’s final advice for the British government would include the following statement: “So long as the importation of Indian opium is allowed by the Chinese government, and is not imposed upon it by intimidation or pressure of any kind, we are not of opinion that the objection [is] sufficiently strong to call for interference on the part of the British government.”<sup>37</sup> The absence of Chinese legal action, and the Chinese government’s continued profit from taxation of imported opium, was cited as evidence that British opium was a welcome product. Such an argument had little basis in historical reality: a major point of tension leading to the first Anglo-Chinese “Opium War” in 1840 had been in fact a Chinese ban on British opium and the imperial confiscation of over 2 million pounds of opium. The legalization of opium would come later with surrender to British hegemony.<sup>38</sup> Regardless, such was the rhetoric of supporters of the opium trade. Their arguments would ultimately manifest into the decided stance of the British royal government on the trade.

## CONCLUSIONS

The opium trade became an extremely contested topic during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Those who opposed it saw it as an evil and immoral stain upon Great Britain as an allegedly civilized and upstanding nation, as well as the entire religion of Christianity. Given the solidarity of the Christian religious community on this subject, those who supported the trade thus inevitably demonstrated doubt in or defiance of their own religion. The motives and intentions behind this behavior remains unclear for now. Indeed, while this essay focused on elucidating a rhetorical divide between missionaries and the British government, a further study of the potential economic motivations behind defenders of the opium trade is essential in completely understanding the context of their conflict with the religious community.

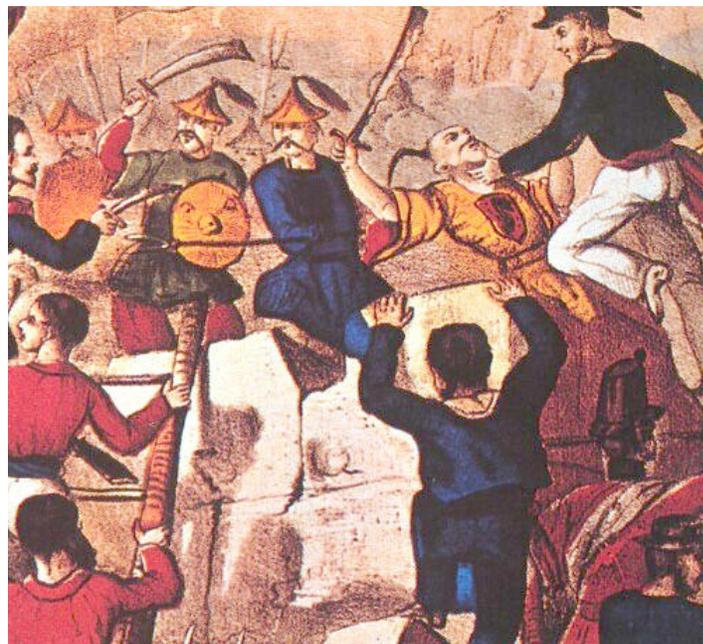
## Endnotes

[1] “Treaty of Tientsin,” *Historical Laws of Hong Kong Online*, accessed November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018 <http://oelawhk.lib.hku.hk/items/show/1025>. Article VIII.

[2] “Treaty of Tientsin.” Articles IX, XI.

[3] K. Flow, *The Chinese Encounter with Opium: Dreams of Colored Clouds and Orchid Fragrance* (Taipei: SMC Publishing, 2009), 14.

[4] K. Flow, *The Chinese Encounter with Opium: Dreams of Colored Clouds and Orchid Fragrance* (Taipei: SMC Publishing, 2009), 14.



Second Opium War (2005)

Source: *Library of Congress (Wikimedia Commons)*

After the release of the Royal Commission on Opium’s final report in 1895, the opium trade would continue for more than a decade into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>39</sup> In a grand study of the historical struggle between religious and economic priorities, this could be interpreted in one of two ways: (1) that economic, or at least non-religious, priorities were dominant over religious ones, allowing the continuation of the opium trade, or (2) that the efforts of Protestant clergymen and missionaries were ultimately successful in eventually putting an end to a profitable trade. In truth, numerous other players and factors in addition to anti-opium activists likely contributed to the prohibition of opium in China. Further inquiry beyond the scope of this paper is necessary to truly understand the consequences of the opium trade in China, but it remains undeniable that the opium trade serves as a compelling case study into the ever-changing, yet eternally intimate, relationship between religion and trade. 🏛️

[5] Taken from Kathleen L. Lodwick, *Crusaders against Opium: Protestant Missionaries in China, 1874-1917* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 30.

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[7] Frank Dikötter, *Narcotic Culture: A History of Drugs in China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 111.

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Presbyterian Mission Press, 1899), 5.

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[10] "Opium Smoking in China," *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*, vol. 1 (Rozario, Marcal & Co, 1869), 181.

[11] John Griffith, "On Opium in China" (Shanghai, American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1891), 20.

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[16] William H. Brereton, "The Truth about Opium, being a refutation of the fallacies of the anti-opium society and a defense of the Indo-China opium trade" (London, W.H. Allen & Co Publishers to the India Office, 1883), 7.

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[22] Taken from Kathleen L. Lodwick, *Crusaders against Opium: Protestant Missionaries in China, 1874-1917* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 79.

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# DOMESTIC DIPLOMACY

## British Failures, American Intrigues, and Interventionist Attitudes in the Lead-up to the Overthrow of Mohammed Mossadegh

*Abstract: In 1953, the Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh was overthrown by a coup d'état secretly coordinated by the United States and United Kingdom. For years prior to the coup, the Mossadegh government had been determined to oust the British-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, and nationalize the oil industry. With Britain and Iran at loggerheads, the United States was forced to decide between supporting a trusted ally and forging closer relations with a country losing barriers to communism from the East. The new Eisenhower Administration finally decided to take action with the British to convince the Iranian Shah to oppose Mossadegh, a successful operation. New FRUS documents shed light on American decision-making, as well as the complex motivations at the heart of the planning.*

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**H**is truck bouncing across the rocky Iranian desert, C.M. Woodhouse, a veteran British intelligence officer fresh off a stint as the leader of operations in German-occupied Greece, covertly traveled through the countryside to the tribal-controlled northern Iran. Winding through mountainous back roads to avoid government checkpoints, Woodhouse and his convoy hoped to keep their trucks away from prying Iranian eyes. The trucks were packed with rifles and Sten guns designated for prominent tribal leaders whom the British deemed crucial potential allies if Iran fell to domestic communists or the Soviet military. Flown in a Royal Air Force plane from a British outpost in Iraq, the light arms represented the British government's increasingly desperate fail-safe measures amid the tense diplomatic scene in the Iranian capital.<sup>1</sup> It was the summer of 1952, and with Prime Minister Mossadegh on the edge of breaking diplomatic relations with Britain, London anticipated the imminent collapse of Iran's central government. Colonel Woodhouse was in charge of the British operation, but as recently released documents reveal, he was not the sole Western intelligence officer operating in Iran. Washington also had contingencies for a communist takeover that included arming Iranian tribal leaders, and these plans, too, were well underway by July 1952.

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the British Secret-Intelligence Service (MI6) had been running parallel covert operations in Iran since the end of World War II in an effort to counter communist interference in the struggling nation.<sup>2</sup> These operations became more desperate after Mohammad Mossadegh, then a rising nationalist politician, led Iran's Parliament, the Majlis, to nationalize the oil industry and oust the British government-owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). Nationalization sparked a tense standoff between



Photograph of President Truman and Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh of Iran (1951)

*Source: National Archives (Wikimedia Commons)*

Tehran and London which threatened the stability of Iran's central government as British oil boycotts and sanctions decimated Iranian oil production. What started as a dispute over oil nationalization quickly became an international crisis, forcing the United States to decide between supporting a key European ally or propping up a government vulnerable to communist takeover. The impasse dominated US policy in the Middle East throughout the Truman Administration and early into Eisenhower's tenure before a joint UK-US operation in the late summer of 1953 overthrew Mossadegh and ushered the pro-western Shah into power. Although British and American documents on the coup have proven difficult to access, the circumstances surrounding the coup, its planning, and its implementation have since been the subject of intense academic study.

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However, in 2017, the State Department released an update to its *Foreign Relations of the United States* series on Iran, providing historians new access to a number of recently declassified State, CIA, and Department of Defense cables, letters, and internal memos from the time-period preceding Mossadegh's overthrow.<sup>3</sup> Though the publication offers little new insight into the actual operational planning and implementation of the coup, the *FRUS* documents offer important insights into the decision-making leading up to the coup. The new documents shed light on how Mossadegh's removal was conceived and justified by members of the U.S. foreign policy establishment and provide a more comprehensive view of the sentiments held by career officials in both the Truman and early Eisenhower Administrations.<sup>4</sup> The *FRUS* release challenges existing narratives of the coup and demonstrates that the Eisenhower Administration's decision to overthrow Mossadegh's government was the result of a number of converging factors that trace their origins to the developing perceptions and policy decisions of career foreign policy officials of the late Truman Administration. This paper seeks to add to the historical narrative surrounding the 1953 coup d'état and to re-examine the Truman Administration's policy in Iran, with particular focus on the policy and attitudes taking shape within foreign policy agencies.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than a sudden ideological change in the Oval Office or a shift in geopolitical atmosphere, I argue that a convergence of other factors, both external and internal, drove increasing support for Mossadegh's among career foreign policy officials. As the Shah's prestige degraded, and Mossadegh's National Front coalition fractured amid several political struggles in the latter half of 1952 and early 1953, American officials saw what they considered Iran's primary bulwarks against communism slip away. Both of these changes occurred as British failures in Iran constrained joint US-UK action, frustrating officials and driving them to increasingly advocate for greater American influence in Iran. As negotiations stalled and seemed unlikely to achieve success while Mossadegh was in power, the US sought to "prop up a government so it could negotiate an oil settlement, not negotiate an oil settlement to prop up a government," according to one assessment in 1953.<sup>6</sup> Essentially, this paper demonstrates that American policy in Iran was more nuanced than previously thought, with policies that were often driven by interventionist attitudes growing within the American foreign policy establishment. These attitudes reached a fever pitch upon the convergence of these factors, resulting in the sustained push for Mossadegh's ouster that would last with career officials into the Eisenhower Administration.

### HISTORICAL SKETCHES OF THE COUP

The forces shaping the 1953 coup d'état against Mossadegh have been covered extensively. Historians such as Stephen Kinzer, Malcom Byrne, and Bill James argue that the change

in Administration between Truman and Eisenhower was an important factor in the implementation of the 1953 coup d'état.<sup>7</sup> Their analyses of the coup rest on assertions that the United States under the Truman Administration was averse to using covert action in Iran as it pressed for a diplomatic solution to the Anglo-Iranian oil dispute, supporting Mossadegh, until, as Mark Gasiorowski argues, "early 1953, when the more hawkish, interventionist Eisenhower Administration turned against him."<sup>8</sup> Eisenhower, these historians argue, was more sensitive to communism and wished to take decisive action against Soviet influence in Iran. These theories also rest on the assumption that it was British lobbying which pushed Eisenhower's Administration to overthrow Mossadegh; British agents may have found a receptive audience in the CIA, according to these traditional narratives, but it was British proposals which ultimately brought them around to the idea of a coup.<sup>9</sup>

Other historians have accepted these narratives while asserting differing views on US motivations. Ervand Abrahamian demonstrates that more continuity existed between Truman and Eisenhower Administration policy in Iran than previous historians have observed.<sup>10</sup> Abrahamian views the continuity in policy between Truman and Eisenhower as an extension of American sympathy for British oil interests and a desire to grant American companies access to the AIOC's oil concession in Iran. His argument rests on the previous narratives' assumptions that British lobbying influenced American policy, but he asserts that it was Eisenhower's harsher stance toward nationalization that ultimately pushed the coup forward. Francis Gavin and Mark Gasiorowski, too, argue that Truman and Eisenhower policies in Iran were not drastically different, but they advocate different theories for why Eisenhower's administration sanctioned the coup when Truman's did not. Gavin contends that a changing geo-political scene and a restructuring of the military power-balance between the US and the Soviet Union bolstered Eisenhower's confidence and allowed him to take riskier actions against communism than his more constrained predecessor. Mark Gasiorowski, however, concludes that Truman's confidence in diplomacy and fear of establishing a negative precedent for intervention distinguished his foreign policy from his successor's more hawkish interventions.<sup>11</sup>

While all of these considerations are important factors that contributed to the 1953 coup, in light of the new *FRUS* release, they alone do not provide a comprehensive analysis of US policy in Iran. The new documents confirm that the policies being advocated within the State Department and Central Intelligence Agency changed little between Presidencies, but they also reveal a far more nuanced American position in Iran that began with negotiations and domestic interventions early in the Truman Administration and ended with stalled diplomacy and the downfall of Mossadegh in 1953.

## THE ROOTS OF THE COUP

Though the Truman Administration initially pressured the British government to negotiate, the prevailing sentiment in the British Foreign Office held that negotiations with Mossadegh were useless.<sup>12</sup> A European-educated politician and wealthy landowner, Mossadegh's position as a nationalist firebrand—and his very political survival, as John Foster Dulles would remark in a 1953 NSC meeting—rested on his “bucking of the British yoke.”<sup>13</sup> By early 1951, Mossadegh and his National Front had become a lightning rod for Iranian nationalist sentiment. For his supporters, the successful nationalization of the oil industry defined Iranian sovereignty and rejected foreign imperialism.

If Britain had a clear symbol of imperial power in the Middle East, it was the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC).

however, coming to a head between the years 1947 and 1951, when Mossadegh and a loose coalition of nationalist parties, known as the National Front, capitalized on the public disapproval of Britain and the AIOC, to achieve a majority in the Majlis. In 1951, a tense political situation developed as the National Front forced renegotiations with the AIOC. The Prime Minister leading the negotiations, Ali Razmara, was assassinated on March 7, 1951 by nationalist radicals after a proposed settlement was met with heavy public disapproval. His death, and the resulting political instability, left a power vacuum in Tehran and encouraged nationalist politicians to pressure the Shah's government to draft a heavily pro-Iranian settlement. After the AIOC rejected the Majlis's proposal to split profits 50/50 under the model of the newly created Arab-American Oil Company (ARAMCO) in Saudi Arabia, the Majlis nationalized the Iranian oil industry in March 1951.

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**“...with World War I looming on the horizon, Iranian oil had become so strategically important to the British Navy that Parliament purchased majority stock in the company...”**

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Founded in 1901 by wealthy Londoner, Knox D'Arcy, who purchased the rights to extract oil in southern Iran from the Qajar monarchy for 20,000 pounds and royalties, the AIOC came to dominate the oil industry in Iran throughout the first half of the Twentieth Century. The company struck oil in 1908, when company prospector George Reynolds's expedition drilled in the rocky desert of south-western Masjid-i-Suleiman.<sup>14</sup> After Reynolds's discovery, the company's position in Iran, and its profits from Iranian oil, ballooned. By 1912, the company, then known as the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC), had established itself with a group of investors in London, and its newly constructed refinery on Abadan island in the Persian Gulf was the largest in the world.<sup>15</sup>

In 1914, with World War I looming on the horizon, Iranian oil had become so strategically important to the British Navy that Parliament purchased majority stock in the company to maintain supplies for the burgeoning war effort. Once the British government took majority control over APOC, the company maintained complete autonomy over export prices and kept its records secret. After World War I, the APOC's profits swelled even as its royalty payments to the Iranian government stagnated under its decades-old contract. In 1932, 8 years after political upstart Reza Pahlavi took power from the Qajars, the new Shah cancelled the D'Arcy concession and forced new negotiations, coming out with a nominal increase in the state's share of royalties and new concessions from the APOC—including a name change to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). Grievances continued,

A little more than a month later, on April 29, 1951, the Majlis nominated—and forced the Shah to install—Mossadegh as the Prime Minister to implement the bill.<sup>16</sup>

The initial American response to nationalization emphasized solidarity with Britain. The Truman Administration understood the importance of Iranian oil to Britain's economy. The crown-jewel of the mid-century British Empire, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company represented “the single overseas enterprise in British commerce” and provided the British government with much needed revenue and dollar exchange during its post-war rebuilding efforts.<sup>17</sup> Iranian oil was also critical for the British armed forces; according to a January 1951 national intelligence estimate (NIE) prepared for the U.S. National Security Council (NSC), the Abadan refinery produced 27 million tons of refined oil per year—31 percent of total Middle East production—supplying the Royal Navy with 90 percent of its oil at a fraction of the market value.<sup>18</sup> The same NIE estimated that British oil shortages from the loss of Iranian oil could be stabilized by increased production elsewhere within a matter of months, but warned that the effect of the AIOC's loss on the British economy “would be overcome slowly, if at all.”<sup>19</sup> To avoid the collapse of the fragile post-war British and western European economy, the Truman Administration desperately wanted to see the flow of oil continue.

However, officials in Washington were also well aware of the importance a stable Iran held for American national security. The United States viewed Iran as a critical buffer between

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the Soviet Union and other US oil resources in the Persian Gulf and feared that a protracted Anglo-Iranian oil dispute would make the nation vulnerable to Soviet influence. Days after Prime Minister Razmara's assassination by nationalist sympathizers, when the situation in Iran looked anything but stable, and nationalist tensions accelerated the dispute with Britain, the National Security Council (NSC) warned that the economic and political instability in Iran could prompt a direct Soviet intervention or a communist takeover of the central government.<sup>20</sup> The loss of Iran, the NSC concluded, also threatened the "entire security of the Middle East area."<sup>21</sup> After Mossadegh nationalized the industry and ascended to the Premiership in the spring of 1951, it became U.S. policy to offer limited aid to Iran, while pressuring both governments to negotiate a speedy settlement.

### **AN AMERICAN PROFILE OF MOSSADEGH: OBSTACLE TO A DEAL**

There was little love for Mossadegh among the American foreign policy establishment. Seventy-years old when he ascended to the premiership, Mossadegh would often hold sensitive negotiations with American Ambassadors from his bed, still wearing his pajamas from the night before.<sup>22</sup> During a visit to Washington in March 1952, Mossadegh remained hospitalized bed-side for much of his two-week trip, forcing prominent diplomats to usher messages between Walter Reed Hospital and Truman's White House, angering presidential advisors and State Department officials alike.<sup>23</sup> In Iran, Mossadegh fluctuated between displays of frailty and political strength. An extensive report on Mossadegh cabled to Washington in mid-February 1952 from John Stutesman, the Second Secretary of the Embassy, recounts tales of Mossadegh's passionate speeches and his habit of fainting during moments of excitement in the Majlis.<sup>24</sup>

Although historians have questioned the level to which Mossadegh's passionate public behavior and disregard for diplomatic norms reflected his true mental condition or were merely part of his political gamesmanship, they had a definite effect on American officials' views of the aging Prime Minister.<sup>25</sup> Stutesman's report concluded there was "little doubt" that Mossadegh was a sick man whose "frequent petty passions" reflected his physical infirmities.<sup>26</sup> A February 20, 1953 cable to Washington from the Embassy similarly reported that "sources indicate a decline in Mossadegh's [sic] mental stability," warning that "some of [his] closest associates admit Prime Minister [sic] increasingly irrational."<sup>27</sup> This perceived irrationality roused anxiety from a Washington establishment increasingly concerned for Iran's stability. A third secretary in the Tehran Embassy during the early 1950s remembered how Mossadegh's attitude and "crazy qualities" endangered Iranian security and urged the CIA to engage in operations to contain the "unbalanced" Premier.<sup>28</sup> As State Department staffers' assessments of Mossadegh reveal, U.S. officials' views of Mossadegh became an important drive of

the later gradual shift in sentiment toward unilateral action in Iran. This sentiment became especially salient in early 1953 as American intelligence officials determined that the Iranian government's fragile position rested solely on the Prime Minister's unpredictable "personality."<sup>29</sup>

In addition to US perceptions of Mossadegh's irrationality and danger to US interests, there was also little belief that Mossadegh could compromise with the British on any component of nationalization. Leaning up from his bed during a conversation with American Ambassador Grady in the summer of 1951, Mossadegh sharply uttered that "we [Iranians] care more about independence than economics."<sup>30</sup> That the Prime Minister preferred independence to oil revenue was no secret in Washington even before this bedside comment, as policy-makers had long interpreted Mossadegh to be dismissive of any efforts to achieve an oil settlement. Stutesman's 1952 report lamented that Mossadegh perceived US military aid and American efforts to financially support the central government "as evidence of some international desperation to prop him up" and not as U.S. officials intended it: a stop-gap measure to keep Iran afloat as it negotiated with the British.<sup>31</sup> Stutesman's record of Mossadegh's comments, and earlier CIA assessments of his 'structural inability' to come to a deal, illustrate that both policy-makers, and American officials on the ground implementing policy, had little faith that a deal between Mossadegh and the British government could be made.

For their part, the British, too, had little confidence that a settlement could be reached. They sought aggressive policies in Iran to undermine Mossadegh's position, hoping that he would step down and allow a "more reasonable" government to step in.<sup>32</sup> In July, after Britain maneuvered warships into the Persian Gulf—arousing U.S. fears of British military action in Iran and prompting the NSC to recommend the United States "bring its influence to bear" to encourage a settlement of the dispute—Truman dispatched veteran diplomat W. Averall Harriman to Iran to try and solve the diplomatic impasse. The Harriman mission, however, failed to bring either party closer to a settlement. During the accompanying negotiations, it became increasingly clear to U.S. officials that Mossadegh's sole goal was to secure Iranian control of oil production, something that Britain and the AIOC felt unwilling to cede.<sup>33</sup> Realizing that diplomacy had stalled, Harriman attempted to impact the situation through interference in domestic politics. The senior diplomat privately prompted the Shah to replace Mossadegh, even as the Shah warned that Mossadegh's political position had grown too strong for unilateral royal intervention.<sup>34</sup>

As Harriman publically negotiated with Mossadegh—and privately lobbied against him—the British were simultaneously attempting to undermine Mossadegh's political position. In June 1951, the Foreign Office sent C.M. Woodhouse and Robin Zaehner, a leading diplomatic



1953 Iranian coup d'état - pulling down statues of the Reza Shah (1953)  
Source: *Pahlavi Dynasty*, *The Guardian* (Wikimedia Commons)

authority on Iran, to the British Embassy in Tehran. Throughout the latter half of 1951, Woodhouse and Zaehner groomed potential contacts and cultivated a massive covert operation to weaken the Prime Minister and his National Front.<sup>35</sup> Utilizing an extensive intelligence network that included Majlis deputies and high-ranking politicians, senior army and police officers, bazaar-class merchants, clerics and religious leaders, prominent heads of newspapers, and southern tribal leaders opposed to the central government, Woodhouse and MI6 spread anti-Mossadegh propaganda and vetted potential successors to Mossadegh under the close direction of Zaehner and the Foreign Office.<sup>36</sup>

London's immense intelligence operation in Iran sought to replace Mossadegh with a Prime Minister that would be more susceptible to British pressure and friendlier to a potential settlement. Woodhouse and Zaehner found a Prime Minister they could support in Seyid Zia, a conservative

political leader and known British-ally. However, by the summer of 1951, the US had entrenched itself in the Iranian Oil Crisis, so the British needed American consent before they could unilaterally act against Mossadegh. An inter-embassy memo to Ambassador Henderson in August 1951 reports that George Middleton, the Counsellor of the British Embassy and the chief British diplomat in Iran, sought to get US backing for Zia and their plan to overthrow Mossadegh, stressing the need for the two countries to "agree in advance of a parallel if not identical course of action before a change of the Mosadeq [sic] Government becomes imminent."<sup>37</sup> Middleton asserted that the Shah needed to be reminded of the "necessity for acceptance of the strongest possible Prime Minister" and that he would require moral support or assurance of his choice from the US or UK governments.<sup>38</sup> The American Embassy dismissed the British suggestions, but London continued its efforts to undermine Mossadegh throughout 1951.

### **BRITISH FOREIGN POLICY FAILURES AND INTRIGUES**

London's efforts to undermine Mossadegh frustrated officials in Washington, with the prevailing sentiment among top U.S. officials asserting that British policy in Iran needlessly hindered American and British interests in the region and endangered the central government. In early September, a State Policy Planning official criticized British attempts to overthrow Mossadegh, asserting that such actions made it "no longer possible to reach an agreement which would permit the British to retain any semblance of the authority previously exercised."<sup>39</sup> In 1951, Woodhouse and Zaehner were expanding their covert network and seeking new avenues to undermine Mossadegh. By the fall, British intelligence was actively working with the Rashidian brothers, a powerful and wealthy family that was fervently anti-Mossadegh and anti-American.<sup>40</sup> However, by October 12, after a number of political intrigues in Tehran bore the Foreign Office's fingerprints, the CIA Station in Tehran warned Washington that "the British position in Iran [had] collapsed."<sup>41</sup>

Though their position had not collapsed as fully as the Station suggested, a series of British miscalculations severely wounded their interests in Iran while strengthening Mossadegh's grip on power. In late

In the aftermath of the AIOC's expulsion from Iran, the developing tension forced the United States to re-examine its policy in Iran. The Truman Administration decided to push for a new round of negotiations between the two countries during the spring and summer of 1951. The United States would continue its aide to Iran while it worked with Britain on joint US-UK proposals to offer Mossadegh, or another government in the event he stepped down or the Majlis replaced him. Although these talks did little to move British or Iranian sentiment to a consensus, by early 1952, Britain agreed to US proposals for interim aide to any new government, provided it intended to come to a 'reasonable agreement' on an oil settlement. By this time, the World Bank had also intervened in an effort to negotiate an oil settlement. After it failed, the State Department began to seriously consider whether an agreement could be reached while Mossadegh remained Premier.<sup>45</sup> It was at this time that Ambassador Henderson began to privately, and quietly, press the Shah to remove Mossadegh from power, an act which led to a significant political crisis in the summer of 1952.

### **HENDERSON'S DOMESTIC DIPLOMACY AND THE JULY POLITICAL CRISIS**

The documents reveal that Ambassador Henderson played a larger role in Iran's internal politics than previous histories have accounted for. He vetted candidates to replace

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**"...the political crisis of 1952 illustrated to the State Department and the CIA that any overthrow of Mossadegh would rest on the Shah..."**

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September, as Harriman's negotiations stalled, Mossadegh offered the British a modified proposal which, "while still far from satisfactory," according to a paper prepared by the State Department's Iran Desk in early October, "the Department felt provided hope that a basis could be found to renew talks."<sup>42</sup> Sensing an opportunity to weaken Mossadegh and encourage the Shah to remove him, the Foreign Office flatly rejected the offer, refused to send a counter, and declared that negotiations had ceased.<sup>43</sup> The British government dispatched more warships to the Persian Gulf, withdrew AIOC personnel from Iranian oil-fields, and announced it would seek legal actions against purchasers of Iranian oil, which it viewed as stolen British property. In response to the British, Mossadegh deployed troops to secure the Abadan refinery and expel AIOC personnel from its grounds. British troops in the Persian Gulf were poised to re-seize Abadan, but opposition from Washington caused London to abandon its military strike. Instead, Britain withdrew its personnel and appealed to the UN Security Council for a resolution against Mossadegh's action.<sup>44</sup>

Mossadegh shortly after the Prime Minister was appointed, and amid the crisis enveloping the monarchy in February 1953, he intervened to convince the Shah to remain in Iran, saving the monarchy from imminent collapse.<sup>46</sup> Throughout late 1952 and early 1953, Henderson worked with the CIA to exploit cracks in Mossadegh's ruling coalition between the Prime Minister and Ayatollah Kashani, one of Iran's most prominent clerics and a leftist supporter of Mossadegh. Kashani signaled he was ready to break with Mossadegh in late September 1952, according to CIA intelligence estimates, but Henderson's meetings with the cleric drove a further wedge between the former allies.<sup>47</sup> Kashani would later tacitly support the August 1953 coup and receive an unspecified amount of funding from the CIA.<sup>48</sup>

However, one of Henderson's most significant ventures into domestic Iranian politics occurred in July 1952, when—though he claimed that the "US govt. pursues [sic] policy of non-interference in Iran internal affairs" to Iranian stakeholders—he was a primary engineer of the political chaos that accompanied Mossadegh's resignation

and his replacement with Ahmed Qavam.<sup>49</sup> After being approached by representatives of Qavam in early March 1952, Henderson renewed his efforts to convince the Shah to replace Mossadegh with a Prime Minister more amenable to negotiations. In early May, Hossen 'Ala, a former Prime Minister and an opponent of Mossadegh, contacted Henderson and lobbied for promises of American support to a potential successor to Mossadegh.<sup>50</sup> This contact spurred a number of meetings between 'Ala and the Ambassador throughout the early summer of 1952.<sup>51</sup> Henderson offered his advice on Mossadegh's successor, privately advocating for Qavam. In mid-June, Henderson met with Qavam at the house of a mutual friend, and though Qavam himself "didn't ask [Henderson] to support him," according to a State Department memo recounting the meeting, the former Premier made it clear that a government under him would remain open to negotiations with Britain.<sup>52</sup>

After this meeting, Henderson, 'Ala, and George Middleton, the British Ambassador to Iran, lobbied the Shah on behalf of Qavam. There was extensive communication between Qavam, 'Ala, Middleton, and Henderson throughout June and July, as the Iranians attempted to gain assurances of American support in the event Mossadegh was replaced. However, while talks with Qavam were still underway, Mossadegh unexpectedly resigned on July 17, after the Shah refused to accept the Prime Minister's simultaneous appointment as Minister of War, an office which was historically the source of the Shah's influence in Cabinet.<sup>53</sup> The reluctant Shah appointed Qavam as Premier, and the new Iranian government was promised immediate aid from the United States. Mossadegh's replacement infuriated members of the National Front, and beginning on July 18, the coalition staged massive demonstrations in Tehran.<sup>54</sup> In the ensuing chaos, the Shah refused British and American lobbying to grant Qavam 'extraordinary powers' to quell the protests, prompting Qavam to resign as his political situation deteriorated.<sup>55</sup> The Shah did not accept his resignation, but Qavam remained sequestered in his home for the remainder of the crisis, and did nothing to secure his government. After heavy rioting broke out and enveloped Tehran on July 20, Washington feared the imminent collapse of the central government, and the CIA proposed placing its stay-behind plans on stand-by. However, after the Shah finally accepted Qavam's resignation on July 21, Mossadegh re-assumed control and quickly restored order.<sup>56</sup>

The July 1952 Crisis placed the indecisiveness of the Shah and the strength of Mossadegh firmly in Washington's consciousness. In a cable to the Embassy in London, senior State Department staff confirmed Washington's "worst fears as to the weakness of the Shah" and warned that it was "highly unlikely any other constructive [political] elements [would] attempt to exercise power in Iran after what happened to Qavam."<sup>57</sup> After Mossadegh supporters' show of strength on July 20, Washington doubted that any

opposition force could rival Mossadegh's grip on power, prompting one State Department official to remark that any removal of Mossadegh would likely usher in a leftist government, and not a "more constructive group," as had been previously hoped.<sup>58</sup> Officials also doubted whether the Shah could effectively exercise any political influence in Tehran after his public spat with the popular Prime Minister. Secretary of State Acheson informed the President of the "general disintegration of authority in Iran" shortly after Mossadegh's reinstatement, while a July 22 position paper from the State Department concluded that after the "Shah [had] been discredited" by the riots, Mossadegh stood in a "stronger position than at any time since the nationalization of Iran's oil in April 1951."<sup>59</sup>

The Shah's appointment of Qavam, according to the Embassy and CIA Station in Tehran, severely damaged his prestige and curtailed his influence in a political scene firmly under Mossadegh's control.<sup>60</sup> The Shah's standing in Iran had been so damaged, in fact, it prompted a number of officials to fear the dissolution of the monarchy altogether, even as policy-makers viewed the Shah as one of the only constant bulwarks against a communist takeover. In a July 30 meeting, Director Smith commented that though Mossadegh and the National Front were effectively the "only anti-communist forces left in Iran," the toppling of the Shah would leave Iran open to domination by a future communist government without the monarch's ability to contain or stop it.<sup>61</sup> The uncertainty surrounding the Shah's position prompted CIA officials to simultaneously float the idea of changing the ruling dynasty, "by letting the stronger tribal leaders have a whack at the royal power," and an ambitious propaganda and intelligence program aimed at reinforcing the Shah's prestige and repairing his tattered image.<sup>62</sup>

Still, the political crisis of 1952 illustrated to the State Department and CIA that any overthrow of Mossadegh would rest on the Shah—who represented the "only present source of continuity of leadership" since the assassination of Razmara, according to one intelligence draft.<sup>63</sup> However, after the Shah's inaction almost led to the collapse of the central government in July, Washington doubted the rationality of any policy that rested on him, even as officials continued to push for decisive US action in Iran. Voices within State and the CIA expressing frustration with the state of Iran after Qavam's short stint in power grew increasingly loud in the latter half of 1952. To many policy-makers, the situation in Iran was largely unchanged from where it had been at the time of Mossadegh's ascent. For a growing number of others, the situation had actively deteriorated now that Mossadegh's coalition proved an active threat to the Shah and the survival of the Iranian monarchy. Without the steadiness of the monarchy, analysts warned, Iran would be ripe for a communist movement and the establishment of a Soviet-aligned republic.

In an October 1952 Special Estimate, a CIA agent reported that the Shah had “almost completely lost his capability for action,” while earlier that month, another staffer described the Iranian monarch as “virtually a prisoner who was discouraged from contacts with foreign chiefs of mission.”<sup>64</sup> As these reports show, much of Washington’s post-July anxiety stemmed from the decline in the Shah’s prestige; but the Shah’s strength was criticized even before the July crisis spotlighted his failings and indecisiveness. A memo to Henderson in August 1951 commented on the “almost tragic need of the Shah for moral support from the US and UK governments,” and an October cable from the Station in Iran warned that the “Shah dares not talk back or step out of line.”<sup>65</sup> In a 1988 interview, a US Embassy staffer remembered naming the Shah a “weak reed” who was unable

revelations of Henderson’s interventions in Iranian politics confirm, this proposed policy examination was only one instance in a range of ventures in collaboration with the CIA. The Embassy worked to vet candidates for parliament to aide CIA operation during the 1952 parliamentary elections, and it identified journalists, politicians, and clerics for potential work with the CIA.<sup>69</sup> The State Department’s consideration of alternatives to Mossadegh days after the July crisis, and the Embassy’s long history of interventionism demonstrates Washington officials’ sustained push for US action in Iran.

This push also came from within the CIA, particularly from future CIA Director, Allen Dulles, referred to by contemporaries in the Tehran Embassy as a ‘big factor in the game being played,’ and Kermit Roosevelt, the head of

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### **“Amid these growing frustrations with British policy, a new attitude toward America’s role in Iran was taking shape in Washington.”**

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to shield Iran from communism. That same staffer claimed that “if Mossadegh had insisted on it, a republic could have happened any day.”<sup>66</sup> It seems likely, amid the declining influence of the monarchy and American assumptions about its importance, that increasingly negative perspectives on the Shah’s abilities and powers provoked the urgency that CIA and State Department officials felt for taking action in Iran. However, the Shah’s declining prestige and the lessons American officials took away from the July crisis tempered American actions, even as different individuals advocated stronger US policy.

#### **A PUSH FOR POLICY ACTION**

After severe rioting that nearly toppled the central government in July provoked a sense of urgency in several officials’ stances on Iran, a growing number of policy papers, memos, and cables offered sustained advocacy for Mossadegh’s removal—especially among top agents within the CIA. Only days after Mossadegh’s reinstatement, the State Department requested a “reappraisal of the situation” from the Embassy and CIA Station in Tehran, “to include (A) recommendations as to possible joint courses action by US–UK; (B) possible alternatives to Mosadeq (C) methods bring such alternative to power; (D) form encouragement and support which would be necessary.” A memo from Assistant Secretary of State Byroade to Secretary of State Acheson confirmed that State was “considering, in some cases in conjunction with CIA, every possible alternative to save Iran.”<sup>67</sup> The State Department advocated strengthening position of the US with Iranian tribes, “which could be a major factor of any coup d’état type of action.”<sup>68</sup> As the new

Middle Eastern operations. Dulles developed a hardline stance toward Mossadegh from the very beginning of the crisis, arguing for the removal of the Prime Minister in a series of conversations with top Agency officials in May 1951.<sup>70</sup> Dulles advocated for greater CIA intervention in Iran even before Mossadegh ascended to Prime Minister, stating in an early 1951 meeting that “Iran may be lost to the West in the coming 12 months” unless the Agency expanded the scale of its operations in the country.<sup>71</sup>

Although the CIA’s network and involvement in the country grew continuously throughout Mossadegh’s time as Prime Minister, Dulles continued to push for the Agency. In a meeting with then Director Smith, Allen Dulles expressed a desire to increase CIA capabilities in Iran, and during a conversation with policy planners, Roosevelt proposed using these new capabilities in the event of chaos or civil war, advocating that the agency stockpile weapons and ammunitions in neighboring countries to be used in such a contingency.<sup>72</sup> The CIA’s growing capabilities in Iran were ongoing operations from the ‘TPBEDAMN’ operations approved by NSC directive 107 during the early days of the oil dispute.<sup>73</sup> These operations sought to undermine the communist Tudeh party through black propaganda and to prepare for the contingencies that Roosevelt mentioned. Gasiorowski documented the TPBEDAMN program based on interviews with past agents, but the State Documents fill in crucial gaps in his narrative, and demonstrate a gradual drift toward sustained advocacy for the removal of Mossadegh. In the beginning, the CIA solely focused on the Tudeh party—TPBEDAMN, after all, stood for “Tudeh Party Be Damned,”



1953 Iranian coup d'état - Pro-shah sympathisers (1953)  
Source: *Pahlavi Dynasty*, *The Guardian* (Wikimedia Commons)

according to Gasiorowski—but after prominent staffers in the agency advocated an expanded intelligence role in Iran, TPEDAMN grew to encompass a number of parallel operations. By May 1953, the CIA operations were routinely attacking Tudeh supporters while inciting unrest among clerics and engaging in ‘psychological warfare’ against other perceived opponents of American interests in Iran.

Officials also increasingly emphasized the communist threat on Iran. An NIE drafted in November 1952 predicted that the National Front would hold onto power for the duration of 1953, and that the central government was unlikely to lose control to the Tudeh party “by constitutional means or by force” for the next year.<sup>74</sup> These views, however, were not a consensus within Washington or the Embassy in Tehran. A cable to the State Department from the Charge d’Affaires in Iran doubted the estimate’s conclusions, deeming it “unrealistic” as it failed to demonstrate how the National Front would stay in power amid an unstable political scene.<sup>75</sup> In a meeting with senior NSC officials in December, Ambassador Henderson voiced concern for the paper’s “dark side,” warning that the American position “could disintegrate very fast” if Iranians resorted to “rash things” when they felt US aide was not forthcoming.<sup>76</sup> The

CIA, too, expressed doubt in the NIE, with Roosevelt and other agents pushing for a word change. In a CIA draft paper proposing an update of NSC 136, staffers concluded that the “trends in Iran [were] unfavorable to the maintenance of control by a non-communist regime for an extended period of time” as Mossadegh’s coalition unwittingly “eliminated every alternative to their own rule except the Communist Tudeh Party.”<sup>77</sup> This rephrasing was reflected in the updated release of NSC 136/7 in January, and is only one example of many wording changes that demonstrate the increasing push among officials to highlight the communist threat. Previous scholars have identified the growing threat of communism as a primary factor in the coup, but until the *FRUS* release, there was little evidence of this mid-Administration shift in American rhetoric.

#### **BREAK WITH BRITAIN**

It was amid this ideological current that a growing disillusion with British policy in Iran came to dominant attitudes in the State Department and CIA. American action began to reach a fever-pitch as officials became increasingly frustrated with British constraints on American policy. Although one State Department official had concluded that the time had “arrived for a show-down with the U.K.” in September 1951,

## *Domestic Diplomacy*

as Britain's efforts against Mossadegh heated up while the US still advocated diplomacy, it wasn't until mid-summer 1952 that this sentiment began to be reflected in policy proposals.<sup>78</sup> After the failure of Qavam's coup signaled the collapse of British influence on Iranian politics, frustrations with British policies increased in Washington while officials began to advocate a foreign policy in Iran that excised American actions from British influence. These frustrations increased drastically when Mossadegh ended diplomatic relations with Britain after a number of British political intrigues orchestrated by Woodhouse and Middleton.

An October State Department memo on a British intelligence estimate of Iran sent from London questioned the need for "absolute Anglo-United States solidarity," asserting that in the case of a break-down of the British position in Iran, "it would be in the interest of the free world for the United States to remain capable of independent action vis-à-vis Iran."<sup>79</sup> The same memo also questioned the "paradox of the British position in Iran," which acknowledged the need for monetary assistance to the Iranian state, but refused to allow its implementation until the oil dispute had been resolved.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, in a CIA draft paper proposing a language-oriented revision of NSC 136 in mid-November 1952, the Agency asserted that "the United Kingdom no longer possesses the capability unilaterally to assure stability in the area" and warned that "if present trends" continued unchecked, "Iran could be effectively lost to the free world before an actual communist takeover."<sup>81</sup>

Amid these growing frustrations with British policy, a new attitude toward America's role in Iran was taking shape in Washington. Throughout 1951 and early 1952, the CIA, State Department, and Department of Defense endorsed policies that supported Iranian security, but the agencies maintained that primary responsibility for that security fell on the United Kingdom. However, following Qavam's fall and what many staffers viewed as the imminent end of UK-Iranian diplomatic relations, American officials increasingly expressed a belief that British failure left the United States responsible for Iran's security and stability. According to the Third Secretary of the Tehran Embassy in 1953, "The British were kicked out, and we [filled] that gap."<sup>82</sup> A policy draft paper prepared in the Department of Defense and circulated by the NSC Executive Secretary on October 7, 1952 revised NSC directive 107/2<sup>83</sup> to emphasize the failures of the British and advocate unilateral US action, regardless of its effect on Anglo-American relations:

In the light of...the present dangerous situation in Iran, the failure of British policy and lack of British capabilities in Iran, increasing United States influence in the Middle East and increasing United States strength, the United States should take action to prevent Iran from falling to communism, even if this involves acting independently of the United

Kingdom and the risk of damaging our close relations with the United Kingdom. The United States should be prepared, if necessary, to accept primary responsibility for Iran, and for taking the initiative in the military support of Iran in the event of communist aggression or attempted subversion.<sup>84</sup>

Prior to this directive stressing the need to take primary responsibility for Iran, the NSC declared in the early stages of the Crisis that "responsibility for military operations in Iran were the United Kingdom's."<sup>85</sup> This draft proposal illustrates the increasing break between the British and US sides. Although the final coup in August was a collaborative effort between the two nations, the new documents from the State Department show that American officials were moving away from the British policy on Iran, and not toward it as the traditional narratives have largely assumed.

In March 1953, the NSC seriously considered unilateral action in Iran, considering how rumors of unilateral British intrigue were swirling, especially among tribes in the south with whom Britain had remained close. The President, too, was seriously considering unilateral action when a series of new economic troubles plagued the country after the February 1953 political crisis. "If I had \$500,000,000 of money to spend in secret" Eisenhower famously remarked in a March 4, 1953 NSC meeting, "I would get \$100,000,000 of it to Iran right now."<sup>86</sup> After the Secretary of the Treasury told President Eisenhower that funds were available to send to Iran, the President ordered Secretary of State Dulles to sit down with British Secretary of the Foreign Office Eden to "find out immediately how the British feel—whether they are ready to concede to us on this situation, or whether they are going to be stiff-necked" about American aid to Iran.<sup>87</sup> The United States still sought approval from London for any extension of aid, but as the memorandum from the meeting notes, "the question of unilateral action in Iran was clearly posed" and a break with UK policy lay on the horizon.<sup>88</sup>

### **THE THORNBURG PROPOSAL**

It was in November 1952, prior to Eisenhower taking office, that the CIA first began to consider a tangible, concerted action against Mossadegh's government. Traditional histories of the coup have placed the impetus of the coup on British intelligence officers who lobbied Washington in late 1952 after the election of a President poised to harden America's stance in Iran.<sup>89</sup> In a memoir, Christopher Woodhouse remembered pitching the idea to a receptive audience at the CIA only weeks after Eisenhower's election. Emphasizing the Soviet threat over considerations of the oil crisis, so as to not be "accused of using Americans to pull British chestnuts out of the fire," Woodhouse petitioned senior intelligence officers to carry the plan to the State Department.<sup>90</sup> However, internal CIA memorandums reveal that plans to carry out "what in effect would be a military coup," according to one CIA operative, were underway prior to Woodhouse's trip to Washington and

a detailed proposal was being disseminated throughout the agency as early as August 1952. This internal memorandum was written shortly after the July political crisis toppled the British government's diplomatic mission in Iran and shortly before the Department of Defense's revised NSC directive recommended more direct American action in the country.<sup>91</sup>

The "Thornburg program," as the prospective plan is referenced in inter-Agency letters, was prepared by Max Thornburg, an American oil executive and intelligence consultant who advised Mossadegh's government in 1952.<sup>92</sup> Thornburg's proposal was effectively for a coup d'état that would have allowed the Shah to remove Mossadegh and install a Prime Minister that would not challenge his authority. Thornburg advocated strengthening the Shah's position and prestige in Iranian politics while backing the Shah "in establishing a 'responsible' government...loyal to the Shah...and disposed to accept a reasonable settlement of the oil dispute."<sup>93</sup> Thornburg's proposal advocated US support in a series of programs aimed to bolster the Shah's position so that he could unilaterally negotiate an end to the oil dispute. As summed up by a CIA agent in an internal memo in September:

Mr. Thornburg has recommended an early, direct approach to the Shah for the purpose of inducing him to lead and carry out what in effect would be a military coup. The Shah would be assured by the U.S. and U.K. of full moral support, sufficient material assistance to tide Iran over until the oil issue was amicably settled, and detailed advice with respect to: (a) the implementation of the coup; (b) the formation of a new Government; (c) the carrying out of necessary reforms; and (d) the settlement of the oil controversy.

In addition to US support for the coup, if the Shah took control, Iran could expect economic assistance from the US to "restore a reasonable measure of financial stability within [the] country."<sup>94</sup> Thornburg's proposal did not reflect a consensus view within Washington, and it didn't receive an immediate warm-welcome in the CIA. CIA officials questioned the Shah's ability to execute the coup, the likelihood of gaining British support, and the risk of severe domestic fall-out from Mossadegh's removal. Nonetheless, the proposal was considered as potential policy and its initial planning was carried out.<sup>95</sup> The CIA even green-lit an inter-agency effort to develop a second, more feasible, plan for a coup after senior officials determined that the original Thornburg proposal was unlikely to succeed.<sup>96</sup> The fact that the proposal was made and considered make this previously undisclosed policy-option important as it marks the beginning of a steady drift toward policy proposals and intelligence estimates that highlight the communist threat and advocate for extraordinary U.S. actions to curtail it. Though Thornburg's program is the first declassified instance of advocacy for an actual military-backed coup d'état, he

wasn't working in an ideological vacuum. Officials within the agency—particularly Allen Dulles and Kermit Roosevelt—had been advocating decisive action in Iran since 1951 and '52. Since the initial NSC directive 107 authorizing covert intelligence operations in Iran, Roosevelt, Dulles, and other agents pressed for action in Iran, even as State Department contributions to NIEs argued that the Tudeh party stood little chance of overthrowing the central government.<sup>97</sup> Memos from agents in Washington and cables from the station in Tehran also illustrate that the CIA, working in concert with the Embassy, and often Ambassador Henderson, played a larger role in internal Iranian politics in 1951 and 1952 than previous historians have accounted for. All of these changes, however, occurred after a long history of British failure in Iran and growing frustrations with British policies that many in the Agency felt were needlessly hindering American national security goals.<sup>98</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The new documents from the State Department demonstrate that American policy in Iran from 1951-1953 was nuanced and that Eisenhower's decision to overthrow Mossadegh cannot be explained by one single event. Building on the narratives of historians that previously lacked access to these documents, this paper has shown that a convergence of factors motivated the coup, including many that had roots in Truman-era policies. The degradation of the Shah's position heightened American concerns regarding the stability of Iran's central government, while frustrations with British policy motivated Washington to separate US policy from British policy in Iran. Both of these factors, as well as a history of interventionist actions and policies during the Truman Administration, provoked a sustained effort toward Mossadegh's overthrow during the latter half of 1952 and into early 1953. The CIA might have collaborated with the British government during the coup planning process, but it was the attitudes of career American officials, assessments of the deteriorating situation, and a stalling of British policy vis-à-vis Mossadegh that were ultimately responsible for the fall of the Prime Minister. 🏛️

## Endnotes

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- [1] C.W. Woodhouse, Interview conducted in 1997 by Robert Fisk. In "With Sten Guns and Sovereigns Britain and US saved Iran's throne for the Shah." March 15, 1997. Independent, accessed online at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/with-sten-guns-and-sovereigns-britain-and-us-saved-irans-throne-for-the-shah-1272932.html>
- [2] For a review of secondary literature on these operations, see: Gasiorowski, Mark J. "The 1953 Coup D'état in Iran." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 3 (1987): 261–86. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/163655> and Wm. Roger Luis, "Britain and the Overthrow of Mossadegh" *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*. 1 edition. eds. Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004, 126-177.
- [3] An earlier version of the same series released in 1988 featured no mention of U.S. or U.K. covert actions and was largely criticized as an overly censored, incomplete narrative of the coup.
- [4] Many of these insights were provided by Donald Wilbur, a senior intelligence official and later historian who played a prominent role in the planning and execution of the coup and wrote a secret history for the Agency's reflection one year after the coup d'état. This history was supplemented by later CIA historians and officially released in multiple versions between 2011 and 2013.
- [5] Such a study is important, in light of these new documents, and as recent political changes in the United States have placed a spotlight on the study of foreign policy implementation and warranted a study on the effect career diplomats, senior intelligence officials, and others in the foreign policy establishment have on the formation of foreign policy.
- [6] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, ed. James C. Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2017), Document 156.
- [7] Bill, James A. "America, Iran, and the politics of intervention, 1951-1953" in *Mussadiq, Iranian Nationalism, and Oil*, ed. Bill and Louis, 1988; Gasiorowski, Mark J. "The 1953 Coup D'état in Iran." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 3 (1987): 261–86. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/163655>. Malcolm Byrne, "The Road to Intervention," in *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*. 1 edition. eds. Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004, 201-226; and Kinzer, Stephen. *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003.
- [8] Gasiorowski, Mark. "Review of The Coup: 1953, The CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations." *Middle East Journal* 67, no. 2 (2013): 315–17. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43698055>, 316.
- [9] Wm. Roger Luis, "Britain and the Overthrow of Mossadegh" *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*, 126-177.
- [10] Abrahamian, Ervand. *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations*. Reprint edition. New York, NY u.a.: The New Press, 2015.
- [11] Gasiorowski, "The 1953 Coup D'état in Iran."
- [12] Wm. Roger Luis, "Britain and the Overthrow of Mossadegh" *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*. 1 edition. eds. Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004, 126-177.
- [13] Homa Katouzian, "Mossadegh's Government in Iranian History" in *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*. 1 edition. eds. Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004, 1-26.
- [14] Lenczowski, George. *Russia and the West in Iran, 1918-1948: A Study in Big-Power Rivalry*. New York, NY: Praeger, 1949, 76-77; Daniel, Elton L. *The History of Iran*. ABC-CLIO, 2012.
- [15] *Ibid.*
- [16] *Ibid*; Ferrier, Ronald W. "The Anglo-Iranian Oil Dispute: a triangular relationship" in *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism and Oil*. Ed. Louis, William Roger, and James A. Bill London: Tauris, 1988, 164-199, 166-170.
- [17] Rahnama, Ali. *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers, and Spooks*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- [18] *FRUS, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V*, (Washington: Government Printing Office 1982), 268-276.
- [19] *Ibid*, 270.
- [20] *FRUS, 1952-1954 Iran, 1951-1954*, Document 6
- [21] *Ibid.*
- [22] John H. Stutesman, Transcript of an oral history conducted 1988 by William Burr. Foundation in Iranian Studies, Colombia University. In *Iran Country Reader*. Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, 18-64.
- [23] *Ibid.*
- [24] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, ed. James C. Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2017), Document 65.
- [25] Malcolm Byrne, "The Road to Intervention," in *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*. 1 edition. eds. Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004, 201-226.
- [26] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, ed. James C. Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2017), Document 65.
- [27] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, Document 155.
- [28] Kennedy, Charles Stuart, and R. Lewis Hoffacker. Interview with Ambassador Lewis Hoffacker. 1989. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib001363/>.
- [29] *Ibid.*
- [30] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, Document 65.
- [31] *Ibid*; *Ibid*, Document 6; *Ibid*, Document 153.
- [32] Wm. Roger Luis, "Britain and the Overthrow of Mossadegh" in *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*. 1 edition. eds. Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004, 126-177.
- [33] *Ibid.*
- [34] John Stutesman interview, 1988; Wm. Roger Luis, "Britain and the Overthrow of Mossadegh" *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*. 1 edition. eds. Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004, 126-177.

- [35] *Ibid.*
- [36] *Ibid.*
- [37] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran 1951-1954*, Document 42.
- [38] *Ibid.*
- [39] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, ed. James C. Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2017), Document 47.
- [40] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, ed. James C. Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2017), Document
- [41] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, Document, 51.
- [42] *Ibid.*, Document 49.
- [43] The British Ambassador relayed his view that the Shah was ready to sack Mossadegh to Henderson during an informal meeting, which Henderson reported in a cable on September 25 (*FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran 1951-1954*, Document 45). This meeting occurred shortly after the Counselor of the British Embassy contacted an American diplomat to gauge American support in a potential successor.
- [44] Wm. Roger Luis, "Britain and the Overthrow of Mossadegh" *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*. 1 edition. eds. Mark Gasiorowski and Malcolm Byrne, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004, 126-177.
- [45] Rahnema, Ali. *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran*.
- [46] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, Document 164.
- [47] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954, Document 164*.
- [48] Even with the release of the new documents, this aspect of the CIA's operation remains classified.
- [49] *Ibid.*, Document 69.
- [50] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, Document 75.
- [51] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1953*, Document 69, 72-79.
- [52] *Ibid.*
- [53] Rahnema, Ali. *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran; FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1953*, Document 97.
- [54] *Ibid.*
- [55] *Ibid; FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1953*, Document 92.
- [56] Rahnema, Ali. *Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran*.
- [57] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, Document 99.
- [58] *Ibid.*
- [59] *Ibid.*, 97.
- [60] *Ibid.*
- [61] *Ibid.*, Document 104.
- [62] *Ibid.*, Document 104, 126.
- [63] *Ibid.*
- [64] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, ed. James C. Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2017), Document 132; *Ibid.*, Document 126.
- [65] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, Document 51.
- [66] *Ibid.*
- [67] *Ibid.*, Document 101.
- [68] *Ibid.*
- [69] *Ibid.*, Document 59, 66.
- [70] *Ibid.*, Document 26.
- [71] *Ibid.*, Document 11.
- [72] *Ibid.*, Document 104, 105.
- [73] *Ibid.*
- [74] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, Document 145.
- [75] *Ibid.*, 151.
- [76] *Ibid.*, 150.
- [77] *Ibid.*, 145.
- [78] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, ed. James C. Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2017), Document 47.
- [79] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, Document 133.
- [80] *Ibid.*
- [81] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, ed. James C. Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2017), Document 144.
- [82] Kennedy, Charles Stuart, Interview with R. Lewis Hoffacker.
- [83] The revision was of NSC 107/2 (*FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, Document 35) paragraph 5, which read as follows: "Because of United States commitments in other areas, the current understanding with the United Kingdom that it is responsible for the initiative in military support of Iran in the event of communist aggression should be continued but should be kept under review in light of the importance of Middle Eastern oil, the situation in Iran, British capabilities, increasing United States influence in the Middle East, and increasing United States strength."
- [84] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, ed. James C. Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2017), Document 128.
- [85] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, Document 6.
- [86] *Ibid.*, Document 312.
- [87] *Ibid.*
- [88] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, Document 312.
- [89] For a comprehensive overview of this historical literature, see: Abrahamian "The 1953 Coup in Iran," Gasiorowski, Mark J. "The 1953 Coup D'état in Iran." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 3 (1987): 261-86. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/163655>; and Kinzer, Stephen. *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003, 48-52.
- [90] C.M. Woodhouse, *Something Ventured* (London: Granada, 1982), 117; Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men; CIA, History of the 1953 Coup*.
- [91] *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, ed. James C. Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2017), Document 122.
- [92] John Stutesman, a consular official and later Officer in Charge of Iranian Affairs at the State Department, remembered Thornburg, a former Standard Oil executive and an 'oil buccaneer in the region, as a preeminent figure in the country, and "believed that he had lines of communications to the National Front" while he lived in Tehran (John H. Stutesman, Transcript of an oral history conducted 1988 by William Burr. Foundation in Iranian Studies, Colombia University. In *Iran Country Reader*. Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, 18-64.)
- [93] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, ed. James C. Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2017), Document 118.
- [94] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, ed. James C. Van Hook (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2017), Document 118.
- [95] *Ibid.*, Document 122, 123, 126.
- [96] *Ibid.*, Document 122.
- [97] *FRUS, 1952-1954, Iran, 1951-1954*, Document 143.
- [98] *Ibid.*, Document 138-145.

# IDEOLOGY IN AMERICAN COLD WAR FOREIGN POLICY

## The Prague Spring Case Study

*Abstract: This paper deconstructs the Johnson Administration's reaction to the Soviet Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 to explore whether realism or ideology drove American foreign policy in the Cold War. The article concludes that a distinction must be made between American decision-making in Europe and in the Third World due to the rigid bloc structure present in Europe, and absent elsewhere, constraining US options in responding to Eastern bloc crises. Due to the Warsaw Pact's limiting effect on US power projection across the Iron Curtain, the US viewed European events through a realist lens while waging ideologically-driven struggles in the Third World where spheres of influence were much more malleable.*

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As World War II came to a close, the Soviet Union began the construction of an East European sphere of influence under its own domination. Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, East Germany, Albania, and Romania all became communist satellite states to the Soviet Union within a few short years after the guns of World War II fell silent.<sup>1</sup> By 1955, these countries entered into a collective defense agreement, called the Warsaw Pact, between themselves and the Soviet Union in response to West Germany's integration into the American-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Soviet Union dictated the foreign policies of all member states and to a large degree determined their economic future as well. However, member states often challenged the USSR's hegemony within the alliance, and such was the case in 1968 during the Czechoslovak Prague Spring.

In January 1968, Alexander Dubcek was elected as the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.<sup>2</sup> Dubcek quickly began liberalizing Czechoslovak society by releasing political prisoners, enabling market reforms, reducing censorship regulations, and facilitating greater political participation among local communities.<sup>3</sup> Dubcek and his government did not envision how hard the Czechoslovak people would pressure the regime to push forward with further liberal reforms.<sup>4</sup> Soon, blatantly anti-Soviet articles began to appear regularly in the Czechoslovak press. Czechoslovak military commanders even expressed desires for an independent foreign policy within the framework of the Warsaw Pact alliance which was clearly antithetical to Soviet interests.<sup>5</sup> By July and August of 1968, the Soviet Politburo and its East European allies regarded Dubcek as either unwilling to control the population or unwilling to do so. On August 20<sup>th</sup>, twenty-three years after Soviet tanks entered Prague as liberators, Soviet tanks returned to the City of a Hundred Spires as conquerors.<sup>6</sup> The

crushing of the Prague Spring will serve as an analytical tool to help clarify the nature of an old historical debate: "To what degree did realism or ideology influence US foreign policy during the Cold War?"

This paper makes use of *Foreign Relations of the United States* documents to analyze the US intelligence community's and President Lyndon B. Johnson's response to the crisis as it unfolded. This paper draws on presidential speeches, the minutes of national security council meetings, memorandums of conversations between key decision-makers, CIA intelligence bulletins, presidential daily briefs, communications between US embassies and Washington, *New York Times* articles, and any Warsaw Pact documents when deemed relevant. Although some Warsaw Pact documents are used, the author has generally avoided these documents in an effort to hone the discussion to the US response exclusively.<sup>7</sup> When used, eastern bloc documents serve to contextualize American reactions to the situation on the ground in Central and Eastern Europe during the crisis period.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, historians scrambled to determine the nature of the Cold War. Most of the debate occurred between 1993 and 2003 as former Soviet states continued declassifying mountains of new documents during this period. Three broad schools of thought emerged. One school proposed that realism, security, and superpower rivalry best explained the essence of Cold War conflict while a second suggested that ideology drove the hostilities. A third school rejected this binary assessment of the Cold War, opting for a more nuanced view of the conflict. While an argument spanning the entirety of the Cold War is well beyond the scope of this paper, it is possible to discuss the nature of the Cold War by using carefully selected case studies to draw wider conclusions on the nature of the contest.

Analyzing the United States' response to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 enables the deconstruction of the often-complex processes of US foreign policy decision-making during this period.

Realism is the first interpretation of the nature of the Cold War, serving as a very popular understanding of geopolitics during the Cold War itself. This analytical approach emphasizes the anarchic nature of the international state system (i.e. all states are responsible for their own security), the dominating role of the security dilemma, and the tendency of states to maximize their power whenever possible. US-USSR rivalry was most commonly explained by structural realists, notably John Mearsheimer and his concept of "offensive realism." Mearsheimer maintains that it "makes good strategic sense for states to gain as much power as possible and, if the circumstances are right, to pursue hegemony."<sup>8</sup> Other scholars, such as Paul Kubricht, do not emphasize the influence of ideology on US policymakers' decision to tacitly allow the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia but stop short of explicitly adopting a realist perspective in their analyses.<sup>9</sup> Even though Kubricht does not overtly declare his presence in the realist camp, he cites US concerns over Vietnam and the presence of an understanding of "spheres of influence" in Europe between NATO and the Warsaw Pact as primary factors de-incentivizing an American response, both of which are very realist interpretations of US actions.<sup>10</sup>

Proponents of the second school of thought reject the realist interpretation as too constrained. For example, Richard Rosecrance and Arthur Stein firmly reject the above interpretation of the international system, arguing that "the narrow constituents of realism – material power, changes in its distribution, and external threat – are radically incomplete and do not account for what nations actually do."<sup>11</sup> For Rosecrance and Stein, domestic groups, social ideas, the character of constitutions, economic constraints, historical social tendencies, and domestic political pressures play a more important role in grand strategy. John Mueller similarly concludes that liberal democratic values were intrinsic to US goals in the Cold War. In his view, the Cold War sprang from a contest of ideas and ideological conflict, not merely raw superpower rivalry.<sup>12</sup>

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the conclusion of the Cold War, some scholars challenged the binary realism vs ideology debate on the nature of Cold War geopolitics. Prominent Cold War historian Melvyn Leffler calls for scholars to do away with the binary paradigm completely, maintaining that "Realists can be ideologues, and ideologues can be realists. Ideology alone does not dictate policy, nor does security."<sup>13</sup> Nigel Gould-Davies offers a compelling interpretation of the complex relationship between ideology and security in the Cold War by arguing that "the United States frequently measured security in terms not of power relations but of the global fortunes of regime types ...



Demonstration in Helsinki against the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. (1968)

Source: *Self-photographed* (Wikimedia Commons)

This ideologized view was founded on antipathy toward Communism not as an economic system, but as a political project."<sup>14</sup> This interpretation of the realism versus ideology question provides greater nuance and analytical flexibility than the former binary structure and better explains the decisions of both superpowers in the Cold War.

This paper should be considered an outcrop of the third school of thought, whereby neither superpower operated exclusively under the influence of realism or ideology. Instead, each side complied with a tacit understanding that Europe was not a place for *violent* ideological confrontation since East-West armed conflict in Europe could quickly escalate to World War III. Instead, the superpowers operated based on realist principles in Europe because there was no room for ideological maneuvering in the clearly demarcated European continent. Rather, the superpowers engaged in violent ideological conflict in the Third World where the threat of nuclear escalation was much smaller.<sup>15</sup> In this arena, communism and democracy would square off in one of the most destructive, prolonged conflicts in human history, eventually claiming the lives of nearly 14 million people in the post-colonial world.<sup>16</sup>

The US response to the Prague Spring is a useful case study for analyzing the degree to which the United States operated based on realism or ideology. The lack of a forceful US response to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 demonstrates that the United States could not take an aggressive, ideologically-driven stance due to their lack of options and the possibility of igniting World War III. Furthermore, the Johnson Administration had clearly demonstrated its willingness to fight bloody Cold War battles in the Third World, having launched or escalated interventions

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in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic. US inaction to the Prague Spring is thus an intriguing historical surprise. The explanation? Simply put, Europe was a different political context for the superpowers which rendered violent ideological reactions to world events impossible.

On August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1968, at 8:15 pm in the White House Cabinet Room, Soviet ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin sat down to meet with President Lyndon Johnson and his special assistant Walt Rostow. The meeting started amidst a good atmosphere, with US President Lyndon Johnson telling Dobrynin about a new color film he had seen while at his ranch in Texas.<sup>17</sup> The laid-back mood seemed to foreshadow the upcoming era of détente which Johnson had so firmly worked for during his presidency.<sup>18</sup> Dobrynin soon switched to the topic at hand and delivered the message to President Johnson that the Soviet Union had invaded Czechoslovakia, stating that there had been “a conspiracy of internal and external reaction against the social system” in Czechoslovakia. He added that the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies had replied to a request by the Prague government for help.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, Soviet military units had been ordered to cross into Czechoslovakia. “Needless to say,” Dobrynin continued, “they will be immediately withdrawn from Czechoslovak territory once the existing threat to security is removed.” The message concluded that Moscow assumed there would be no damage to Soviet-American relations, “to which the Soviet government attaches great importance.”<sup>20</sup> However, in reality, the invasion tarnished Soviet reputation within the socialist camp, non-aligned movement, free world, and nearly all other states.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately for Johnson, détente was now in serious jeopardy.

Johnson responded unpredictably. Instead of acting with strong condemnation to the news of the quashing of millions of people’s political freedoms, Johnson responded by informing Dobrynin that the position outlined by Secretary of State Dean Rusk during Dobrynin and Rusk’s July 22 meeting was the current position of the United States.<sup>22</sup> During that meeting, Rusk had told Dobrynin that “If this happened (an invasion of Czechoslovakia – C.R.) we would deeply regret it and it could not possibly have anything but a very negative effect on our relations, all the more so if the U.S. was to be presented as a scapegoat.”<sup>23</sup> Johnson proceeded to thank Dobrynin for the notification, only to move on to discuss his visit to the Soviet Union and, curiously, one Mr. Rayburn’s drinking habits and the history of Texas.<sup>24</sup> If Johnson understood the severe damage the invasion would do to the prospects of détente and his visit to the Soviet Union, he certainly did not show it during this meeting.

President Johnson called an emergency meeting of the National Security Council to discuss the Soviet invasion

after Ambassador Dobrynin’s visit. The meeting consisted of numerous key decision-makers, including President Johnson, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, CIA Director Richard Helms, General Earle Wheeler, US Ambassador to the United Nations George Ball, and Special Assistant for National Security Affairs Walt Rostow, among others. Secretary Rusk was disappointed by the timing of the invasion, especially in light of the USSR’s “favorable messages” on strategic missile talks and the President’s in-person meeting with General Secretary of the Soviet Union Leonid Brezhnev.<sup>25</sup> To make the timing even more uncomfortable, the Americans and Soviets had previously decided to announce President Johnson’s impending visit to Moscow on August 21<sup>st</sup>, the day after the invasion. There is no evidence to suggest that this move was an intentional ploy to scuttle the meeting. There were much easier ways to cancel a proposed meeting than by invading a country. However, the damage was done, and President Johnson’s hopes for a bilateral summit were summarily dashed.

The next day, after Johnson had met with his cabinet, he released a public statement on the invasion, condemning the USSR’s invasion justifications as “patently contrived.” Johnson called on the Soviets and their allies to withdraw all forces from Czechoslovakia.<sup>26</sup> The statement’s brevity indicates Johnson’s nonchalant attitude towards the invasion as well as American policymakers’ lack of options. President Johnson desired détente between the United States and the USSR; as a result, he wanted to leave the invasion behind and continue furthering bilateral ties. It is no coincidence that a period of US-Soviet détente emerged immediately after Johnson’s presidency under the Nixon Administration once the backlash against the Soviet invasion had largely dissipated. As historian Mitchell Lerner demonstrates, Johnson deserved much more credit than he was given for détente and the signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty in 1972.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, since President Johnson only had a couple more months left in office, the invasion rendered cooperative talks with the Soviets essentially impossible if the US issued a strong, public condemnation of the event. The United States was caught off-guard by the invasion. Even on the day of the invasion, the Administration was working to further arms control talks between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.<sup>28</sup> It is in this context that Johnson decided to de-emphasize the importance of the invasion and instead focus on bilateral relations. However, as the American and global public exploded in rage at the Soviet action, Johnson’s somewhat conciliatory tone began to change.

### **SPHERES OF INFLUENCE AS CONSTRAINT**

The President’s inaction did not sit well with many in the American public, which was quick to condemn not only the Soviet invasion but also its government’s lack of a meaningful response. One *New York Times* article on August 22<sup>nd</sup> compared the invasion of Czechoslovakia to the “rape

of Hungary” in 1956, raged against the lackadaisical US response, and bemoaned the slow-moving efforts made by the UN to convene a Security Council meeting on the issue.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, numerous US senators such as Senator Roman Hruska and Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen informed Johnson of their constituent’s displeasure with the lack of a concrete American response to the invasion, particularly exacerbated by Johnson’s continued effort to build better relations with the USSR.<sup>30</sup>

There were also strong voices in the American public supporting some of the President’s actions. Zbigniew Brzezinski, who served as a national security adviser to US Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter, praised President Johnson for his bridge building initiative with Eastern Europe which Brzezinski believed forced the Soviets to invade and show their true colors.<sup>31</sup> James Reston, executive editor of the *New York Times*, wrote an article praising Johnson for his pragmatism in ignoring the invasion while focusing on arms control, which he deemed to be “the predominate issue in the world today.”<sup>32</sup> Journalist Max Frankel agreed with the President’s decision not to cross the well-understood line of demarcation separating West from East. To Frankel, these lines existed so nuclear war could more easily be averted. Frankel stated eloquently that “Moscow has let down good communists in France and Guatemala as Washington has let down liberty-loving men in Budapest and Prague because survival is ultimately a higher value than ideology.”<sup>33</sup> In short, many influential members of the public understood US inaction towards the invasion as a surefire sign of an “understanding” between Washington and Moscow that they would not interfere in each other’s backyards– the interference was meant for the Third World.

While the Johnson Administration vehemently opposed this notion, Brezhnev believed that Johnson had confirmed to the Soviet Union that a sphere of influence in Europe did exist. According to Leonid Brezhnev, he asked President Johnson “if the American government still fully recognizes the results of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences. And on August 18, I (Brezhnev – C.R.) received the reply: as far as Czechoslovakia and Romania are concerned, it recognizes them without reservation; in the case of Yugoslavia, it would have to be discussed.”<sup>34</sup> As of yet, no document has surfaced which confirms that the Johnson Administration gave Brezhnev this greenlight. To the contrary, two well-respected scholars on the invasion, Jiri Valenta and Harold Gordon Skilling, did not find any convincing evidence to suggest that Brezhnev’s statement was true. Furthermore, on September 4, in the 590<sup>th</sup> meeting of the National Security Council (NSC), Secretary Rusk explained that “It is important that everyone know we have never had any understanding with the Soviet Union about respective spheres of influence as De Gaulle alleges.”<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, even foreign heads of state bought into the “spheres of influence” explanation of US inaction towards the invasion.



Memorial of victims of 21 August 1968 in Liberec (1968)  
Source: Photograph by Jiří Sedláček (Wikimedia Commons)

Clarifying this debate over whether or not the Johnson Administration agreed to an explicit or implicit understanding between the US and USSR on their respective spheres of influence helps indicate to what degree ideology influenced US decision-making during this period. If the Administration agreed to an understanding, then this is strong evidence that practical security matters, in this instance, trumped ideological concerns; allowing your ideological rival to dominate half of the European continent, and millions to toil under the communist system, is a very hard pill to swallow for cold warrior ideologues. However, if Johnson did not agree, it would be easier to argue that ideology still played an important part in his foreign policy calculations vis-à-vis Europe and the Soviet Union.

Journalist George Urban interviewed Eugene Rostow the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs during the invasion, in 1979.<sup>36</sup> The text of this interview was subsequently published in the *Washington Quarterly* and contains passages which illuminate the Cold War paradigms senior Johnson Administration officials viewed their world through. Rostow freely admits that the United States never considered aiding anti-Soviet reform efforts in Eastern Europe, saying:



During the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovaks carry their national flag past a burning tank in Prague (1968)

Source: *The Central Intelligence Agency* (Wikimedia Commons)

“We recognized, and it was a very painful and hateful thing to recognize, that under the standing rules of the Cold War there was nothing we could do about Czechoslovakia, but if the Soviet moves represented something wider than an “internal” response to the Prague reforms—that was going to be treated as a very different matter.”<sup>37</sup>

From Rostow’s perspective, US officials clearly understood that their influence in Eastern Europe was negligible, and further supporting the Prague Spring reformists may in fact endanger them. Rostow notes that there was a central rule which the administration always heeded: “Don’t cross the East/West demarcation line.”<sup>38</sup> This decision was not taken lightly. Rostow explained the United States’ difficult position in formulating how to “meaningfully” respond to the invasion. After all, it is quite difficult to respond to an invasion reciprocally without declaring war. According to Rostow, decision-makers weighed multiple options, including stopping grain shipments to the USSR, halting technological transfers to the Soviets, and/or ceasing arms control talks. However, these options were limited in their viability, as Rostow admits, especially in the case of halting grain shipments. Rostow stated resolutely that “food simply is not a weapon, because we could not refuse help to starving people.”<sup>39</sup> It was also not politically viable to halt arms control talks due to Johnson’s determination to achieve a breakthrough on arms control between the US and USSR.

US passivity to the invasion is thus well-grounded. The distinct lack of diplomatic and economic options available to Washington seriously constrained its ability to respond in a way which would placate the American public. Rostow’s version of events suggests that during the Johnson Administration there was, at the very least, a *de facto* understanding between the US and USSR over European demarcation. Whether Johnson gave Brezhnev formal authorization is of little relevance since US actions reflected its silent consent of the invasion.

**THE LIMITS OF IDEOLOGY ON DECISION-MAKING**  
Washington’s decision-making on Czechoslovakia did not occur in a vacuum, and the international context under which the United States operated in 1968 was not at all conducive to exploiting the Soviet invasion for maximum damaging effect on the USSR and its allies. The Vietnam War constrained the Johnson Administration’s ability to conduct further foreign policy ventures and produced an American public which was quite wary of increased entanglement abroad. In 1968, merely forty-two percent of American men and thirty-six percent of American women supported the war in Vietnam.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the number of US servicemen killed in action reached its apex in 1968, with 16,899 American soldiers losing their lives in Vietnam.<sup>41</sup> War in Europe, even if it could be assuredly contained to purely conventional, non-nuclear forces, was out of the question for the Johnson Administration in light of staggering losses in Vietnam.

Vietnam further constrained Washington due to the American media's quick realization of the parallels between the American involvement in Vietnam and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Reporters told Secretary Rusk in his press briefing on August 22<sup>nd</sup> that some Americans suggested that the US did not have a moral right to criticize the Russians because of the US role in both Vietnam and Santo Domingo (the 1965 US-led intervention in an anti-government coup in the Dominican Republic).<sup>42</sup> Rusk adamantly responded that the comparisons were unequal because the United States responded to a "common danger" shared with South Vietnam and acted on its treaty of mutual security, while the Warsaw Pact had deprived a member state of their right to sovereign, internal policymaking.<sup>43</sup> Regardless of Rusk's reasoning, the message was clear: many Americans viewed each intervention as Cold War-fueled actions undertaken by two governments which were obsessed with imposing their will on the world.

Ideologues can still be constrained by concrete security concerns without compromising their ideological morals. President Johnson clearly championed democratic and capitalist governments in the world, as well as pro-Washington regimes which brazenly rejected democratic principles. Even though most Cold War presidents were ideologues in their own ways, they understood their boundaries in the international system. In Johnson's case, although he may have felt that helping Czechoslovakia achieve democracy would fit squarely within his personal ideological framework, that would result in the destruction of the world if the US responded militarily. Under such a moral calculation, realism and idealism would have resulted in the same exact response. Furthermore, realism does not intrinsically mean rationality just as ideology does not inherently imply irrationality. Adherents to both schools of thought, assuming they are rational actors, would have pursued the same general course of inaction chosen by Johnson. There simply was not another reciprocal option.

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**“The distinct lack of diplomatic and economic options available to Washington seriously constrained its ability to respond in a way which would placate the American public.”**

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A military response was off the table for the Johnson Administration. However, as outlined previously, there were not many more palatable options of a reciprocal nature which could both punish the Soviets and placate the American public's outrage at the invasion. The Johnson Administration was thus left with little leeway in deciding the US response. There was no room for ideology to influence the administration's decision-making because concrete factors prevented any resolute reaction to the invasion. If more options were available to policymakers, ideology might have affected the decision-making process more meaningfully.

Since there were few viable options for decision-makers in Washington, it is difficult to properly assess the role ideology played in the US decision to stand aside. This dilemma calls into question the reliability of using Czechoslovakia as a barometer for ideology's prevalence in US foreign policy. However, the solution lies in proposing a more nuanced understanding of the term "ideologue" in Cold War history. Common assumptions of ideologues suggest that they cannot compromise with their ideological rivals, or that they are inherently aggressive towards them. Importantly, however, deeming someone an ideologue does not mean that they are inherently irrational. The history of the Johnson Administration's stance is useful because it highlights the ideological flexibility with which the United States operated during the Cold War.

Johnson's ability to look past the Soviet invasion and immediately focus on arms control talks is commendable. This serves as an example of ideological compromise making sense for world peace. If a state's number one goal is security, a nuclear exchange with a country with second-strike capability would be completely irrational. This view prevailed on the US side, as former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara explained to the United Press International in San Francisco in September of 1968: "the blunt fact is, then, that neither the Soviet Union nor the United States can attack the other without being destroyed in retaliation; nor can either of us attain a first-strike capability in the foreseeable future."<sup>44</sup> This statement accurately reflects US nuclear defense policy at the time since McNamara left his post as Secretary of Defense in February of 1968, only a couple of months before the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August that year.

#### **THE THREAT OF THE SOVIET STEAM-ROLLER**

The US foreign policy apparatus was much more concerned about the invasion than President Johnson was. The President was focused solely on achieving a positive legacy through arms control talks, and this is exemplified in the initial meeting between Dobrynin and Johnson on August 20<sup>th</sup>, when Dobrynin first informed the President of the Soviet invasion. According to Dobrynin himself, Walt Rostow was the only other person in the room when he told Johnson of the invasion, and while the President seemed to miss the significance of the invasion, Rostow "sat with

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lowering face, trying not to interrupt the president,” as he continued to arms control talks.<sup>45</sup> According to Dobrynin’s account of events, Johnson still wanted a summit in Moscow between himself and Brezhnev in spite of the invasion.<sup>46</sup>

Secretary of State Rusk was much more resolute in making the President aware of his disapproval of the invasion. Dobrynin explained that Rusk’s attitude toward the invasion “represented anything but approval” and that he would “spare no effort to make President Johnson disapprove of it just as strongly as he did.”<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the Central Intelligence Agency prioritized the Soviet invasion and accorded it a high degree of importance. From August 21<sup>st</sup> to September 7<sup>th</sup>, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia was the first entry in each worldwide agency bulletin; this demonstrated that the invasion was the primary focus of the intelligence community immediately following the event, with other regions such as Vietnam taking a temporary backseat.<sup>48</sup> During this period, US analysts began to fear further Soviet invasions in Eastern Europe targeting both Romania and Yugoslavia.<sup>49</sup> Both of these countries were in open opposition to Moscow before the invasion, and certainly after it.

On August 21<sup>st</sup>, the day after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party published a scathing indictment of Soviet actions that day.<sup>50</sup> The committee railed against the “flagrant violation of the national sovereignty of a fraternal socialist, free and independent state,” and mobilized the Romania population in case of invasion, stating that the “The armed patriotic guards, formed of workers, peasants and intellectuals,” would be immediately reorganized.<sup>51</sup> This action only fueled Soviet fear of Romania’s rebellion more, with Petro Shelest, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine and a full member of the CPSU Politburo, specifically criticizing the actions of the armed patriotic guards in protesting the invasion.<sup>52</sup> Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito blasted the Soviet invasion as well, stating that it was a “great blow to socialist and progressive forces in the world” and could “intensify the Cold War.”<sup>53</sup>

Senior US foreign policy officials scrambled to assess the possibility of further Soviet invasions. Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs John Leddy provided Secretary of State Rusk with possible US responses in the event of a Soviet-led invasion of Romania. In the note, Leddy suggests an increase in NATO vigilance measures and the return to Europe of United States air and ground forces currently being rotated back to the States. He further recommends potentially extending military assistance to Yugoslavia if Tito requested it.<sup>54</sup> The drafting of these proposals illustrates the high degree of concern in the US foreign policy community about further invasions which would seriously destabilize world peace.

Just after the invasion, Tito called in Charles Burke Elbrick, the American ambassador to Yugoslavia, to ask about US policy towards Yugoslavia in light of Soviet actions in Czechoslovakia. Elbrick informed Tito that US policy vis-à-vis Yugoslavia was “the same as always,” meaning that the United States would continue to “support Yugoslav independence and integrity.”<sup>55</sup> Elbrick then paused and asked Tito, “Do you need any help?” Tito thanked Elbrick for enquiring but declined assistance. However, Tito remained firm, making it clear that he supported the Dubcek government and rejected the Soviet invasion. Elbrick later commented that “He (Tito) volunteered to receive me at any time if my government should require any information or clarification of Yugoslav position and implied hope that I would be available if Yugoslav Gov’t had any suggestions to make.”<sup>56</sup>

Even President Johnson worried about further invasions. After all, if any occurred, arms control talks would be completely out of the question, even more so than they already were.<sup>57</sup> President Johnson valued arms control talks highly, illustrated by his letter to Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin in 1967 in which he declared that arms control talks were of the “greatest importance” and “considerable urgency.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, he feared that further Soviet invasions would derail bilateral progress on arms control between the US and USSR. At his speech to the Democratic National Convention, Johnson observed that “In a tragic move they (the Soviets) have applied the full measure of military power in Czechoslovakia where tonight hundreds of tanks surround that capital. There are even rumors late this evening that this action might be repeated elsewhere in the days ahead in Eastern Europe.”<sup>59</sup> Fears of subsequent Soviet aggression had thus reached the top of the United States government.<sup>60</sup>

If Yugoslavia were invaded, the Soviet Union would place its troops there permanently as was done in Czechoslovakia.<sup>61</sup> Western powers considered the presence of Soviet troops adjacent to Italy and Greece, the inevitable result of a Soviet invasion of Yugoslavia, intolerable.<sup>62</sup> The United States was even prepared to supply Yugoslavia in any military conflict with the Soviet Union if Tito so requested; US ambassador Elbrick specifically informed Tito of this US position. President Johnson had also made a point of improving bilateral relations between the United States and Yugoslavia as part of a larger “bridge building” campaign in the socialist bloc. Johnson believed that “bridge building could make the Cold War less dangerous and bolster the United States’ influence in both Western and Eastern Europe.”<sup>63</sup> Supporting Yugoslavia made sense to US policymakers due to Yugoslavia’s independent foreign policy. Unlike countries in the Warsaw Pact where Moscow dictated each member state’s foreign policies, Yugoslavia was free from Moscow’s control. Yugoslavia’s independent foreign policy ensured that Yugoslavia could preserve the regional geostrategic balance in south-eastern Europe and enabled Belgrade to be a frequent thorn in Moscow’s side within the socialist camp, something America welcomed. Clearly, the United States viewed Yugoslavia’s independence as crucial to its foreign policy in Eastern Europe.

Romania, however, was a different story. While the United States certainly wanted to avoid any unnecessary bloodshed, there was a powerful argument within the State Department to allow the Soviets to invade Romania if it were inevitable. Proponents of this course of action rationalized that an invasion of Romania might weaken the Warsaw Pact's war potential since additional Soviet forces would be required to neutralize the Romanian divisions.<sup>64</sup> This is a realist position by the United States; the US recognized the limits of its military capacity behind the Iron Curtain but would simultaneously do nothing to prevent Romanian revolt within the Warsaw Pact. Furthermore, the position of the communist party in Romania was never under threat, and political liberalization akin to the Czechoslovak Prague Spring was not underway in Romania in August 1968. Instead, Bucharest's opposition to the Soviet invasion was purely based on their belief in national sovereignty and their fear of Moscow asserting further control over countries in the Warsaw Pact. US officials would thus be more reluctant to directly aid Romania since there was no democratization process underway, unlike in Czechoslovakia. However, US influence was still negligible compared to Soviet influence across the divide of the Iron Curtain.

## CONCLUSION

American impotence in Eastern Europe, and Soviet impotence in Western Europe, contributed greatly to the static nature of the post-war European order. US inaction to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia is thus indicative of a broader trend which spanned nearly the entire Cold War. President Truman espoused one of the most important conceptual frameworks for American foreign policy during the Cold War on March 12, 1947. In his speech to Congress, Truman exclaimed that "it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures." He continued by declaring that a free and just world could not be achieved "unless we are willing to help free people to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes."<sup>65</sup> However, analysis of the US non-response to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia demonstrates clearly that the United States did not always follow this "central" tenet of its foreign policy. This was especially the case in Europe, where, as discussed previously, American influence was not enough to help East European nations toiling under communism.

This practice transcended partisan politics, with Democratic and Republican presidents choosing European non-intervention. President Eisenhower refused to intervene in the East German Uprising in 1953, the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, or the 1956 Polish crisis but approved the CIA-directed topplings of the Iranian government in 1953 and the Guatemalan government in 1954. President Johnson refused to intervene in Czechoslovakia in 1968

but waged anti-communist wars in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic. President Reagan declined intervention in the Polish Crisis of 1980-81 but funded right-wing death squads in Central and South America which targeted leftists and communists with impunity. Reagan verbally supported the Poles but did not offer concrete aid, just like President Johnson in 1968 with the Czechoslovak crisis.<sup>66</sup> Czechoslovakia 1968 is thus one link in a long chain of a sustained US policy of non-intervention in Eastern Europe.

Brian McCauley correctly notes that *mutual* non-interference existed in Cold War Europe, arguing that "both the Soviet Union and the United States felt that in times of crisis, the status quo was preferable to a complete breakdown in the existing power balance. Neither was prepared to risk a major war over an area it had little prospect of controlling."<sup>67</sup> After the initial scramble for influence in Europe immediately after WWII, both superpowers operated under the assumption for the remainder of the Cold War that NATO and Warsaw Pact countries were firmly entrenched in their respective camps and successfully "flipping" a country from the rival bloc would be nearly impossible. Furthermore, both sides understood that the force required to successfully flip a rival state in Europe would likely require military action, and thus threaten the world with nuclear annihilation.

The United States did adhere to a de facto understanding of spheres of influence in Europe with the Soviet Union; this produced one of the most peaceful periods of *European* history. The agreed system offered very clear and distinct lines which each superpower understood they could not cross. There was no question where one ideological system ended and the other began. In Europe, this produced a stable and peaceful post-war status quo which endured until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Keeping this in mind, a purely ideological interpretation of the Cold War fails to fully explain the de facto US-Soviet understanding over the demarcation of Europe. Allowing the Soviet Union to dominate Eastern Europe for decades and refusing to aid East European revolts against communism seems antithetical to democracy promotion as espoused in the Truman Doctrine.

At the same time, the United States waged incredibly costly wars in the Third World which realism fails to fully explain. For example, US involvement in the Vietnam War is difficult to rationalize without taking into account America's deep antipathy towards communism as a political and cultural system. Furthermore, the US and USSR both supported murderous regimes across the Third World in the name of their respective ideologies. It is useful to return to Nigel Gould-Davies' argument that "the United States frequently measured security in terms not of power relations but of the global fortunes of regime types ... This ideologized

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view was founded on antipathy toward Communism not as an economic system, but as a political project.”<sup>68</sup> This view explains superpower interaction in the Third World quite well. However, as American restraint after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia demonstrates, Gould-Davies’ argument must be qualified to note that the superpowers were reluctant to influence the “global fortunes” of regime types in Europe across the East-West line of demarcation. With this caveat in mind, the third school of thought on the old realism versus ideology debate is most accurate in explaining superpower antagonisms during the Cold War.



## Endnotes

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[1] For many excellent accounts of these transformational years in East European history, see *Imposing, Maintaining, and Tearing Open the Iron Curtain: The Cold War and East-Central Europe, 1945-1989*, ed. Mark Kramer & Vit Smetana (Lanham, Maryland; Plymouth, United Kingdom: Lexington Books, 2014), 3-171.

[2] “Resolution of the CPCz CC Plenum, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1968, Electing Alexander Dubcek as First Secretary,” 5 January 1968, in *The Prague Spring '68*, ed. Jaromir Navratil (New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 34-36.

[3] Three crucial primary documents outline the intellectual basis for the Prague Spring reforms: Josef Smrkovsky, “What Lies Ahead,” 9 February 1968, in *The Prague Spring '68*, ed. Jaromir Navratil, 45-50; “The Action Program of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia,” in *Winter in Prague: Documents on Czechoslovak Communism in Crisis*, ed. Robin Alison Remington (Cambridge & London: The M.I.T. Press, 1969), 88-137; “The ‘Two Thousand Words’ Manifesto,” 27 June 1968, in *The Prague Spring '68*, ed. Jaromir Navratil, 177-181.

[4] “Open Letter from 134 Czechoslovak Writers and Cultural Figures to the CPCz Central Committee,” 25 March 1968, *The Prague Spring '68*, ed. Jaromir Navratil, 76-77.

[5] “Informal remarks by Czechoslovak Chief of General Staff, Gen. Otakar Rytir, at a Confidential Meeting of General Staff Officials, Prague,” 13 March 1968, *Cold War International History Project Digital Archive*, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117166>; “Action Program of the Czechoslovak Army,” 11 June 1968, in *A Cardboard Castle?* ed. Vojtech Mastny and Malcolm Byrne (Central European University Press, 2005), 279-282; “Interview with Czechoslovak General Vitanovský,” *Parallel History Project*, [http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/lory1.ethz.ch/collections/coll\\_czechgen/fraternal\\_invasion.html](http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/lory1.ethz.ch/collections/coll_czechgen/fraternal_invasion.html).

[6] “Statement by the CPCz CC Presidium Condemning the Warsaw Pact Invasion,” 21 August, 1968, in *The Prague Spring '68*, ed. Jaromir Navratil, 414-415.

[7] While Moscow’s view of the crisis is equally as, if not more, important than Washington’s view of Czechoslovakia in 1968, this paper seeks to utilize the United States’ point of view since the goal of the paper is to establish the degree to which the US operated based on realism or ideology. The paper does not attempt to explain Soviet motivations, Prague’s understanding of the crisis period, or the US position on the crisis before the invasion on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1968. While all of these questions are important to answer, they are beyond the scope of this paper and deserve full length studies of their own.

[8] John Mearsheimer, “Structural Realism,” in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith, eds., *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 72.

[9] Paul Kubricht, “Confronting Liberalization and Military Invasion: America and the Johnson Administration Respond to the 1968 Prague Summer,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, Neue Folge*, Bd. 40, H. 2 (1992), 197-212. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41048782>.

[10] Paul Kubricht, “Confronting Liberalization and Military Invasion: America and the Johnson Administration Respond to the 1968 Prague Summer,” 211.

[11] Richard Rosecrance and Arthur A. Stein, “Beyond Realism: The Study of Grand Strategy,” In *Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, eds. Richard Rosecrance and Arthur Stein (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5.

[12] John Mueller, “The Impact of Ideas on Grand Strategy,” In *Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy*, eds. Richard Rosecrance and Arthur Stein (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 48-62.

[13] Melvyn Leffler, “What Do ‘We Now Know?’” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 2 (1999), 523.

[14] Nigel Gould-Davies, “Rethinking the Role of Ideology in International Politics During the Cold War,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, No. 1 (Winter 1999), 109.

- [15] The use of the term “Third World” here, while not understood to be fully politically correct in modern discourse, is used in its proper context here to use the vocabulary of the Cold War as a means of explaining the international system at the time. The author does not intend to use derogatory language in relation to the Global South, developing world, or whichever titles are deemed most appropriate to use. The use of the term is carefully considered and the author deems its use appropriate in describing the Cold War world of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- [16] For an excellent overview of the international Cold War, see Paul Chamberlain, *The Cold War's Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace* (New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 2018).
- [17] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 80.
- [18] On Johnson’s work towards Détente, see John Dumbrell, *President Lyndon Johnson and Soviet Communism* (Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 2004); Thomas A. Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003).
- [19] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents* (New York, Random House, 1995), 185.
- [20] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 185.
- [21] For relevant newspaper articles on world backlash to the invasion between merely August 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, see “West Europe Reds Denounce Soviet; In Unusual Step, They Voice Public Condemnation,” *New York Times* (New York City, New York), Aug. 22, 1968; “New Rift in Red Bloc; Invasion Tears Open Gap in Europe Comparable to Peking-Moscow Split,” *New York Times* (New York City, New York), Aug. 22, 1968; “De Gaulle Condemns Invasion; General Accuses the Kremlin of ‘Attack on the Destiny of a Friendly Nation,’” *New York Times* (New York City, New York), Aug. 22, 1968; “Tito Decries the Invasion; Yugoslav Meets Aides,” *New York Times* (New York City, New York), Aug. 22, 1968; “Rumania Warns Soviet; Ceausescu Adamant,” *New York Times* (New York City, New York), Aug. 22, 1968; “Wave of Anger Sweeps World, Some Soviet Embassies Raided,” *New York Times* (New York City, New York), Aug. 22, 1968; “Wilson Calls it a World Tragedy; Briton Terms Occupation of Czechoslovakia a Blow to East-West Relations,” *New York Times* (New York City, New York), Aug. 21, 1968.
- [22] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 80.
- [23] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 70.
- [24] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, Document 80.
- [25] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 81.
- [26] “The Situation in Czechoslovakia: Statement by the President,” in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United State: Lyndon B. Johnson, Book II July 1, 1968 – January 20, 1969* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1970), 905.
- [27] Mitchell Lerner, “Four Years and a World of Difference: The Evolution of Lyndon Johnson and American Foreign Policy,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 107, No. 1 (2003): 93.
- [28] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, eds. David C. Humphrey & Charles S. Sampson (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 288.
- [29] “Russians, Go Home!” *The New York Times* (New York City: New York), Aug. 22, 1968.
- [30] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, eds. David C. Humphrey & Charles S. Sampson (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2001), Document 292.
- [31] Meyer Srednick Handler, “U.S. Specialist on Soviet Affairs Urges NATO Parley on Invasion,” (New York City: New York), Aug. 22, 1968.
- [32] James Reston, “Washington: Czechoslovakia and Disarmament,” (New York City: New York), Aug. 24, 1968.
- [33] Max Frankel, “Spheres of Influence: Inaction of the US in Crisis Illustrates Its Impotence in Eastern Europe,” (New York City: New York), Aug. 23, 1968.
- [34] Paul Kubricht, “Confronting Liberalization and Military Invasion: America and the Johnson Administration Respond to the 1968 Prague Summer,” 209.
- [35] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 93.
- [36] Under Secretary Eugene Rostow should not be confused with Special Assistant to the President Walt Rostow.
- [37] George Urban, “The Invasion of Czechoslovakia, 1968: The View from Washington A Conversation with Eugene V. Rostow,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 2, Issue 1 (1979), 108.
- [38] George Urban, “The Invasion of Czechoslovakia, 1968: The View from Washington A Conversation with Eugene V. Rostow,” 108-109. The line he refers to is the line dividing Western and Eastern Europe, and roughly corresponds to membership in either the Warsaw Pact or NATO.
- [39] George Urban, “The Invasion of Czechoslovakia, 1968: The View from Washington A Conversation with Eugene V. Rostow,” 113.
- [40] William L. Lunch and Peter W. Sperlich, “American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 32, No. 1 (Mar., 1979), 35.
- [41] “Vietnam War U.S. Military Fatal Casualty Statistics,” The National Archives, January 2018, <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics>.
- [42] “Cabinet Report on Czechoslovakia and Vietnam,” in *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* 4, No. 34 (Aug. 26, 1968): 1265.

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[43] “Cabinet Report on Czechoslovakia and Vietnam,” 1265.

[44] “Text of McNamara Speech on Anti-China Missile Defense and U.S. Nuclear Strategy,” *The New York Times* (New York City: New York), Sept. 18, 1968.

[45] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 186.

[46] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 186.

[47] Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 186.

[48] For brevity, these documents will not all be cited, but they can be found at the CIA FOIA site by searching “CIA Intelligence Bulletin” and narrowing your search to the dates 08-21-1968 to 09-07-1968. The September 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Bulletins are not available on the website, but in light of this trend it seems acceptable to assume that Czechoslovakia maintained the same level of importance on those reports seeing as it continued to do so until September 7<sup>th</sup>.

[49] For instance, the CIA emphasized the Romanian government’s belief that they too were about to be invaded in the President’s Daily Brief on August 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. See “The President’s Daily Brief, 23 August 1968,” *Central Intelligence Agency*, [https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0005976319.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0005976319.pdf) & “The President’s Daily Brief, 24 August 1968,” *Central Intelligence Agency*, [https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC\\_0005976321.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0005976321.pdf).

[50] “Protocol No. 5 of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party on the Situation in Czechoslovakia,” August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1968, *Cold War International History Project Digital Archive*, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110454>.

[51] “Protocol No. 5 of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party on the Situation in Czechoslovakia.”

[52] “P. Shelest on Romanian Reactions to the Unrest in Czechoslovakia,” September 3, 1968, *Cold War International History Project Digital Archive*, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112461>.

[53] Paul Hoffman, “Yugoslavia Meets Aides,” *New York Times* (New York City: New York), Aug. 22, 1968.

[54] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 164.

[55] David Binder, “C. Burke Elbrick, Ex-Envoy, is Dead,” *New York Times* (New York City: New York), April 15, 1983. Note that they got his name wrong here. It should be Charles BURKE Elbrick

[56] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 191.

[57] Arms control talks were crucial to the Johnson Administration. This can be seen by his focus on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which was eventually signed in 1968. However, work began on the treaty as early as 1964. See documents 36, 37, 46, 47, 50, 52, and 55 in “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XI, Arms Control and Disarmament,” edited by David S. Patterson (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1997).

[58] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume

XI, Arms Control and Disarmament,” edited by David S. Patterson (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1997), Document 178.

[59] Lyndon B. Johnson, “Message to the Democratic National Convention Prior to the Nomination of a Presidential Candidate, August 28, 1968,” in Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon Johnson, 1968, Book II-July I, 1968 to January 2.0, 1969, 920 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1968).

[60] It is important to remember the President’s Daily Brief of August 23<sup>rd</sup> here. The CIA expressly emphasized the danger of a Soviet invasion of Romania in this report which Johnson saw five days before his speech at the DNC.

[61] “Bilateral Treaty on the ‘Temporary Presence of Soviet Forces on Czechoslovak Territory,’ October 16, 1968,” in *The Prague Spring ’68* ed. Jaromir Navratil (New York: Central European University Press, 2006), 533-536.

[62] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 193.

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[64] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XVII, Eastern Europe, eds. James E. Miller and Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), Document 23.

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