

**University of West Bohemia**  
**Faculty of Arts**

**Master's Thesis**

**The Evolution of Munich Analogy in the American  
Foreign Policy during the Cold War**

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Pilsen 2023

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**Study Program Political Science**  
Field of Study International Relations – Security Studies

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## **Declaration**

Herewith I declare that I have written the Master's Thesis on my own, and I have diligently cited all mentioned sources.

Pilsen, 19th April 2023

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## **Acknowledgment**

A dul thank you shall be addressed to my supervisor doc. PhDr. Přemysl Rosůlek Ph.D. As a tireless reader, he kept aiding my efforts to create a meaningful and original subject projected into this thesis.

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## Introduction

From its signing in 1938, the Munich Agreement became the subject of many disputes and conjectures. Opinions differed on the interpretation of its legal enforceability, the involvement of Western democratic powers, or the historical importance of the agreement itself concerning subsequent developments on the European continent<sup>1</sup>. However, such discussions only reflect that even after more than 80 years, the "Munich betrayal" topic has not been exhausted. Instead, it was mapped from almost all angles during this long time. After all, as the historian Robert Kvaček (2004: 243–252) mentions, the topic of the Munich Agreement is already so richly elaborated that "*here we have to deal with a library that an individual researcher cannot handle*". On the other hand, the subject of "*Munich*" is still obscured by many unknowns. William Rock (1977: 25) for example notes that "*like most great issues in human experience, Munich will be variously interpreted, even after the generation which directly experienced it is gone. No real consensus may emerge, no 'final judgment' seems possible*".

The goal of this thesis is to explain why the US presidents used the Munich analogy continuously during the whole period of bipolar confrontation.

Although never a signatory of the agreement and with no existential threat coming out of it, the United States stayed fixated on Munich legacy for the whole Cold War period and even beyond. During the subsequent decades after the end of WW2, the American administration used, for example, the Vietnam War analogy. However, the Munich analogy as the prevailing specter of appeasement politics never really disappeared and was used with varying degree of significance throughout the whole Cold War period, regardless of the administration's generational change.

It is assumed that the Munich analogy employment by the United States was not a mere reflection of the US Cold War tactics to challenge the Soviet Union but a

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<sup>1</sup> An example of the current debate is the exchange of views on this event between Eduard Stehlík and Jan Němeček on the Czech Radio program (2018).

culmination of historical lessons as part of the cognitive aspects of decision-makers, and the US global strategic assumptions in foreign policy. This assumption will be examined through the cognitive and the Munich analogy aspects (further described in the theoretical-methodological part). Aligning with the stated goal, the thesis postulates one research question:

"Did the enduring usage of the Munich analogy derive only from the anti-Soviet politics after WWII or also from the structural incentives based on the US strategic assumptions and historical lessons"?

The thesis is divided into theoretical-methodological and analytical parts. The theoretical-methodological part is based on a closer examination of cognitive aspects in historical reasoning and the Munich analogy aspects in the American context. Furthermore, it elaborates on strategic assumptions in the US foreign policy, and the Munich analogy's historical roots in the United States. By doing so, it also demonstrates the evolution of the Munich analogy employment by US presidents during the examined period.

Chapter 1 discusses the historical role of analogical reasoning in foreign policy, the benefits and setbacks of using historical analogies, and finally, how politicians find their analogies. In chapter 2, the thesis discusses the Munich analogy aspects by describing the impact of the Munich Agreement on the United States. Additionally, to provide a wider observation of how the US presidents adopted the Munich analogy so eloquently in their political and rhetorical usage, the thesis maps strategic assumptions of US diplomacy and portrays the linkage between the Versailles treaty and the Munich Agreement.

The analytical part demonstrates the employment of the Munich analogy into foreign policy reasoning during concrete international crises. Based on the conducted research, it is possible to discover the Munich analogy played a significant role in Harry Truman's 1950 decision to deploy American troops in Korea, in Eisenhower's 1954 attempt to intervene in Southeast Asia, as well as his 1958 decision to militarily intervene in Lebanon. Also, John Kennedy backed himself by the lesson of Munich Agreement during the Berlin Crisis in 1961 and

the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Furthermore, it was formative in Lyndon Johnson's 1965 decision to deploy American troops in Vietnam, and played a role in justification for the 1969 covert Cambodia bombing by Richard Nixon, likewise in Ronald Reagan's 1986 decision to conduct an airstrike against Libya. Moreover, the analysis of historical documents gives the opportunity to demonstrate that each Munich analogy employment aiming to justify abroad intervention was accompanied by deliberations of the US international obligations, which mirror the president's perception of American foreign-policy nature, and historical roots of the 1938 lesson deriving from personal war experience of presidents. These deliberations were addressed either during their presidential term or, in some cases, before becoming a president. Either way, such statements were addressed during their political careers and will be taken as relevant sources in the thesis. Also, examining national polls and statements by the president's closest aide circle shows the importance of the domestic environment when conducting interventions abroad.

Following this pattern, chapter 3 analyzes Harry Truman's presidency against the background of the Truman Doctrine and the Korean War amidst the containment strategy. Furthermore, chapter 4 examines Dwight Eisenhower's reasoning during the prospect of American involvement in Southeast Asia while coining the domino theory, and the Lebanon intervention amid the formation of Eisenhower doctrine in the Middle East. Coming with the age of John Kennedy, the Munich analogy was still in active use. Yet, as will be described with Berlin Crisis and the Cuban Missile Crisis in chapter 5, Kennedy's employment of the Munich analogy served the purpose of a diplomatic solution rather than to justify a military intervention.

Chapter 6 discusses "Munich" utilization in the captivity of the Vietnam War, further elaborating on Lyndon Johnson's presidency and the Munich analogy's impact during the US engagement in the Vietnam War. Despite its failed involvement in Vietnam, the American presidents still actively sought the Munich analogy. Chapter 7, therefore, addresses reasons behind the habitual tendency to keep evoking the Munich analogy despite the prevailing

consequences of the Vietnam War. Yet, as will be examined, the tradition of using the Munich analogy to conduct open military operation is altered with the Vietnam failure. This change is demonstrated against the background of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan presidencies and their subsequent airstrike operations in Cambodia and Libya, avoiding the prospect of deploying ground forces.

At the same time, with the Libya bombing in 1986 and the following subchapter, the thesis demonstrates the Munich analogy's overarching nature, which moves beyond the usual Cold War narrative of contending with the Soviet Union. Finally, the conclusion provides an evaluation of the thesis's main goal and research question.

# I. Theoretical-Methodological Part

## 1 The Usage of Historical Analogies in the Foreign Policy Process

In order to justify the taken acts, politicians tend to look for any meaningful way to achieve it. One of the most eloquent and usable is the historical analogy. It can not be denied that analogical reasoning has been entrenched in politicians' decision-making throughout all historical periods<sup>2</sup>. The desire to exploit past experiences to form the intellectual framework through which one can interpret current events has been enduring ever since. During the 20th century, analogical reasoning has been substantially used as a rationalizing tool in policy making, that derives from an important element worth discussing.

The element is the singular variety of analogical reasoning that allows politicians to provide seemingly valuable justification for concrete foreign policy decisions. When alluring to analogies, the rationale behind such reasoning derives from the necessity to provide a simplified version of reality. As such, its focus is to illuminate the issue and potentially sway public opinion. On this address, Margaret MacMillan states (2008: 248): "*When we are trying to make sense of a situation [...] to come to a decision, we use analogies to try to discern a pattern and to sort out what is important and what is not*". Analogies are vital to evoke "alike situations" to justify engagement abroad.

During the 20th century, attempts to employ historical analogies were in abundance. After WWI, most Western countries avoided repeating the same mistakes, thus using the "Versailles" lesson. The same pattern has also been employed after WWII. Even after many years, politicians either explicitly or implicitly alluded to these perpetual analogies. For example, the inability of international diplomacy to resolve the Kosovo crisis of 1999 was partly explained by the fixation on "Balkan" analogies emphasizing the disintegration

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<sup>2</sup> The historical roots of this phenomenon can be traced back to the ancient period. Writers such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Salust, Petrarch, Nicholo Machievali or even Edward Gibbon (Brands; Suri 2016: 3) were trying to capture the pervasive link between history and policy.

of European politics leading to WWI (Mumford 2015: 10) and the US insistence on not repeating the same mistakes of Rwanda and Somalia.

Nevertheless, other analogies have been particularly valuable for explaining the future crisis. One such case is the 1989 Eastern European Uprisings which happened to be a valuable historical inspiration for the 2011 Arab Spring. It was, namely, the idea of bottom-up revolution that contributed to the overall fragile regime's collapse. In other words, the Eastern Bloc uprisings inspired Arab countries in their attempt to change the status quo and orient themselves toward liberal order. Generally, it can be stated the Arab Spring/Eastern Bloc analogy is another example of how history can be used to fulfill ideological interpretation of the present situation (Mumford 2015: 14).

Needles to say, however, that using analogies for foreign-policy purposes can act as a double-edged sword. If treated carefully, it can offer a valuable guide for policymakers to avoid previous mistakes, enforce recent decisions, and make them understandable to the broad public. On the contrary, as Jeffrey Record (1998: 23) argues: "*Reasoning by historical analogy can be dangerous, especially if such reasoning is untempered by recognition that no two historical events are identical and that the future is more than a linear extension of the past*".

Both powerful and misleading, the reasoning by historical analogies is a somewhat tricky mechanism that deserves further exploration. As obsolete as it might seem in the 21st century, what makes this set of arguments relevant even today is the assumption of policymakers' further usage of historical analogies.

### **1.1 The Utilities and Perils of Analogy Reasoning**

As stated above, the linkage between policy and history might be efficient as well as haunting. In the academia, the latter mostly prevails as both historians and political scientists are cautious about extracting lessons from history and adopting them to the contemporary milieu. Still, if a politician manages to avoid certain risks and pathologies from this thinking, the decision-making based on historical reasoning can conjure up a great deal of help. Or at least in the given

historical context, it can create a sensible impetus for domestic as well as foreign policy decisions.

History, if carefully used, can be a powerful tool that offers a thorough insight into specific problematics. By a certain piece of rationalism, it can also provide a way to solve them. Additionally, history can help in self-knowledge, enabling us to positively see the country and its representatives. However, this casted light does not have to be shared among other countries with a similar zeal (MacMillan 2008: 231–232), such as the example of American posture of themselves as a non-warlike country<sup>3</sup>. As MacMillan argues, this is not how it might seem to, for example, Nicaraguans, Cubans, or Iraqis (ibid).

The biggest obstacle, however, is the personal motivation of politicians to actively seek and employ historical analogies on situations that do not fit entirely. In other words, foreign policy errors do not come from the lack of political will but from its abundance. As Henry Kissinger points out (1994: 27): "*History teaches by analogy, shedding light on the likely consequences of comparable situations. But each generation must determine for itself which circumstances are comparable*". This logic seems to go hand in hand with Record's distinction of the historical reasoning main pitfall. In fact, one of the most prevailing perils of historical reasoning is a lazy generalization that might result in foreign-policy failures.

Yet the question is, how to overcome these perils? According to Ernest May and Richard Neustadt (1988: passim), policymakers need to adapt themselves to dissect sovereign beliefs by cutting them up and embarking on a novel situation by familiarizing them with concrete conditions. No single event is historically the same. Therefore, the only antidote to prevent any major failure is to recognize "likenesses" and "differences". One of the given examples is the evoked analogy between the Great influenza epidemic of 1918 and the swine flu of 1976. Technically resembling each other, yet with completely different consequences

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<sup>3</sup> An example of such posture can be illustrated by Ronald Reagan's statement about the US anti-war attitude. In 1983, he stated: "*Our country has never started a war. Our sole objective is deterrence, the strength and capability it takes to prevent war*".

on world history and social development, the 1918 "Spanish flu" was castigated on many occasions during the 1976 epidemic.

One of the reasons why the US policymakers evoked the 1918, was the experience of their family members with this flu. As they point out (1988: 154): *"it seems that almost everyone at higher levels of Federal government in 1976 had a parent, uncle, cousin, or at least a family friend who had told lurid tales of personal experience with the 1918 flu"*. As it turned out, the "likeness" between these two epidemics was merely similar in living costs and economic performance. Still, it was constantly implied by many US officials regardless of the overall impact, clearly setting forth the "likeness" and "differences" for analogical reasoning (1988: 163). What this example, however, highlighted is the importance of personal experience.

As was mentioned, one of the essential parts of historical reasoning is analogies. Their role is often integral in how politicians see world issues and adopt measures to fight them. But how do politicians find them in the first place? One such reason is the personal attachment that policymakers have with a concrete historical event. But are there any other reasons, and how is it that some analogies prevail over others with both politicians and the society? The following subchapter will address these questions in more detail.

## **1.2 How Policymakers Find Their Analogies?**

When analyzing foreign policy decision-making, one can not deny the importance of analogies and other impalpable objects such as ideas, perceptions, prejudices, and norms. Interestingly, with the expansion of the cognitive branch in psychology during the second part of the 20th century, reasoning by analogies has been marked as a "cognitive tool" and gained its role among scholars as an integral part of studying foreign policy. This has led to a rapid increase in research works dealing with this phenomenon.

Analogies which could be defined as a *"comparison between one thing and another, where the two things are held to exhibit structural similarities in some or all of their properties"* (Houghton 1996: 524) are often understood as they can

make sense out of newly emerged situations. Moreover, the "cognitive" aspect derives from the assumption that all human beings are rational in their behavior, but their decisions are often affected by their personal experience, domestic environment or international circumstances. Yet still, their behavioral pattern can be measured considering these constraints. This positivistic aspect extracting its essence from Freudian psychoanalytic structure ultimately helped to establish a new form of examining events in international politics. Consequently, analogies have become an indispensable part of this approach, with many authors and works dealing with analogical reasoning in the foreign policy dimension.

A particular focus on the behavioral activities in the FPA is further examined through the lens of cognitive theory. This theory encompasses activities such as memorizing and recalling information and pattern recognition, as well as more complex ones like social judgments, analytic reasoning, and learning with the overall goal of simplifying the decision-making process (Rapport 2016: 1). In an attempt to examine how leaders use analogies in foreign-policy decision making, the cognitive theory analyses concepts such as beliefs or images which are influenced by domestic environment, previous experiences and generational effects.

Beliefs are key in creating historical analogies. They derive from the perception of another state or individual that deviates from "normative" thinking established in a particular country. The American people, for example, went through no social revolution during their history. This has a unique effect on seeing themselves as "equal". By seeing the world through such a prism, the Americans will have difficulty understanding Europe's social system and subsequently interpreting it in terms of their antiradical fetishism (Hartz 1955: 723). On the individual level, this often results in a binary view of good/bad countries based on a liberal democratic system. All communist countries, for example, might be automatically regarded as enemies to American security and the world order.

Related to an individual's beliefs are also images. Similar to beliefs, images are cognitive schemes that share a person's "*interrelated knowledge about a concept or stimulus*" and are structured in a hierarchical order (Larson 1994: 19–20). As

with beliefs, images can also be regarded as simplified versions of their referents. In this regard, an individual may project an image of a „dictator“ whose characteristics (aggressive, evil, violent etc.) might fit into specific pattern of leaders, such as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Ho Ci Minh, and many others (Rapport 2016: 6).

Of particular importance are also past events that were experienced by a future decision-maker. In this manner, Robert Jervis (1976: 649–653) argues that those experiences that occur during a person’s adult life are among the most intense and formative. During this period, the individual absorbs new ideas and concepts that, once embedded, maintain a discernible influence for the rest of one’s life. Jervis addresses adulthood as a formative period in which the most fundamental orientations are confirmed. Among the most impactful events, he counts wars or conflicts.

Wars by their nature dominate the life of a given country and their citizens. The ways how the war was conducted, the methods of terminating the war and the final result, have all great impact on those who experienced it firsthand (Jervis 1976: 677). Mindful of portentous implications, the future statesman will probably implement these dimensions into his political reasoning.

In the case of the United States, the signing of the Munich Agreement had almost no implications on their security. It, however, led them to reconsider the importance of European continent, and especially the alliance with Great Britain being still vital for both countries. The specter of war was finally embodied in 1941, resulting in the US involvement in WWII. Unlike most European societies, American society was not under a permanent threat of aggression, nor was the American economy as devastated as their European counterparts were (in fact, quite the opposite happened). Finally, the Americans should not have been worried about any significant spillover into their country due to its geographical distance. Despite these facts, many Americans were horrified by the ongoing war in Europe and beyond. This experience was detrimental to American politicians in the same way as to ordinary citizens. Therefore, it is safe to assume the effect

of one generation experiencing this kind of event plays a crucial role in making lessons and trying to avoid previous mistakes which led to this conflict.

According to Jervis, the generational effect is another important layer in molding a person's views and beliefs. In the period of thinking about politics, the climate of opinion is central to dissecting what values are essential. For example, all those coming of age at the time of war are similarly affected by these [antiwar] views (1976: 654). In other words, the generation of the 1930s shared a common historical dimension that "*created a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and characteristic type of historically relevant faction*" (Manheim 1951: 290–291). The generational effect of those Americans who witnessed WWI or WWII firsthand, or whose thoughts were molded by the common dread of witnessing it once more, has laid a definite antiwar foundation for the upcoming years.

Similarly, the domestic environment is also crucial in the decision-making process. First is the bureaucracy. Each foreign policy decision is a result of merely one person. It is quite the opposite. There is a myriad of people whose positions might be influential in both positive and negative terms. The "bureaucratic model" has its leverage in most fundamental foreign agendas. As Graham Allison and Morton Halperin (1972: *passim*) demonstrated, the US praxeology is usually derived from the interaction between the president and his aides. Although authoritative in terms of "calling the final shot", the president heavily relies on recommendations, assessments and personal views by the ambassador, regional military commander, Joint Chief of Staff, National Security Advisor, Secretary of State Defense, and many others (1972: 45). Ultimately, these insights may or may not assure the president's perception and contribute to the overall decision.

The second aspect of the domestic environment is wider public. Each president needs to be aware of the peculiarity of their voters and the ever-changing environment under which policies are made. As observed by Robert McMahon (2005: 97), the US foreign relations and domestic politics are linked together, especially because it is "*intrinsically, a Janus face field, one that looks both*

*outward and inward for the wellsprings of America's behavior in the global arena*". Retaining power, electoral considerations, approval rating, and partisan politics seem to be among the major calculations that each president takes into account. These calculations were in abundance with American presidents. The unwillingness of Franklin Roosevelt to break the neutrality status in the 1930s or the initial public support to intervene in Korea were all examples of how the public might influence the president's decisions.

In terms of deciding what historical analogy might be invoked, politicians use those past events that are agreed on to be exceptionally sensitive, commonly experienced, and socially accepted. One impediment to this thinking is the overgeneralization of particular analogies to receive political and public support. As such, they might prove to be unreliable guide to present day policy decisions. On the other hand, they can lay out a distinctive pattern to follow, which might speed up the decision-making process. As will be examined in the following chapters, both sides of this coin appear to be true in the case of the United States.

## 2 Aspects of the Munich Analogy in American Context

Referring to the Munich analogy evokes the remembrance of the notorious Munich Agreement of 1938. The biggest victims of this pact were, undoubtedly, Czechoslovaks. Being ripped off part of their territory and then completely conquered by German nazis, its elites as well as ordinary citizens, felt betrayed by Western countries. In Czechoslovakia, the real implications coming from the agreement were so devastating that the events of September 1938 even got its name – the Munich Trauma.

Deeply embedded in the minds of Czechoslovakian people, the Munich Trauma has become a consensually accepted traumatic event for both the political and social milieu. Indeed, compared to other countries, the implications for Czechoslovakia were fatal. Germans swallowed its territorial sovereignty, the political elite was persecuted, and its citizens faced constant repression. Nevertheless, for some Czech scholars, the 1938 event meant a different type of experience. A historian Jan Tesař (2000: *passim*), condemns the narrative of the Western betrayal of Czechoslovakia by what he calls a "Czech myth" and offers a counter-argument stating that "Munich" was a collective, unifying, and intensive experience solidifying Czech national consciousness. According to him, the failure to rightfully identify the nature of such an experience contributed to the Communist takeover in 1948.

Yet, the Czechoslovakian response was adequately reciprocal to the event. Politicians disdained the agreement, referring to it as a "scrap of paper"<sup>4</sup> and further describing it as a symbol of betrayal, weakness and capitulation. In culture the theme of Munich betrayal resonated in many works and genres, including movies<sup>5</sup>, poems and fictions<sup>6</sup>. Finally, the destiny of Czechoslovakia was sealed until the end of the WW2.

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<sup>4</sup> The term "scrap of paper" was firstly used by the Czech diplomat Hubert Ripka (1939: 85) when describing France's failure to honor its commitments under the Locarno pact toward Czechoslovakia as "*scrap of paper diplomacy*".

<sup>5</sup> Among the most notable belongs a coloured documentary movie *Dny zrady* (Days of Betrayal, 1973) which captures the moments of 1938.

From the international viewpoint, the failure of the Munich Agreement confirmed beliefs about the appeasement politics inefficiency. As Henry Kissinger points out (1994: 314): "*Munich has entered our vocabulary as a specific aberration-the penalty of yielding to blackmail*". The lesson was clear; democracies must be engaged in securing international order by employing early and more effective force to stop it. What is surprising is that although unambiguous about the necessity to fight against the aggressor, the "lesson" does not specify how to perform it.

For the United States, however, the basic characteristics and obligations of the Munich analogy derived from the fact that after the WW2 the Nazis Germany and Hitler were replaced by the Soviet Union, communism and Stalin as a threat to liberal democracies and international security (Rystad 1982: 33). As such, the Munich analogy had quite clear implementations in their foreign-policy: (I.) crossing national borders and intervening in foreign state issues to avoid the "domino" fall of other countries; (II.) employing all available instruments, including military ones, to stop the aggressor; (III.) engaging in international alliances; (IV.) entering strategic partnerships with non-democratic regimes

Not all of these characteristics were fulfilled when conducting operations to curtail communism. As will be examined in the following chapters, some cases were subjected to diplomatic solutions. Similarly, some operations were conducted solely by the United States and with no international support. Still, the US treatment empowered the Munich analogy as a foreign-policy tool in the upcoming Cold War. To get a better sense of the American motivations for employing this analogy, it is necessary to discuss the Munich Agreement's impact on the United States. As will be discussed, despite its non-existential

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<sup>6</sup> One of the most immediate literary responses to the crisis was the anthology *Torzo naděje* (Torso of Hope, 1939) by František Halas, *Historický obraz* (Historical Image, 1955) by Vítězslav Nezval, *Cesta blesku* (Path of the Lightning, 1952) and *Sedm hrobů* (Seven Graves, 1956) by Marie Majerová. For more details about Czechoslovak literary treatment about Munich crisis, see McLoughlin, Kate (2008: 543–562).

threat on the US statehood, the Munich Agreement meant a significant event impacting their future foreign-policy behavior in the Cold War period.

## **2.1 The Impact of Munich Agreement on the United States**

The treaty's signing, later known as the Munich Agreement, was an attempt to stop emerging German expansion in Central Europe. However, it only resulted in a devaluation of appeasement politics that Britain had been using since the 19th century. Now, it became a symbol of "naivete and weakness" and gained its status as one of the dirtiest words in American politics (Logevall; Osgood 2010: 14). In the Bavarian city of Munich, both Neville Chamberlain and Édouard Daladier were desperate to sacrifice a piece of Czechoslovakian territory in return for a pledge of peace<sup>7</sup>. This kind of reasoning soon proved to be too naive and blind as it just enabled Hitler to conquer all of Czechoslovakia and seize its power here. Ironically enough, after Chamberlain's famous line of "saving peace in our time", Germany, due to newly gained territories and military preparedness, invaded Poland in September 1939, ultimately causing the official start of WWII. Although not one of the signatory countries of the 1938 agreement, the onset of WWII was for Americans an unprecedented act of aggression similar to Japan's expansion in Asia. Still, the US non-engagement mood, officially framed in Neutrality Act (1935–1939), was too strong and prevailed among many politicians and the broad public until the very last month of 1941. Most Americans felt secured under the official status of neutral country despite many objections by Franklin D. Roosevelt about the increasing aggression by Italy, Japan and Germany.

Yet because of its geographical distance and natural barrier in the form of two oceans, the emerging threat of Axis powers did not have such an intimidating

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<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that for many British, as well as for Neville Chamberlain himself, was Czechoslovakia a "*faraway country of whom we know nothing*". The determinance of Chamberlain not to drag Britain into a war is even more symptomatic by his commentary of "*how horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas-masks here because of a quarrel in that remote place*" (1938: 22).

effect on the United States as it did on many European countries. Moreover, Hitler himself did not have the prospect of the US power in high regard, stating: "*I do not see the future of United States too bright*" (quoted in Ferguson 2006: 497). Thus, the only threat that could cause a harm on American territory were Japans. Yet the Japanese economic dependence on the US was so deep that barely anyone could have predicted any aggression<sup>8</sup>. The more surprising was the attack on naval bases in Hawaii in December 1941. Although the initial damage might have seemed shocking<sup>9</sup> and it rightfully infuriated both politicians and broad public, its strategic impact was rather negligible. Most warships were only damaged, and the local crews managed to escape them. Also, Japanese bombardiers did not hit American diesel tankers or submarine covers. Most importantly, all American aircraft carriers were on the open sea during the attack, remaining in total numbers for all future operations.

Still however, the United States in reaction to this act finally entered WWII and almost immediately started the most intense mobilization of human, physical, and financial resources in history. During the whole conflict, more than 11 million Americans were called on to join the army, with 405 000 losing their lives and over 670 000 being wounded (Adams 1951: 23; De Bruyne & Leland 2015: 2). On the domestic front, American citizens faced severe conditions as well. Huge reductions in both fuel consumption and main ingredients such as sugar, butter, bacon, meat, or cooking fats being rationed meant huge sacrifices for most of them.

Despite these dire effects, the United States came out empowered on almost all fronts. Its economy witnessed record growth due to a surplus of incentives from all battlefields American soldiers were engaged in. American companies moved from producing consumer goods to war supplies and military vehicles. The

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<sup>8</sup> One third of Japanese export was coming from the USA, including cotton, metal and oil. Even more dependent was on the US machinery and special purpose machine tools (quoted in Ferguson 2006: 463).

<sup>9</sup> More than 2 000 members of armed forces died, almost half of all American air force in that area was destroyed, eight battle ships, three destroyers and three cruisers were decommissioned (quoted in Johnson 1997: 621).

record pace at which these supplies were produced could be attributed both to the flexibility of the US business model and economic power. Persons such as Henry Kaiser, Henry Morrison, and John McCone, with astonishingly effective production of river dams, have established themselves as a symbol of American entrepreneurial prudence and economic power. Other industries such as steel, aviation, and automobile have also created millions of job opportunities for regular Americans.

By the time of the United States being fully involved in war, Roosevelt's "fireside chat" address in 1943 has confirmed the failure of appeasement politics by saying that *"for too many years we lived on pious hopes that aggressor and warlike nations would learn and understand and carry out the doctrine of purely voluntary peace. The well-intentioned but ill-fated experiments of former years did not work"* (quoted in Siracusa 2004: unpagged).

The Munich analogy laid its roots in American society in the same manner as it did in British, French or Czechoslovakian one. Nevertheless, one might ask whether it sufficiently correlates to the actual reality. The signing of the Munich Agreement had no real implications on either American territory or statehood. Being outside the main theater of war until 1941, the USA entered European battlefields rather from moral reasons than from any prospect of existential threat. The Japanese attack was on remote islands and, even if successful, would have caused almost no harm to the US integrity. Simply put, its geographical isolation gave Americans a safety net protecting their interests and security for WWII. Despite this, the Munich analogy has become an inseparable asset in US diplomacy during the Cold War period. Except for Czechoslovakia, no other country has been using this analogy as often as the Americans did.

In the Cold War environment, the analogical reasoning turned out to be an exceptionally efficient tool in halting the communist threat. Its usage, however, was not just an ad hoc decision reacting to bipolar structure, as often described. Its inception was rather formed by the legacy of Versailles treaty, generational effect of interwar period, president's preoccupations and the US strategic assumptions.

## 2.2 Strategic Assumptions of the US Diplomacy

The grand figure of American diplomacy, George Kennan (1947: not paged), once noted that: "*We Americans like our adversaries wholly inhuman; all powerful, omniscient, monstrously efficient, unhampered by any serious problems of their own, and bent only on schemes for our destruction. Whatever their real nature, we persist in seeing them this way*".

Although this description might be appealing to many US foreign policy hawks, as well as its critics, it does not express the traditional nature of US strategic assumptions.

Since its birth in 1776, the security prospects of the United States were based on two fundamental assumptions. The first assumption was the geographical proximity/distance to abroad affairs. To what extent should the United States defend its national interest? Should it start on the far or near side of the ocean? (Roskin 1974: 566). According to American scholar of geopolitics Nicholas Spykman, this dilemma is "*the oldest issue in American foreign policy*" (Spykman 1972: 5–7). Based on this perception the US foreign policy can be divided into "non-interventionist", also called "isolationist" phase/paradigm, and "interventionist", also called "internationalist" phase/paradigm. As Michael Roskin points out (ibid): "*These antiethical views shift under the impact of catastrophes which seem to prove that the old paradigm was wrong and its adherents mistaken*". What proves to be wrong shall not be repeated. Throughout US history, it can be seen there is a general pattern of eschewing previous mistakes, thus reversing its methods to achieve positive results in foreign policy. Yet, the picture gets rather dubious connotations when looking at the nature of US engagement in foreign policy issues.

First and foremost, the United States was never a non-interventionist (isolationist) country in the real sense of this word. The traditional isolationist state units, such as ancient Egypt or China, had an isolationist propensity due to their natural barriers. Despite its large ocean barriers from both sides, the United States was always an internationalist country. The American elites were always open to negotiating, establishing commercial ties, and being in contact with

foreign countries, no matter the distance. Unlike the Spanish, Franco-Canadian, or Portuguese, the Americans were desperate to get in touch with Russia (through Oregon state and Alaska), China, Spain, Britain, and many other European countries (Johnson 1997: 615). There was no such thing as isolationism in how America perceived and treated other states.

During the 19th century, often cited as the primetime of American isolationism, their interests lied mainly in the American continent. The expansionism was rather local, than global. Still, for all the proponents of "America first" motto or Manifest Destiny, the importance of global expansionism was inevitable<sup>10</sup>. In Asian countries, for example, the American influence spread throughout the whole 19th century. Along the commercial interests, there were also religious and cultural interests in countries such as Thailand, Burma, Korea, and China, embodied by thousands of missionaries, explorers, educators, and researchers (Ariye 1967: 67–70), and with the only exception of Japan, the propensity to adopt American culture and technologies was very much present in Asian countries. With the definitive victory in the Spanish-American war in 1898 and the subsequent intervention in Cuba and the Philippines, it was clear that the US emergence as a great power was a generally accepted phenomenon.

The official US entry in WW1 meant the definitive end of the conflict, which then led to a drastic shift of power in the international order. Even though Americans were not tempered to issue major interventions in Europe, its influence still prevailed even after. The initiation of the United Nations was based on idealistic conception through which European issues would be solved without any major American intervention. Following the 1930's, although focused on domestic issues related to the Great Depression, they were still very much intrigued by what was going on in Europe<sup>11</sup>. With the Pearl Harbor attack,

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<sup>10</sup> Imperialism was the central theme in the 1900's presidential elections. The convincing victory of the "imperialist" candidate, William McKinley, shall serve as a good example of the public mood during that period (for more about the 1900's presidential elections, see Rystad, Goran 1975)

<sup>11</sup> An example of American support was the Lend-Lease Act (1941) by which the US government supplied its allied countries with food, oil and other material.

American neutrality was dismantled, thus creating a new chapter in American internationalism applied during the Cold War era.

The second assumption lies in its ideology and in what ways it should be enforced. Based on the fabric of American history, certain elements need to be considered when speaking about American ideology. First is the idealistic tradition from the Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman and British influence. By combining philosophical-religious incentives, the first colonies were handed over a genuinely remarkable amalgam of particular beliefs revolving around equality and unalienable rights, such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (quoted in National Archives: unpagged). These fundamentals are the cornerstone of US national identity and as such, they are naturally sought in foreign relations. This idealistic approach was, however, quite conservative in its usage as it relies mainly on its "soft power". In other words, not all states could have been attracted into American orbit just by promoting freer and more prosperous world based on liberal democracy, recognizing state sovereignty, and maintaining durable peace through international cooperation. Ultimately, with the emergence of American power in the 19th and 20th centuries, this idealistic tradition proved insufficient in reacting to new challenges in a more globalized world.

Along the idealism, there were also threads of realism that played an essential role in domestic and foreign policy. The central premise of the American realistic thread derives from the Roman and European tradition in recognizing the need for law and police and military force (Klingberg 1996: 1). Whatsmore, the realistic idea of maintaining international order by force started to be increasingly apparent during the American expansionist era in the 19th century. From local to global spheres, the realistic tradition gained influence with the rise of the American military and economic power. Unlike the idealistic approach believing in the "right makes might"<sup>12</sup> motto and other states of being generally

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<sup>12</sup> This motto was firstly used by Abraham Lincoln during the Cooper Union speech in 1861. Its main argument was to persuade Southerners to abolish slavery. This speech is considered to be one of the most influential in American history.

"good", the realistic approach delves deeper into the complexity of international relations and treats other states as possibly "evil".

The question arises whether the United States should imply symbolical or also military power. The symbolical power is understood as a way of securing international order by the central pillars of American identity on other states in a non-military way. Seen from the 19th century, what had been truly developed, however, was a "realistic idealism" - the willingness to use force in order to defend ideas of freedom and justice, with the ultimate goal of achieving peace (Klingberg 1996: xii). The United States was determined to enforce its will and beliefs on other "deviating" states and was not either withheld by the prospect of military solution to achieve it. In the 20th century, the convergence of American idealistic and realistic tradition seems to be a "right on time" mechanism vis a vis all potential challenges, namely the Soviet threat in the emerging Cold War.

Based on these two assumptions, the Munich agreement derived from the American internationalist perception of world affairs. Regarding the idealism versus realism duality, the use of the Munich Agreement mirrored the traits of American realistic idealism, as described above. To address the concrete reasons, which led to this conclusion, it is important to map the historical roots of the Munich analogy in American context.

### **2.3 The Historical Roots of Munich Analogy in the US Employment**

In the USA, the (in)direct roots of the Munich analogy can be traced back to the end of WWI. In the prelude to this conflict, the historical conditions especially appealed to the United States. Although many scholars commenting the US only had limited influence on world issues, the contrary was true. Similarly, as with the overture to WWII, Americans were no isolationists in the 1910s. Being equipped with enormous wealth and diplomatic muscle, they were able to pursue economic goals in the same manner as to control European financial movements through arms control regimes and loans (Kagan 2023: 545). Just as before WWII, the USA was also internationalist before WWI. And just as 20 years later, the outbreak of WWI had almost no impact on US statehood. When the war broke

off, the reaction of many Americans was more of excitement and curiosity than fear coming from the newly erupted conflict on the European continent. (ibid). The official American statement to the war was declared neutrality, enabling the USA to become a mediator rather than a straight participant. Yet declaring neutrality did not permit American presidents to be engaged in European matters in another way.

For Woodrow Wilson, the German's belligerent tactics were worth not only condemning, but also halting. Nevertheless, the main reason for the United States was not security but the economy. Although relatively self-sufficient economically, the entanglement with European economies was still significant. With the outbreak of WW1, many Americans working in steel to shoemaking industries lost their jobs (Wilson 1914: 445). Similarly, the war abruptly disrupted the transatlantic exchange, causing raw materials, grain, and manufactured goods to be stocked in warehouses (Kagan 2023: 256). Under these circumstances, it was all natural that the Wilson administration reacted by prompting citizens and companies to continue exchanging. In spite of the official "neutrality" that the president was obliged to breed<sup>13</sup>, it did not permit American politicians to encourage private businesses to flourish. This was certainly the case with the US-UK partnership<sup>14</sup> which was done at the expense of Americans trading with the Germans.

However, the staunch position of neutrality that the United States remained in seriously impacted how the war in Europe continued. After realizing the war was not about to end in a few weeks, as was initially predicted, America's lofty ambitions to create conditions for peacemaking became somewhat elusive. Moreover, it became clear that the conflict would not end until America's direct engagement.

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<sup>13</sup> The duty to stay neutral was also underlined by Woodrow Wilson during the Jackson Day in January 1915: "*Look upon the troubled world. Only America is at peace!*".

<sup>14</sup> There are countless works dealing with the the US-British partnership during WWI. Good observation offers for example Zieger, Robert (2021: passim) and Grey, Keene, Jennifer (2021: passim).

Germany's decision to deploy U-boats and submarines changed the nature of war and, after sinking the Lusitania vessel in 1916, bypassed the US perceived justness of staying neutral. The Lusitania crisis was a decisive event which, according to many American top advisers, meant a blank check sent by Germany to American leadership. Yet still, Wilson did not plan to drag American soldiers into war, and the somewhat uneven opinion of American citizens and many politicians about joining European allies only reassured his unwillingness (Link 1960: 375). Certainly attuned to public opinion, Wilson insisted on staying out of the conflict.

With the Lusitania sinking, the risk of war was imminent even for Americans. There was also increasing criticism among many opposite politicians, such as Theodore Roosevelt, denouncing "professional pacifists" and "peace-at-any-price men" while mainly targeting Wilson himself (Kagan 2023: 333). Needless to say that Wilson was worried about the ongoing war in Europe and the polarization inside his country. When the German foreign minister, Arthur Zimmerman, sent a memo commenting on the situation of "*more than 500 000 trained Germans in America*" (Link 1960: 309–310) and offering the Mexican government subsidies and territorial gains<sup>15</sup> in exchange for Mexico's participation, Wilson's lamentations about engaging in war gained much clearer traits. Finally, after Kaiser Wilhelm decision to renew submarine warfare against the US vessels, the only way to solve this dilemma was to enter the war. This decision was embodied in 1917 by Wilson issuing the first American troops to be sent to Europe.

Undoubtedly, the US engagement in WWI was a turning point in ending the conflict. Their ability to move on naval and ground fronts was a decisive factor that helped the Allies defeat Germany and Austria-Hungary. The prospect of Germany dominating the whole of Europe was put to its end by the Americans.

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<sup>15</sup> The so called "Zimmerman telegram" offered the Mexican government gains in the US states, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, along with guns and cash in exchange for waging war with the United States. Therefore, the US would have to defeat Mexico in the first place and, after that, face the Germans in Europe.

The world after WW1 was, for a brief moment, out of danger coming from revisionist states. In the words of Theodore Roosevelt (quoted in Osgood 1953: 151): "*Americans fought Germany in order to defeat an arch of foe for international right and of ordered freedom throughout the world*". This was certainly true in the early 1920s. However, its prospect of maintaining enduring peace was squandered even before many states realized it. The Versailles treaty of 1918 was supposed to bring peace and prevent a future "arch of foe" from coming to the surface. What yet achieved by its rigorous conditioning was creating a background for an even more belligerent regime to come. The postwar international order witnessed years of democracy flourishing but also created foundations for future peace to crumble.

For the United States, as for the rest of Western countries, the conditions for the Munich analogy existed before the infamous Chamberlain's attempt to secure "peace in our time" in 1938. Most notably, the Versailles treaty did not fulfill its primary goal, that is, to set foundations for peace in the long term. It did not even secure peace conditions right after signing the document. Where the treaty failed to deliver its promises, appeasement politics was supposed to play its role. In the words of Martin Gilbert (1967: 56): „*appeasement and the [Versailles] treaty were linked inextricably*". Simply put, appeasement was a policy aiming to achieve "peace without victory" not delivered by the Versailles treaty (Rasmussen 2003: 507).

With the creation of the League of Nations, the Versailles treaty and its lessons were evoked again to integrate Germany as a member state. The League's "collective security" focus conveyed a clear message of appeasement politics that would terminate reparations and maintain Germany in the European security structures. The nature of appeasement politics seemed to be a particularly favorable option in the 1920s and 1930s mainly because it enabled Germany to hold accountable for their crimes by a set of agreements rather than by wielding a military power.

In essence, appeasement reflected not only the British "*instinct [of] shaking hands and make up after a fight*" (quoted in Rasmussen 2004: 510) but rather the

whole Western identity. Thus, it is no surprise the construction of peace and security as inseparable assets in postwar praxeology has become a true cornerstone in the lesson of the Versailles treaty. This was the case for American leadership. Like the British, American statesmen were also determined to secure peace at any cost. As was described, the appeasement policy has brought fruits in terms of halting German militarism and holding them accountable for outbursting the war. The biggest setback, however, was that Western statesmen could not recognize that with Hitler coming into power, Germany was no longer a civil democratic country. For Britain, just as for the United States, appeasement peaked with the Munich Agreement as it symbolized the policy's ultimate failure.

After WWII, the new international order was short of any meaningful guide or praxeology aligning Western powers to act together. Having in recent memory, what led to Hitler's rise, the lesson of appeasement policy's failure had to be recognized to face a newly emerged threat; the Soviet Union (Rasmussen 2004: 512). This time, American leaders had no intention to repeat the same mistakes that led after WWI to establishing the nazi régime and with the Munich Agreement, leading to WWII.

The focus of the theoretical part was to demonstrate the complexity of historical reasoning, especially the Munich analogy, among American politicians. As was discussed, the reasons behind the US special treatment were not mere anti-Soviet politics that came in handy in the Cold War period. It had much deeper roots dating back to the failure of the Versailles treaty and the subsequent appeasement politics. Not a figure of speech but a true foreign-policy beacon, the Munich analogy symbolized for the United States a memento of not-appeasing any aggressor. Furthermore, as was demonstrated, the Munich analogy appeared entirely fitting with the United States internationalist nature and the realistic idealism narrative. Finally, the significance of the Munich analogy was embedded among the US presidents due to their personal experience with the impact of the Versailles treaty and the Munich Agreement.

In the analytical part, special attention will be paid to each US presidential administration that was active in using the Munich analogy. Their decision-making will be further examined through the lens of cognitive theory and the aspects of the Munich analogy as part of the following subchapter outlining the methodology and research design.

#### **2.4. Methodology and Research Design**

The structure of the thesis is designed as a single case study of the Munich analogy development in US foreign policy during the Cold War. For this work, the Cold War period will be framed by the end of WWII to the final collapse of the Soviet Union, i.e., 1945–1991. The research method used is foreign policy analysis (FPA) based on cognitive theory, which focuses on the cognitive aspects of decision-making process. The exclusive focus will be on presidents, as their powers in the foreign policy are relatively strong, yet somehow elusive in terms of war powers<sup>16</sup>.

By this approach, the thesis further examines each presidential administration that was active in using the Munich analogy for foreign policy issues. The examination of the decision-making process leading to military, non-military and covert operations is based on cognitive and the Munich analogy aspects.

In terms of cognitive aspects, first is the president's war experience, which is examined by him invoking the failures of the Versailles treaty or the Munich Agreement. Second is the domestic environment that is being examined by the public opinion - approval rating in the given period<sup>17</sup>. Third is the influence of the president's aide circle members<sup>18</sup>, which is examined by their references to

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<sup>16</sup> In terms of war powers, the position of American president "*shall have power, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, to make treaties, provided two-thirds of the Senators present concur*" (National Archives: undated). However, as Goran Rystad (1981: 18) points out, there is no indication when and at what particular stage of the negotiating process, the Senate shall give its advice.

<sup>17</sup> For logical reasons, there will be no approval rating provided in case of covert operations.

<sup>18</sup> The term "aide circle members" refers to the highest-positioned persons in each administration. These are the vice president, National Security Advisor, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, (often) CIA Director, General of the Army and Ambassadors.

the Munich analogy. Finally, it is the president's perception of the US strategic assumptions that is examined through his proclamations of the Cold War as a struggle between "good" and "evil" blocs, as well as emphasizing on the US necessity to intervene abroad.

In terms of the Munich analogy aspects, the peculiarity of American treatment lies in their willingness to cross national borders and interfere in foreign state issues, employ all possible instruments to face the aggressor, often times participate in international alliances and enter strategic partnerships with non-democratic regimes.

For the purpose of this thesis, the Munich analogy is understood in looser terms, deriving from the historical essence of the 1920s and the 1930s appeasement. Hence, the concrete interventions will be then selected against the background of presidential speeches, in which they explicitly used expressions such as "Munich", "Munichism", "Hitler", "Chamberlain", and "Sudetenland", but also the "1930s", "1938", and "appeasement".

To support the thesis's main goal, there is also used a research method of document analysis from *National Archives, Department of State, J.F.K Library, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Office of the Historian, the UC Santa Barbara American Project, Department of State*, as well as presidential diaries and national polls.

Lastly, the thesis relies on publications such as Jeffrey Record's *Making War, Thinking History. Munich, Vietnam and Presidential Uses of Force Korea to Kosovo* (2002), Goran Rystad's *Prisoners of the Past. The Munich Syndrome and Makers of American foreign policy in the Cold War era* (1982), and Stephen Theoharis' *The Myth of the Munich Analogy* (1971), among other works reflecting historical analogies projected in the foreign policy milieu.

## II. Analytical Part

### 3 The Munich Analogy at the Onset of the Cold War

In the context of the rising bipolar world structure, the inevitability of facing the Soviet Union was present in almost every dimension of the US statecraft. Nazism and Hitler were replaced by communism and Stalin, yet the nature of the totalitarian approach was the same. For the US presidents, who were aware of the new international order and the role of the United States in it, was detrimental to put their foreign policies into a particular framework. As was mentioned, the Munich analogy fit perfectly in the Cold War environment. In addition to this, the US foreign policy was heavily influenced by the so called "containment strategy"<sup>19</sup>. The policy of containment was based on assumptions aligning with the Munich analogy aspects. Moreover, it proved its value by prompting a quick reaction to the early post-war communist threats in places like Iran, Greece, and Turkey. The importance of containing communism, combined with the Munich analogy reasoning, created a substantial paradigm for US foreign policy. The main domain of such policy demanding to promptly react and contain an inherently aggressive communist régime, seemed even more plausible with the release of an article called *American Century* (1941) by a prominent newspaper magnate Henry Luce.

Despite its release date, it resurfaced as an ideological source after WWII, justifying the US engagement in foreign issues. In the upcoming ideological battle (and possibly a military one) with the Soviet Union, the US leadership found this article fascinating in the precision with which Luce articulated the "realist-idealistic" demand for the United States to defend its own shores, but also defend democratic values abroad. Unsurprisingly, this article became a blueprint, perhaps a grand strategy for all upcoming US administrations (Logevall 2021: 270). The expansive assessment that Luce was making in 1940, proved to be even more desirable now than ever before.

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<sup>19</sup> The containment strategy is further afield in subchapter 3.1.

### **3.1 Harry Truman and the Rise of Containment Strategy**

As a staunch exponent of American exceptionalism (AmericanForeignRelations 2021: unpagged) and ardent anti-communist, Harry Truman was undoubtedly influenced by Luce's article. The invoked call for US foreign engagement resembled Truman's attitude toward US international obligations and the appeasement policy. Operating in a framework that obliged the American leadership to be engaged in foreign issues, Truman underlined the main tenet of the US Cold War policy by saying: "*The free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world – and we shall surely endanger the welfare of our Nation*" (National Archives 1947: unpagged). Additionally, Truman's memories of the Versailles treaty failure made him to reinvoke the necessity to stop appeasing, and rather actively participating in preventing the enemy's rise. During the Postdam Conference in 1945, when pointing at the ill treatment with defeated Germany, Truman asserted that (1955: 902): "*The experience at Versailles following the last war does not encourage the hope that a full formal peace conference can succeed without preliminary preparation*". In a similar vein, Truman summarized the responsibility the United States have after WWII in his 1948 address (quoted in Koenig 1956: 270): "*Twice in one generation the United States has had the opportunity to lead countries of the world to peace. After World War I we shirked our responsibilities. World War II taught us a lesson*".

Following the end of WWII, Truman adhered to the idea of the United States playing the role of global policeman. This viewpoint underpinned assumed America's unique and universal message of benefit to the rest of the world by proclaiming its demands on preserving liberal values and humankind rights (Fousek 2000: 5). As it became more apparent that the only meaningful way to stop the communist expansion was the internationalized role of the US economic and military power, there was a desire among the US leadership to come up with one universal strategy.

This strategy was delivered in 1947 by the US ambassador to the Soviet Union, George Kennan. Perhaps no other political advisor had such an impactful legacy on decision-making than him. As a sharp observer of Soviet politics, he assembled a letter containing thoughts on Soviet culture and, more importantly, providing guiding principles on how the Truman administration should handle communist expansionism. What was sent under the anonymous name of "X" article, later extended into a memo called *Long Telegram*<sup>20</sup>, soon became a main pillar of the containment strategy. Kennan's message was clear; to face the Soviet Union, the United States shall support democratic regimes in countries under the threat of communist influence. Moreover, it shall be done by providing political, economic, and military aid. This assertion hit the right spot in Truman's worldview and meant a reassuring voice for the inevitable "civilization clash" that Truman was certain about<sup>21</sup>. Soon enough, the containment strategy was embodied in the first post-war doctrine by which Truman's administration sought to expel the emerging communist threat from democratic countries.

This embodiment was called Truman Doctrine and was officially announced in 1947 during a speech to Congress. Aligned with the main message of the *Long Telegram*, Truman was raising the issue of containing communism even further. In reaction to the crisis in Near East, he applied the lessons of the Munich Agreement to persuade Congress to provide financial aid to Greece and Turkey by evoking the early equivalent of the domino theory<sup>22</sup> when enlisting the potential consequences if the Greek and Turkish governments were spared of any American support

The dramatic and persuasive tone by which the Truman Doctrine was addressed undoubtedly contributed to Congress's quick decision to hive off 400 million

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<sup>20</sup> Two years after publishing the "X" article in *Foreign Affairs*, Kennan penned his most influential text called *Long Telegram*. This memo was sent straight to Truman administration and helped to formulate the containment strategy in more detail. Its name refers to 5,500 words the document was made of (Costigliola 2023: 10).

<sup>21</sup> In many cases, Harry Truman described the United States as the "leader of the free world" that must confront Communism and save humankind from its "evils" (AmericanForeignRelations 2021: unpagged).

<sup>22</sup> The domino theory will be further discussed in chapter 4.

dollars in funds by the approval of 67–23 in the Senate and 287–107 in the House of Representatives (quoted in Rystad 1982: 30). Reacting to the British decision to stop providing financial and military assistance to the Greek government in its war against the local Communist Party, Truman saw this conflict as a breeding ground for further communist expansion. At the same time, Truman was aware about the potential spillover to Turkey where the British government initially disposed of a strong economic muscle.

These cases manifested the containment strategy created by US strategic masterminds. Most notably, it was George Kennan and his deeply probing view into Russian/Soviet culture and politics, along with the explicit description of communism as the biggest threat to the US interests. Yet, not only George Kennan pulled the strings in the Truman administration. In fact, by late 1948, Kennan's voice had been marginalized due to his gradual criticism of the US containment policy and the rising influence of the Cold War hawks, which discounted his assumptions. With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, these hawkish advisors seemed to gain an even more significant role. Still, it was not only them who contributed into Truman decision-making.

### **3.2 Korean War (1950–1953)**

The official announcement of the Truman Doctrine was expected to be expanded to other parts of the globe. One of these parts was the Korean Peninsula. After the initial reluctance of the US policymakers, the inevitable threat coming from North Korea's plan backed by the Soviet Union and China to conquer its southern neighbor changed the US perception. Truman's administration saw no other approach but to take an immediate military response and support the authoritarian régime in South Korea led by Syngman Rhee. When justifying the American intervention, he clearly emphasized the 1938 lesson stating (1950: 3515): *"We will continue to take every honorable step we can to avoid general war...But we will not engage in appeasement...The world learned from Munich that security cannot be bought by appeasement"*.

For Truman, the prospect of intervening was merely a matter of geopolitical balancing. Molded by his personal experience of the Versailles treaty and the Munich Agreement failure, appeasement politics as a common denominator proved to him to be just an illusion that cannot be used in the present situation. The attack on South Korea was a clear example for him as of history repeating itself. In his *Memoirs*, Truman describes his reaction to this crisis (1955: 332):

*"I remembered how each time that the democracies failed to act, it had encouraged the aggressors to keep going ahead. Communism was acting in Korea just as Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese had acted ten, fifteen, and twenty years earlier...If this was allowed to go unchallenged, it would mean a third world war, just as similar incidents had brought on a second world war".*

Surprisingly, the US-planned invasion was accompanied by unseen support from the American public. In the words of British historian Michael Leigh (1974: 69), the counter-appeasement image embedded in the minds of US policymakers after WWII has also been used to elicit public opinion to accept such an image. Interestingly, what a regular American perceived as an imminent threat was similar to those views shared among US policymakers. As a result, the common perception of communism as a main ideological and military threat that needed to be suspended from the international order was mirrored in the American public support, where during the first months of intervention, 78 % of Americans approved Truman's decision to send military aid (quoted in Crabtree 2003: unpagged).

Along with the public support, the reassurances of his aides also emboldened Truman's decision to intervene in the Korean war. One of them was George Marshall and Dean Acheson. Both disciples of the Munich lesson, they sparked the historical reasoning behind the Truman administration quite convincingly. Being touched by the events of his generation, George Marshall, as a Secretary of State and later Secretary of Defense, stated in address to the ongoing Korean War (1950: 904): *"There is nothing to be said in favor of war except that it is the lesser of two evils. For it is better than appeasement of aggression because*

*appeasement encourages the very aggression it seeks to prevent". Also touched by the Munich events, Dean Acheson, as a Secretary of State, addressed in his speech the issue of non-appeasing (1951: unpagged): "Aggression cannot be allowed to succeed; it cannot be appeased, regarded or ignored. To meet it squarely is the price of peace". When summarizing the Soviet threat, Truman himself referred to the 1930s failures of contending Nazism (1951: 3): "Our actions showed that we were for peace...At the same time, we made it clear to all the world that we would not engage in appeasement. When the Soviet Union began its campaign of undermining and destroying other free nations, we did not sit idly by".*

In response to this crisis, the United Nations formed an international alliance in which the US leadership decided to step in. Along with countries such as France, the UK, Turkey and many others, the support for the South Korean régime was substantial. Still, however, after three years of continuous fighting, the result was murky at best. On the one hand, the North Korean and Chinese communists were repelled from South Korean territory. On the other hand, the international alliance, including the US, had to deal with the physical barrier of the 38th parallel, ultimately dividing the country into two halves. Another significant loss for US foreign policy was the Chinese communist victory in the 1949 civil war. With the takeover led by Mao Zedong and the subsequent escape of Jiang Jieshi's forces on Formosa island, the Truman administration had to accept such a reality.<sup>23</sup>

After this, the United States echoed the Korean war as an unsuccessful story of interventionism based on hasty anti-communist strategy and dull historical reasoning. On the other hand, one can argue that using the Munich analogy in the context of the Korean War served well as it urged the Truman administration to back South Korea when being under attack by its northern counterparts. If successful, it might have destabilized the postwar environment in a different and

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<sup>23</sup> For a more detailed explanation of the US foreign policy toward the Chinese communist régime, see Westad, Arne Odd (2007: 110–119).

more plausible direction for the United States (Brands; Suri 2016: 12). Either way, the Munich analogy utilization continued to be a significant way of conducting US foreign policy for other administrations to come.

#### **4 Dwight Eisenhower and the Rise of Domino Theory**

When Harry Truman decided not to run for the second presidential term in 1952, there was hardly a better candidate for the 34th president of the United States to count on than Dwight Eisenhower. As a former war hero and respected military strategist, he was popular among American voters just as among many politicians. What was expected from Eisenhower's administration was a continuing opposition to communism, yet avoiding military confrontation in conflicts with no apparent benefit. It was with the Eisenhower administration that the US leadership started to adopt historical reasoning in such a selective manner<sup>24</sup>. Learned from Truman's mistake of intervening in Korea, Eisenhower used the Munich analogy reasoning in foreign policy less loosely. It does not mean he felt attached to any aspects of pacifism or appeasement. In his eyes, the US role was firmly an internationalist one.

When giving a public address aptly named "The Chance for Peace", he underscored the fundamental role of the United States in the future liberal order and superseded the American values over the Soviet ones (Eisenhower 1953: unpagged):

*"In this spring of 1953 the free world weighs one question above all others: the chance for a just peace for all peoples[...] The way chosen by the United States was plainly marked by a few precepts, which govern its conduct in world affairs".*

According to Eisenhower, the most distinguishable precepts shared within the United States are the necessity for peace, fellowship and justice, cooperation with other nations, and the nation's right to form an independent government,

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<sup>24</sup> Such examples can be illustrated by the Eisenhower approach toward the Suez crisis and the Hungarian uprising, both happening in 1956. During the Suez crisis, the non-interventionist stance derived from the US insistence on Arab goodwill in their fight against the Soviets, along with the US anti-imperial attitude toward British and French behavior in the Middle East.

In the case of the Hungarian uprising, the main motivation for Eisenhower was the unwillingness to deal with any major crisis behind the Iron Curtain.

among others (ibid). For Eisenhower, just as for Truman, the Cold War theme simply revolved around the struggle between "righteous" and "evil" civilization. Like other "Munich generation" members, he was also significantly touched by the 1930s events. For him, the Munich Agreement explicitly violated state sovereignty principle and ultimately penetrated international security. Moreover, he understood the Munich betrayal as a product of ill-based appeasement politics rooted in the Versailles post-war order. To Eisenhower, just as to Harry Truman, the failure of not reconciling with Germany and instead relying on appeasement pathed the way into Hitler's rise. Experiencing the horrendous events during both world wars, he was serious about creating a paradigm of avoiding appeasement. In the radio report, Eisenhower told the American nation (1958: unpagged):

*"In Europe, appeasement was looked upon as the way to peace. The democracies felt that if they tried to stop what was going on, that would mean war. But because of these repeated retreats, war came just the same. If the democracies had stood firm at the beginning, almost surely there would have been no World War".*

The way Eisenhower used the Munich analogy was nowhere near its zenith. For the 1950s US leadership, the Korean failure and the "loss of China" did not stem the determination to halt global communism. In his *Diaries*, Eisenhower jotted that to gain back the Soviet overruled territories, the military expenditures needed to be increased. As he adds (1981: 143–144): *"Anything less will mean merely a succession of new Munichs, finally war under conditions least favourable to us"*.

Nevertheless, there was a change to observe. Communism was still perceived as a global, yet not a monolithic, threat. Hence, the novel approach was to re-focus on those countries or regions, untainted by the Soviet brush. One of the regions was Indochina. To Eisenhower, the former French colonial structure was strategically important. The biggest obstacle, however, was the war-weary mood of the Congress and the American public. Being at war for nearly four years since WWII ended, there was hardly ever a desire to indulge in another conflict,

in which, unlike in Korea, there was no Soviet cross-border support. Hence, despite the ever-going debate over communism, notoriously prompted by McCarthyite Red-baiting,<sup>25</sup> the Congress and American voters at last decided to not support the prospect of another military engagement.

Even though not officially supported to military intervene in Indochina, Eisenhower still perceived communism as threatening American interests in Southeast Asia. This time, however, the Soviet communism was dominantly alternated by its Chinese counterpart. Internationally, Southeast Asia, was the region where Eisenhower and his aides paid a special attention. Not willing to repudiate the fate of other countries in the region, president Eisenhower explained the US internationalist obligation by using the domino metaphor (1954: 86): "*You had a row of dominoes set up, and you knock over the first one, and what would happen to the last one was the certainty that it would go over very quickly. So you have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences*". In such a rousing speech, resembling the tone by which Truman urged Congress to provide financial aid to Greece and Turkey, Eisenhower aimed to inform the public of the American security obligations in Southeast Asia countries. Importantly though, it was not only him who seriously thought about the inevitable American presence in those countries. Among the most prolific ones were John Foster Dulles and Richard Nixon.

As an ardent internationalist and anti-communist, Dulles paired with Eisenhower perfectly, creating a formidable duo in foreign-policy sphere. From his position as Secretary of State, he disposed of a profound influence over multiple international issues. To Dulles, just as to Eisenhower, the domino theory symbolized the importance of expanding over borders and ultimately wearing off the Chinese communist influence. In other words, the domino theory reflected the necessity to "*prevent the loss in northern Vietnam from leading to the extension of Communism throughout Southeast Asia and Southwest Pacific*" (Dulles 1954: unpagued). As for the anti-appeasement posture, Dulles was equally

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<sup>25</sup> McCarthyism was a process of making accusations of subversion and treason by an alleged collaboration with Soviet communism. Its name refers to the US senator Joseph McCarthy.

adamant. The biggest Munich lesson, as he saw it, was the failure of France and Great Britain to adhere to collective security, that is to jointly defend Czechoslovakia (Theoharis 1971: unpagged). Hence, the future geopolitical partnership shall be maintained by the alliance sharing collective security principle. As he put it in 1956 speech (Dulles 1956: unpagged): "*All of these arrangements, in their present form, are the product of a sense of danger born of the aggressive and violent foreign policies of power-hungry dictators – firstly Hitler and then the Soviet and Chinese rulers*".

Another distinctive figure was Richard Nixon. As a vice-president in the Eisenhower administration, his voice was paid a special attention likewise. Nixon's prudent anti-communist attitude<sup>26</sup> evoked that of John Foster Dulles. Furthermore, the Korean failure along with the "loss" of China gave him a meaningful impetus for castigating Truman presidency, the same as Eisenhower and Dulles did<sup>27</sup>. Relishing to take a high road in making strident attacks on political opponents, Nixon, for example, designated the presidential Democratic rival Adlai Stevenson "*Adlai the Appeaser*" having "*a PHD from Acheson's College of Cowardly Communist Containment*" (quoted in Logevall 2013: 334). As a symbolical bludgeon, the Munich analogy was used by Richard Nixon in another instance, when he forbade his aides from wearing black umbrellas, referring to the umbrella carried by Neville Chamberlain while opting for appeasement with Hitler.

In the Munich analogy narrative, the domino theory blent in quite seamlessly. Both serving as apt metaphors to justify foreign-policy decisions, they created the main pillars of the 1950s US diplomacy. In essence, the domino theory is a restated position of the Munich analogy. The temptation to not allow the aggressor to take out its first "domino" is equally essential for the Munich

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<sup>26</sup> His biggest achievement elevating him to national prominence was the conviction of American official Alger Hiss of spying on the US government.

<sup>27</sup> Republicans, in general, demised Truman's intervention in Korea and attacked his policy for "appeasing" communism in Asia. This, as they saw it, resulted in the loss of China and the subsequent attack of North Korea on its southern neighbor (Rystad 1982: 41).

analogy as for the domino theory. Additionally, they both convey the same message; if we allow a country to fall under the influence of communism, other countries will follow in an inevitable chain reaction (Theoharis 1971: unpagged). Such a logic will be used in other foreign crises during Eisenhower's presidency.

#### **4.1 Conflict in Indochina and the Prospect of Defending Southeast Asia**

As was mentioned, the military invasion of French Indochina was rejected by both Congress and the American public. For Eisenhower, though, the struggle that was going on in Indochina was particularly significant as it manifested a local fight against global communism. In a speech given in February 1953, he characterized the Indochina fight by saying that: "*France in Indochina hold the line of freedom [against] Communist aggression throughout the world*" (quoted in McMahon 1999: 63). In his attempt to step in, he even tried to lurk the British government to intervene jointly. In 1954, Eisenhower sent a personal letter to the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, using the Munich analogy to justify such an act (1954: unpagged): "*We failed to halt Hirohito, Mussolini and Hitler by not acting in unity and in time. That marked the beginning of many years of stark tragedy and desperate peril. May it not be that our nations have learned something from that lesson*".

Churchill was not, however, swayed by such reasoning and rejected Eisenhower's assessment. The importance of Indochina was yet still very much present in the minds of the American establishment. In emphasizing its significance, John Foster Dulles for example distinguished the Korea war from that in Indochina<sup>28</sup>. The biggest threat, as asserted by many US officials, including Chester Bowles and Thomas Dewey, was the prospect of other countries in the region, such as Burma, Thailand, India, the Philippines, Laos and Cambodia, falling into the orbit of Chinese communism.

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<sup>28</sup>For many US officials, including Eisenhower and Dulles, the stakes in Indochina were even higher than in Korea. Dulles stated that, unlike Korea, the loss of Indochina " [...]would spread throughout Asia and Europe" (Memcon 1953: 54).

At the Geneva Conference in 1954, which was established to end the Korean war and settle the Indochina conflict, the US delegation was concerned about the scenario resembling "another Munich" and avoided discussing with communist countries there. John Foster Dulles compared such talks to those representing the "psychology of appeasement" and even refused to shake hands with Chinese Foreign Ministers (Siracusa 2004: unpagged).

In the context of heralded domino theory, the Indochina issue was not abandoned even with the Geneva Conference as Eisenhower decided to supply the régime of Ngo Dinh Diem at least by military aid. At the same time, the issue of South Vietnam and other Southeast Asia countries was expected to be maintained by the international organization sharing collective security principle called Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). As a result, the military aid along with the establishment of SEATO in 1954, created conditions that would curtail communist expansionism and postpone the victory of Ho Chi Minh forces for three decades.

Finally, the unfulfilled prospect of the military engagement in Indochina secured almost no political harm to Eisenhower and pathed the way to his second presidential term. With Indochina being put on the periphery of US foreign policy, yet another region emerged as a vital playground in the Cold War era. By starting to engage in the Middle East power struggle, there were other opportunities to employ the Munich analogy and its domino theory corollary.

#### **4.2 Eisenhower Doctrine and the Lebanon Intervention (1958)**

The American leadership was interested in the Middle East for two intertwined reasons. One of them was undoubtedly economics. During the 1950s, it became clear that the Western economic situation, including that of the United States, depended on cheap Middle Eastern oil. The second reason was pure geopolitical reasoning. Despite Eisenhower's desire to avoid local conflict with the Soviet Union (such as the Suez crisis in 1956), the Kremlin's expansionist tendency could not be overlooked. The foreign policy promoted by Eisenhower was meant to be solved through careful diplomacy and securing supply lines of inexpensive

oil to the American market. Simultaneously, the Soviet influence shall be handled by mostly non-military aligning with local regimes. One such regime was in Iran. When Iranian anti-communist prime minister Mohammed Mossadeq decided to nationalize its oil supplies and even threatened to lean toward the Soviet Union, the Washington government used covert action to replace him. His successor Reza Pahlavi was soon "installed" into the position of new Iranian leader and immediately recognized by the United States.<sup>29</sup>

Aside from supporting local leaders, the Washington government attempted to ease the regional tensions and the communist penetration by establishing a military alliance called Bagdad Pact. Officially announced in 1955, its main purpose derived from Dules' assertion of collective security. Following the same pattern of facing Soviet influence, all member states, such as Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Turkey, were meant to cooperate and ultimately balance the Soviet Union out of the region. Despite the Bagdad pact and many bilateral partnerships in the region, the possibility of a military solution was not entirely abandoned.

In the context of ongoing Arab Cold War<sup>30</sup> and its many proxies, the one to which the United States finally reacted by military intervention happened to be in Lebanon. In response to a recent insurrection by political opponents with communist leanings, the autocratic Lebanese president, Camille Chamoun, requested military assistance from the US armed forces. By pledging to defend the Middle East from "*any country controlled by international communism*" (Office of the Historian undated), the Eisenhower doctrine was announced in January 1957. The biggest impetus for creating this doctrine was

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<sup>29</sup> Such covert operations took place in many Third World countries. In Guatemala, the Eisenhower administration acted similarly to destabilize the local government led by president Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. After the Caracas conference in 1954, initiated by John Foster Dulles, it became clear, however, that such an overthrow would be much more complicated, mainly due to reluctance of many American countries (Logevall; Campbell 2009: 155).

<sup>30</sup> The term "Arab Cold War" refers to localized political tensions among Arab countries from the 1950s to the 1970s. Its beginning is generally accepted with the 1952 Egyptian revolution leading to Gamal Nassir's presidency. The end of this era is viewed by the Iranian revolution in 1979, led by Ayatollah Khomeini.

the growing influence of the Soviet Union in states like Egypt and Syria. After the Suez crisis and the departure of British and French troops, a power vacuum was waiting to be filled by the Pan-Arab movement led by Nassir. The only way to prevent such a scenario was to establish a permanent US presence in the region. Finally, by evoking the Eisenhower doctrine the US obligations were set loud and clear.

Under such conditions, it took no effort for Eisenhower to yoke the Munich analogy again. When explaining the US intervention in Lebanon, he argued (quoted in American Foreign Policy 1958: 972): "*In the 1930's the members of the League of Nations became indifferent to direct and indirect aggression in Europe, Asia and Africa. The result was to strengthen and stimulate aggressive forces that made World War II inevitable*". The same reasoning was to be seen with John Foster Dulles. When justifying the 1958 intervention, he stated: "*Indeed, experience shows that those who try in that way (appeasement) to buy peace in fact only increase the ultimate danger of war*" (quoted in Theoharis 1971: unpagged). Additionally, the reaction from American public was certainly pro-interventionist with 57 percent of asked respondents approving the intervention (quoted in Benson 1982: 594).

It might be quite puzzling to see such a reaction from the American public, considering their resolute "no" in the case of the Indochina war. One has to consider, though, that Chinese communism was not conceived as threatening to international security and American interests as the Soviet one was. The second reason lies in the Eisenhower doctrine itself. Its obligation to defend Middle Eastern countries against the Soviet takeover attached US diplomacy to the region. In addition, the Eisenhower doctrine was endorsed by president Chamoun (Labelle 2019: 176) and was officially accepted by the US Congress and the United Nations. Most importantly, there was evidence of the Soviet influence done by its attaches and the radio broadcasting, which, combined with the pan-Arab movement already happening in neighboring Syria, Jordan, and Iraq, was a serious reminder of the anti-American forces in the Middle East.

When put under scrutiny, it can be seen that several elements spurred Eisenhower's decision-making. The first element was his experience of the 1920s and 1930s crises, especially the Munich Agreement. Another element was his aides. Like Richard Nixon, John Foster Dulles significantly reassured Eisenhower's view on global communism. His impact on Eisenhower went even to establish regional military alliances in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Finally, it was the American public that, unlike in Indochina conflict, prompted Eisenhower to send military forces to Lebanon.

With equal importance, the overall success of the Lebanon intervention must be pointed out. In hindsight, operation "Blue Bat", which was its code name, managed to fulfill its primary task. The Chamoun government was helped against its political opponents, and the United States sent a clear message to the Soviet Union about their determination to protect regional allies. By candidly evoking the Munich analogy, Eisenhower gathered Congress' support and mobilized regular Americans to adhere to the significance of intervening in Beirut. In retrospect, the main reason was not to hold Chamoun in power. Washington primarily focused on Cold War tactics to preclude the Sovietization of Lebanon and the rest of the Arab world. The stakes were high for the US leadership, as the Pan-Arab movement led by Nassir and backed by the Soviets was trying to stand control over the block of countries from Morocco to Indonesia (Riedel 2019: unpagged). Such reasoning, accompanied by the domino theory corollary, was effective and managed to cede the US influence in the Middle East. Consequently, the Munich analogy prevailed not just as a symbolical instrument justifying interventions but proved to be an embedded decision-making asset.

## **5 John F. Kennedy and the Rise of Nuclear Brinkmanship**

The approach of John F. Kennedy toward the Munich analogy seems obvious. As a son of a prominent magnate and the US ambassador to the United Kingdom – Joseph Kennedy, he was exposed to high-rank politics since childhood. Moreover, his father's role as an ambassador to the UK coincided with the time when the Munich Agreement was signed. The US entry to WWII has been for Kennedy a watershed event forming his youthful thinking in a much more serious connotations. He was forced to join US Navy forces and fight in the Pacific War. This undoubtedly reinforced Kennedy's conviction of the Western betrayal of Czechoslovakia and empowered his anti-appeaser position for upcoming years. For many Americans, including John Kennedy, the Pearl Harbor attack led to a war that was drawn along the lines between good and evil (Tierney 2007: 57).

The most personal settlement with the Munich Agreement implications was embodied by his senior thesis named *Appeasement at Munich*, later to be published under the name *Why England Slept?* Despite several allegations of him not being the only author, the work succeeds in condemning the appeasement policy during 1938. Finally, the conclusion lesson for Kennedy is the necessity to equalize military preparedness with the US obligations (1940: 230–231): "*We must always keep our armaments equal to our commitments, Munich should teach us that; we must realize that any bluff will be called*".

Nevertheless, for Kennedy, just as for previous US presidents, the Munich Agreement did not arise with the WWII, but was rather a culmination of the post-Versailles narrative dominated by the alleged effectiveness of appeasement. As stated in the senior thesis, the 1920s and 1930s appeasement employment derived from the British insistence on keeping the trade network open and untouched. As he explained, this pattern was subsequently implemented into the treatment of post-war Germany and, by relying on concessions, contributed to German rearmament (1961: 25–41). Consequently, this kind of foreign policy planning entailed the future conquest of Austria and Czechoslovakia.

Kennedy was particularly concerned about not repeating the same mistakes that occurred in the 1920s (ibid):

*"We withdrew from Europe in 1920 and refused to do anything to preserve the democracy we had helped to save. We thought that it made no difference to us what happened in Europe. We are beginning to realize that it does. Even from a purely selfish standpoint, we realized it when we voted our first \$5,000,000,000 for defense".*

Moreover, he was doubtful about establishing the United Nations as a successor to the League of Nations that failed to deliver its promises to secure peace. In his diary, he commented on the prospect of such an international organization (1945: 86): *"The world organization that will come out of San Francisco will be the product of the same passion and selfishness that produced the Treaty of Versailles"*. Yet still, Kennedy saw the US role as an internationalist one. When giving a speech to the Chamber of Commerce in Texas, he underscored the US role as an international arch maintaining the global order (1963: unpagged): *"We are still the keystone in the arch of freedom, and I think we will continue to do as we have done in our past"*.

Harnessed by the implications of the Munich Agreement, Kennedy was convinced that the United States had to serve a bigger role in world affairs and he also subscribed to the domino theory. In defense of the US necessity to intervene in Indochina, he argued that Vietnam is *"the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the keystone to the arch, the finger in the dike. Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, the Philippines and obviously Laos and Cambodia are among those whose security would be threatened if the red tide of Communism overflowed into Vietnam"* (quoted in Gibbons 1986: 303).

What is surprising, however, is the real implication in the foreign policy arena during his presidency. Despite his anti-appeasing posture, Kennedy's legacy in foreign policy is less warlike than one might expect. One of the reasons was the intellectual propensity that enabled him to avert historical generalization and look for a more open-minded approach regarding diplomatic solutions.

## 5.1 Berlin Crisis and the Bay of Pigs Invasion (1961)

The 1960s was an eventful period in the Cold War era. The rising tensions between the West and the Soviet Union over the status of Berlin escalated into the (second) Berlin Crisis of 1961. With a slight irony, this crisis meant a "preparatory course" for Kennedy's decision-making. The Berlin Crisis proved a valuable lesson in diplomatic solutions for the United States. Kennedy, still as a presidential candidate, was convinced about the importance of helping West Berliners. In the 1960 declaration, he conveyed a clear message to Kremlin on behalf of the Munich analogy (quoted in Merli; Wilson 1974: 304):

*"If we took the view which some Englishmen took, that Prague or Sudetendeutsch were not worth a war in '38, if we took that view about Berlin my judgment is that the West Berliners would pass into the Communist orbit, and our position in West Germany, and our relation with West Germany would receive a fatal blow...They're fighting for New York and Paris when they struggle over Berlin. Therefore the U.S.A. has to make it clear that they would fight".*

Like Kennedy, many other US politicians of that period saw the Munich Conference as a pinnacle of appeasement politics. A senator and a Cold War hardliner, Thomas Dodd, for example, called the Munich Conference (1962: 56): *"a tombstone on the long road to futility and failure upon which man had journeyed for so much of his history"* and reminded Kennedy of the last concessions by the UK and France ultimately enabling Hitler to conquer Austria and Czechoslovakia (ibid). The same comments can be observed with the US diplomat Adolf Berle stating that the approach of the United States toward Western Berlin might *"make war certain a year from now – as did Munich"* (quoted in Rystad 1981: 43).

The pro-military stance was to be observed also in the US public. According to the 1961 Gallup Poll, approximately 58 % of asked respondents expected a "fighting war" in the case of the Soviet Union controlling Berlin, with 57 %

approving military action in Berlin (quoted in Roper Center 2014: unpagged)<sup>31</sup>. Yet not all of US statesmen were in favour of armed conflict. In fact, most of Kennedy's inner-circle advisors were much more flexible in terms of the Berlin crisis, such as the Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, who supported talks with the Soviet Union, or general Lucius Clay. Additionally, it was Kennedy himself whose intellectual propensity helped him understand the dangers of using historical analogies, especially when the military confrontation was at stake. As it turned out, Kennedy was far more capable of diplomatic solutions despite the staunch pro-military leaning of some US politicians and the public. At last, the potential hot war was avoided resulting in a geopolitical stalemate embodied by the physical wall, dividing spheres of influence into two parts<sup>32</sup>. With this event, Kennedy demonstrated a clear-mind approach when dealing with indignant Soviet leaders. All the more surprising is the decision to use covert military action when dealing with the Cuban regime led by communist president Fidel Castro. The main reason, however, was the geographical location of Cuba. Since the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, the Western Hemisphere was understood among US politicians as a territory worth defending from any foreign power involvement. With Fidel Castro as head of the country, significantly backed by the Soviet Union, the potential threat of the Soviet meddling in the political affairs of American countries has increased substantially. Concerned with the expansion of communism in an area close to the US soil, Kennedy finally approved the launch of 1,400 Cuban exiles into the Bay of Pigs on the south coast of Cuba. The result was a pure failure. The Cuban government managed to halt the invasion. Moreover, the communists' victory even more solidified Castro's regime and pushed Cuba closer to the Soviet Union.

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<sup>31</sup> As a reaction to the escalation over Berlin, Kennedy himself was tempted to military engage. This can be demonstrated by his plan to ask Congress for an additional 3,25 billion dollars in military and the increase of US troops operating in Berlin (Kennedy 1961: unpagged).

<sup>32</sup> Concerning the newly erected Berlin wall, Kennedy stated: "*It's not a very nice solution, but a wall is a hell of a lot better than a war*" (quoted in Gaddis 2006: 115).

## 5.2 The Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) – Lessons Learned?

The Cuban Missile Crisis was in many ways akin to the Berlin Crisis of 1961. Since its beginning, the emerging Cuban crisis was framed as a threat provoked by the Soviet communists supporting the local government. And just as with Berlin, some US politicians seemed very supportive of military enforcement. In fact, one of the loudest was Kennedy's younger brother Robert, who took a hawkish stance on the Cuban issue and called for air strikes as the only way to avert another "Bay of Pigs".

Moreover, as the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExCom) transcripts show, the Munich analogy reasoning was also invoked and even prompted the option of military engagement. General Curtis Le May, for example, denounced Kennedy's plan to implement a blockade on Cuba by arguing (quoted in Naftali; Zelikow 2001: 583–584): *"This blockade and political action, I see leading into war.*

*I don't see any other solution. It will lead right into war. This is almost as bad as the appeasement at Munich".*

As was shown in the previous subchapters, Kennedy was no stranger to the Munich analogy. Hence, when the nuclear brinkmanship forged too close due to the evidence of Soviet missiles being stored in Cuba, he warned that the (1962: unpagged): *"1930s taught us a clear lesson: aggressive conduct, if allowed to go unchecked, ultimately leads to war"*. Yet he was merely a docile servant of the analogy. Reinforced by the Bay of Pigs failure, Kennedy was determined to resolve the crisis in a non-military fashion, just as he did with the Berlin Crisis in 1961. In terms of public opinion, the US population was also not in favour of direct conflict. As the 1962 poll shows, more than 51 % opposed the prospect of the US sending troops to Cuba (J.F.K. Library 2002: unpagged).

These numbers certainly stimulated Kennedy's decision to use a diplomatic arm instead of a violent confrontation. After fully exploring all possible options Washington possessed, the option of imposing "quarantine" on Cuba seemed to be the most fitting. This decision was gradually praised by the Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, and National Security Advisor, McGeorge Bundy.

Even initially hawkish Attorney General Robert Kennedy finally concluded that the implications of an air attack would be too demolishing and cost thousands of lives on both Cuban and Soviet sides (Dallek 2003: 554–555). Based on the reached consensus among the ExCom members, Kennedy delivered the "quarantine" speech in October 1962 resulting in a naval blockade around Cuba. What it also meant, however, was the necessity to giveaway nuclear missiles that the United States stored in Greece and Turkey. This quid pro quo policy resembled, in many ways, the outcome of the Berlin Crisis year before. Still, the international reputation of Kennedy, just as of the United States, was perceived positively, mainly due to the averted nuclear war. One might only hypothesize how the US-Soviet relations would evolve with Kennedy still in office. Yet, this question would remain unfulfilled as he was assassinated during the 1963 parade in Dallas.

As was examined, Kennedy was impacted by the Munich Agreement, just like Truman and Eisenhower before him. His personal experience with WWII and his father's ambassadorship in the office of Neville Chamberlain undoubtedly molded the perception of appeasement politics. Kennedy was also an internationalist convinced of the US obligations toward countries threatened by Soviet and Chinese communism. However, unlike his predecessors, John Kennedy was also much more aware of the potential risks when using historical analogies. During the most perilous events, he firmly resisted taking military actions, although being often pressured by his closest circle.

Despite his short presidential tenure (exactly 1000 days), he managed to establish a new viewpoint on the Munich analogy. During the two most critical events, the Berlin Crisis and the Cuban Missile Crisis, he changed the pattern of understanding the Munich analogy as an instrument obliging to military actions only. Moreover, the Cuban crisis also showed how vital the Caribbean region is for US foreign policy. Yet along these two regions, another would soon become a scene of one of the most consequential chapters in US history.

## **6 The Munich Reasoning in the Captivity of Vietnam War**

With the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the averted Cuban crisis in 1962, the Indochina region swayed back with even more cadency. As was described, the US administration has been keen to engage in Southeast Asian issues since Eisenhower's presidency. The immediate response from the Congress prevented the prospect of sending US troops back in 1954. Yet, the potential threat of communist spillover into other Indochina countries lingered throughout the rest of the 1950s.

Since the 1960s, the Vietnam issue has been minted among policymakers as the inevitable foreign-policy objective. The Republican candidate Barry Goldwater, for example, asserted the threat of global communism that needs to be tackled at any cost. What he saw as the main task was "*to persuade the enemy that we would rather follow the world to Kingdom come than consign it to Hell under Communism*" (1962: 24). Such inflammatory statements were not rare in the early 1960s as the communist expansion was generally conceived as the United States' biggest challenge.

Yet not all US policymakers were in favor of the intervention in Vietnam. For some, the US foreign policy towards Southeast Asia seemed outdated. Instead of halting communist presence in Vietnam and neighboring countries, the United States should aim at improving its domestic situation.

The problem was how top policymakers projected their previous experiences and beliefs on this novel situation. In fact, most Washington executives were still hooked by the past, thus trying to impose their beliefs and perceptions, molded by the WWII experience, on Vietnam reality. In the words of a prominent American historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., for those who grew up in "*a world threatened by massive, unitary, centralized aggression and social fanaticism: Adolf Hitler and Nazism in the thirties and Josif Stalin and Communism in the forties and fifties*" (quoted in Rystad 1982: 47), it would be difficult to avoid seeking for the same analogies they lived through before. Despite many

intellectuals arguing against the Vietnam invasion<sup>33</sup>, it seemed that all chips were on the table.

### **6.1 Lyndon Johnson and the Rise of Vietnam Syndrome (1965–1973)**

When Kennedy's former vice-president Lyndon B. Johnson was elected the 36th president of the United States, many officials of his administration, including himself, seemed to be already suffused by the prospect of the Vietnam war.

Like his predecessors in the White House, Lyndon Johnson was a "Munich generation" member. As such, his perception of appeasement was similar to that of Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy. Just like them, he taunted Western powers of mild treatment of the 1920's Germany. In his opinion, the Munich Agreement was possible only because of the flawed strategy relying solely on appeasing the enemy. In his diary, he recalls (1971: 66): *"Like men and women of my generation, I felt that World War II might have been avoided if the United States in the 1930's, had not given such an uncertain signal of its likely response to aggression in Europe and Asia"*.

This position was further articulated in his 1965 speech on the 30th Anniversary of V-E Day (1965: unpagged):

*"On November 11, 1938–20th century anniversary of the armistice–Munich was just six weeks old, and war less than a year away...And when new aggression threatened, Western leaders yielded, to find that weakness only increased the appetite of tyrants"*. He then continued by stating (ibid): *"For, we learned from the folly of the past...the Atlantic nations replaced appeasement with firmness [...]As a consequence, Europe is safer from attack and closer to enduring peace than at any time since V-E day"*.

Similar to previous presidents, Johnson was also convinced about the US internationalist role and saw the Cold War conflict as a struggle between good and evil, from which only American righteousness has to come out as a winner.

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<sup>33</sup> Along with Arthur Schlesinger Jr., William Fulbright was also critical of the planned US engagement in Vietnam. In televised hearings called *The Arrogance of Power* (1966: passim), he systematically warned about the "presidential hubris" enabling him to send American troops to Vietnam.

In one of his 1952 proposals to tackle Soviet communism, he proclaimed (quoted in Barber 1977: 88):

*"We should announce, I believe, that any act of aggression anywhere, by any Communist forces, will be regarded as an act of aggression by the Soviet Union...If anywhere in the world...by any means, open or concealed – Communism trespasses upon the soil of the free world, we should unleash all the power our command upon the vitals of the Soviet Union....That is the policy we should maintain".*

Indeed, the Munich Agreement was an impactful experience for both his personal views and foreign policy reasoning. Based on the declassified recordings between him and the Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, it is clear that Johnson's public position on appeasement was by no means a varnished one<sup>34</sup>.

What Johnson saw as an inevitable struggle with communism over international order was now submerged into one key region. That region was Southeast Asia. Just as Dwight Eisenhower and John Kennedy, he was also intrigued by the possibility of more "dominos" falling apart when one country is hit by the communist wave<sup>35</sup>.

Along with Johnson, the Munich reasoning dominated his closest aide circle. When delivering a speech at the U.S. Council of the International Chamber of Commerce, the Secretary of State Dean Rusk evoked the Munich analogy with all seriousness (quoted in Rystad 1982: 51):

*"So what is our stake? What is our commitment in that situation? Can those of us in this room forget the lesson that we had on this issue of war and peace, when it*

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<sup>34</sup> In an attempt to persuade Robert McNamara of increasing military support to South Vietnamese, Johnson argued by the possibility of a "third world war or another Korean action". Then he goes on by saying: "you can have more war, or you can have more appeasement. But we don't want more of either" (1964: unpagged).

<sup>35</sup> In the National Security Action Memorandum of 1964 sent by Robert McNamara to Lyndon Johnson, the problem of South Vietnam's defense was argued by the domino theory (1964: unpagged): "We seek an independent non-Communist South Vietnam...Unless we can achieve this object...almost all of Southeast Asia will probably fall under Communist(s) (all of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia)".

*was only 10 years from the seizure of Manchuria to Pearl Harbor: about two years from the seizure of Czechoslovakia to the outbreak of World War II in Western Europe?"*.

Such statements were not rare to either Robert MacNamara or vice president Hubert Humphrey, who underscored he had (ibid) "*not forgotten the lessons of the 30s, when men cried peace and failed a generation*", while defending the planned Vietnam policy.

Additionally, Johnson was fully aware of how strongly can domestic environment influence his future presidency. What was particularly at stake was the vision of a Great Society<sup>36</sup> that many Congressmen perceived as too costly and obsolete. In Johnson's logic, the insufficient supply of South Vietnamese would offer an excellent argument for the opponents against proceeding with the domestic and social reforms (Record 2002: 67). On the contrary, if the Great Society manages to find its place within the US system, it would substantially increase Johnson's chances of being re-elected.

Strikingly, neither the US public nor Congress was against the planned invasion in Vietnam. After the "Gulf of Tonkin"<sup>37</sup> incident of 1964, the US polls showed more than 85 % of respondents approved a resolution reacting to the attack (quoted in Karnow 1997: 374). The public was also supportive of the official invasion in 1965, where approximately 61 % of respondents thought the US did not make a mistake in sending troops to Vietnam (quoted in Digital History 2021: unpagged). As Fredrik Logevall (2001: 134) points out, however, this relatively warm public welcome was mainly due to the skill at the deception of Johnson's administration in covering the expenditures related to the war. Impacted by public support, the Congressional approval of the "Tonkin Gulf" resolution, his own personal memories of the 1930's, and the stance of his closest

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<sup>36</sup> The Great Society was a set of programs aimed at resolving domestic problems. Announced in 1964, its main goal was eliminating poverty and racial justice.

<sup>37</sup> The Gulf of Tonkin incident was a 1964 international crisis where North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked one American destroyer and one aircraft vessel. In response to this act, the United States abruptly escalated its involvement in Vietnam.

aide circle, Johnson announced on behalf of the Munich analogy that the United States would militarily engage in the Vietnam war (1965: unpagged):

*"We have learned at a terrible cost that retreat does not bring safety and weakness does not bring peace. It is this lesson that has brought us to Viet-Nam. Nor would surrender in Viet-Nam bring peace because we learnt from Hitler at Munich that success only feeds the appetite for aggression".*

The United States was determined to help the Southern Vietnamese government, led by Ngo Dinh Diem, whose policy was straightforwardly anti-communist and catholic yet autocratic towards other religious groups. Lately, the Washington government has enforced an international military muscle that would assemble most other countries to expel communist influence from Vietnam. Namely, it was South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, and the Philippines, which gradually joined the conflict.

After a few years, nonetheless, it became clear that the US involvement would not end the conflict with a satisfactory result for either the United States or South Vietnam. What was initially seen as the US savior operation became a quagmire with no tangible results. The protracted conflict stirred up the American public and numerous politicians in criticising Johnson's policy. Moreover, the Vietnam war was too costly to continue, which appeared to be the main problem when building the Great Society in the United States. In other words, Johnson's ambitions to tackle communism in Vietnam and simultaneously build a Great Society at home proved far-reaching and non-achievable.

Although still far from ending the conflict, the Vietnam war has been gradually suffused by a pile of woes from all imaginable fronts of American society. Furthermore, it besmirched the Munich analogy as a tool to justify military invasions. As a result, a new phrase came into American foreign policy vocabulary. It was called "Vietnam Syndrome", which presupposed a war that was, after some time, generally depreciated by virtually the whole nation, and also expressed the reluctance of further US engagement in abroad continents.

The Vietnam failure, in any event, would remain an epicenter of anti-interventionist arguments for many years to come. It even engrained into another pervasive analogy. The Vietnam analogy, as it started to be called, happened to be employed with a similar warning tone, yet conveying an entirely different lesson.

Interestingly, Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan were among the most notable proponents of such reasoning. Both becoming presidents in the following decades, they kept warning of the Vietnam memento. Nevertheless, they were still active in using the Munich analogy. What led them to keep using it, despite its obvious discreditation by the Vietnam war? To explain why the Munich analogy did not wane after the late 1960s and the tumultuous Vietnam exiting, the differences between the Vietnam and Munich analogies need to be addressed.

## **6.2 The Differences Between Munich and Vietnam Analogy**

Even when both analogies are often treated in similar terms, the analogy of Munich and Vietnam deviates from each other in numerous aspects. One of the most notable is the nature of each analogy. When put under scrutiny, there are differences that would help to explain why the post-Vietnam US presidents kept employing the Munich analogy to justify military and non-military operations while simultaneously pointing out on inefficiency of the Vietnam analogy.

As was discussed in previous chapters, the nature of Munich analogy derives from the flawed politics based on appeasing enemy in exchange of avoiding military conflict. The redolent spirit of such politics found many defenders throughout the 1920's and the 1930's. Even in the US, the appetite to appease an emerging threat instead of confronting it, was observable. With the 1938 crisis and the Pearl Harbor attack, the remnants of pro-appeasing postures within the US society were mostly dispelled.

In accordance to the seriousness of such an event, the United States deployed its economic and military strengths and contributed to the final defeat of nazism in Europe, and of Japanese revisionism in Asia. With the emergence of the Cold War, the "bejeweled" idea of American exceptionalism was re-evoked as a vital

tool to fight global communism. Within such a context, the Munich analogy appealed extraordinarily to most US policymakers. The main reason was that the Munich analogy is based on a belief that all dictators are alike and that aggression is spurred by a predictable dynamics (Brands 2016: 73). Hereby, just like Hitler in the 1940s, Stalin had to be stopped, no matter the costs and used instruments.

The Munich analogy flourishes in the period after a peaceful time, where there are no expectations of war, and the war-like mood is put aside. On the contrary, when the war is looming, the lesson of 1938 is clear: appeasement only feeds further aggression and veins dictators to spread their influence. In essence, the Munich analogy symbolizes a failure of the international community to contain aggressive behavior by other countries. For the United States, the Munich analogy gained relevancy mainly due to the prospect of a global threat that was about to expand further. This aligned with internationalist strategic assumptions of the United States and the personal experiences of local policymakers. Additionally, Czechoslovakia was a vital piece of the territory regarding international security. From a geopolitical perspective, its position in Central Europe was strategically significant for Western powers, including the United States.

The Vietnam analogy, on the other hand, is far more different in its nature and the overall message. It symbolizes a failed and unnecessary conflict with no meaningful result. Also, its lesson is opposite to the the Munich one; if Munich lesson evokes an assertion of force, the Vietnam lesson encourages an absolute aversion of it (Record 1998: 4).

The historian Howard Zinn distinguishes further differences between 1938 and 1965. According to him, in Munich (1967: 85): "*the main force operating against the Czech status quo was an outside force, Hitler's Germany...the major force operating against the status quo in South Vietnam had been an inside force...the NLF*". Additionally, the South Vietnamese government was by no means a democratic one, unlike the Czech government in 1938 (ibid). Also compared to Czechoslovakia, South Vietnam was not of

particular strategic importance to Washington. Last but not least, unlike Hitler with Czechoslovakia, Ho Chi Minh's territorial demands with South Vietnam were historically supportable (Record 2002: 18) and did not pose any significant threat to the international order.

Another important difference is the lack of consensus on why the United States failed to defeat the Northern Vietnamese. As James Chace and David Fromkin mention (1985: 746):

*"The Vietnam war does not provide us with a point of departure for common discourse about how to face the challenge. The Munich pact was a disaster, but at least the Western world recognized it as such and learned that it would be a mistake to commit the same error again. The lesson of Munich can be misapplied—but the point is that it can also be applied. The lesson of Vietnam, if there is one, cannot be applied because we still do not agree about what happened".*

In a broader sense, the policy that the Vietnam analogy teaches is somewhat murky and provides no reliable common pattern to follow (Record 2002: 18). The Munich analogy was so powerful because it formed the intellectual basis not only for the domino theory but also for the security praxeology of the United States since the WWII (Rasmussen 2003: 505). The Vietnam analogy, on the other hand, embarks on unclear references in foreign policy, territorially limited conflict with no capacity to spill beyond the borders of Indochina (Record 2002: 22), and the offensive strategy in strategically irrelevant country. These conditions seemed to no longer resonate with post-Vietnam policymakers in Washington.

As for the Munich analogy, though, it did not wear off in the US presidential reasoning, mainly due to its clear foreign policy pattern, historical relevancy, and alignment with global assumptions of the United States within the context of the Cold War, which was still very much underway.

## 7 The Munich Analogy in the Post-Vietnam Era

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Vietnam analogy was almost unanimously repudiated due to the protracted conflict. The common pattern for presidencies to follow was not to repeat Johnson's mistakes from the 1960s. Nevertheless, the US presence in Vietnam was still ongoing. Moreover, the echoes of Vietnam failure moved beyond a political dimension as its detractors were to be found in American culture. For example, in 1967, Norman Mailer released a book called *Why Are We in Vietnam?* which was a timely response to Washington's inability to depart from Indochina. Remarkably, there was hardly someone who could answer such a question sufficiently.

What was not abandoned, however, was the Munich analogy. For the upcoming Richard Nixon presidency, the lesson of the 1930s was still a relevant historical analogy. Living through that period and serving as a vice president in the Eisenhower administration, Richard Nixon was well aware of the Sudetenland crumbling with all its consequences. Moreover, he perceived the Munich Agreement would not be enforced if there had not been an appeasing mood of previous statesmen. When giving the Acceptance Speech at the Republican Convention, he asserted that the next president must be aware of the 1930's lesson (1960: unpagged): "*because we have already paid a terrible price in lives and resources to learn that appeasement leads not to peace, but to war*".

Following a similar pattern as his predecessors, Richard Nixon was also convinced of the internationalist nature of the United States. In his 1960 speech, Nixon as a vice-president (1960: unpagged) noted:

*"The strength we must maintain. Why? Not because we are for war, because we are not; because we are for peace, because we are the guardians of peace, and because it is essential that as guardians of peace, America must have strength that will discourage any of those who would threaten the peace of the world "*.

Nixon repeated a similar idea, when delivering a 1969 address on the Vietnam war<sup>38</sup>. As such, he was not willing to sacrifice South Vietnam to the communists succumbing. Yet also learned from the Vietnam mistake of deploying military forces into uncharted locations, the only way to avoid prolonging the American involvement was to take the upper hand of airpower.

This approach was part of the new foreign-policy strategy called the Nixon Doctrine. Officially announced in 1969, this new strategy was meant to secure the US interests while increasing the burden-sharing with its allies (Logeval; Campbell 2009: 261). By adhering to the Nixon Doctrine, the United States articulated its position in Southeast Asia to help countries that are threatened by communism, but certainly "*to avoid another war like Vietnam any place in the world*" (Nixon 1969: unpagged).

### **7.1 Cambodia Bombing (1969)**

As part of the Indochina exiting plan, the United States felt determined to help surrounding countries from communism. One such country was also Cambodia. In a desperate attempt to end the Americanization of the Vietnam war, Richard Nixon forced the Northern Vietnamese government to accept concessions. When they did not buckle, the White House decided to conduct a covert operation called "Operation Menu" aiming to disperse Northern Vietnamese forces and provide a shield for the American withdrawal. When the operation was finally discovered in 1970, the public response was resolute in its condemnation. The most defiant ones were students. During one of the encounters with students protesters in Washington, Richard Nixon used the Munich analogy. He later told the reporters how he justified the Cambodia bombing (1970: unpagged):

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<sup>38</sup> "*Two hundred years ago this Nation was weak and poor. But even then, America was the hope of millions in the world. Today we have become the strongest and richest nation in the world. And the Wheel of destiny has turned so that any hope the world has for the survival of peace and freedom will be determined by whether the American people have the moral stamina and the courage to meet the challenge of free world leadership*" (1969: unpagged).

*"I told them that I know awfully hard to keep this in perspective. I told them that in 1939 Neville Chamberlain was the greatest man living and Winston Churchill was a madman. It was not until years later that I realized that Neville Chamberlain was a good man, but Winston Churchill was right".*

The decision to conduct airstrikes against the communist presence in the northern part of Cambodia was stimulated by several elements. First was the anti-communist zeal of Richard Nixon deriving from his personal conviction of not retreating nor appeasing the enemy. As it is observable from his *Memoirs*, he saw a parallel between the 1938 Agreement and the destiny of South Vietnam. As he concludes (1978: 658): *"What had been true of the betrayal of Czechoslovakia to Hitler in 1938 was no less true of betrayal of South Vietnam to the communists advocated by many in 1965"*.

Secondly, it was the lesson of the Vietnam war. Learned from the failed intervention, Nixon did not want to repeat the same mistakes that led to the US prolonged presence in Vietnam, and rely on airpower instead. Thirdly, it was the influence of his aides, in particular vice-president Spiro Agnew. Being raised in the 1920s, he also experienced the consequences of the 1930s, Agnew lived through the appeasement consequences, which reinforced his viewpoint in terms of dealing with the enemy. Moreover, he was anti-communist and supportive of the Nixon Doctrine. In reference to the protesters against the Cambodia bombing, he also reasoned with the Munich analogy (1971: 35):

*"A major reason why they [protesters] have gained so much prominence in our national life, the major reason they increasingly terrorize decent citizens, can be summed up in a single word: appeasement. When you permit an imbalance to exist that favours the accused over the victim, you are inviting more violence and breeding more bullies"*.

When criticizing the alleged pro-appeasement mood, Spiro Agnew did not spare even other political representatives when noting that Hubert Humphrey *"begins to look like Neville Chamberlain...maybe that makes Mr Nixon look like Winston Churchill"* (quoted in Ambrose 1997: 247).

Finally, it was public opinion. According to the March 1969 national poll, approximately 65 % of asked respondents approved Richard Nixon's handling of the presidency (quoted in The New York Times 1969: unpagged). All of these aspects reinforced how Nixon thought about a potential air strike, and how to fulfill one of his biggest pre-presidential promises; to end the American engagement in the Vietnam war.

In the following years of his presidential tenure, Nixon was reluctant in regards to the explicit use of the Munich analogy, albeit still relying on the domino theory corollary<sup>39</sup>. Finally, he was forced to resign due to the infamous Watergate scandal. During the Gerald Ford presidency, the imprint of Richard Nixon's foreign policy was sustained, yet the explicit invoking of the Munich analogy was rather laid back. The same was apparent with James "Jimmy" Carter, whose primary goal was to open talks with the Soviet Union.

## **7.2 Ronald Reagan and the Rise of "Political Symbolism"**

The Vietnam failure was also subsequential for Ronald Reagan. During his tenure as the California governor, he was particularly harsh on Johnson's policy. On one occasion, he recalled (quoted in Magstadt 1983: unpagged):

*"As a graduate student back in the bad old days of the Vietnam war, I recall how the sirens of the Johnson administration would invoke the "Munich analogy" as an argument for "standing up to the communists" in Southeast Asia". Despite the accusation of Johnson's artificial usage of the Munich analogy to justify the military intervention in Vietnam, Ronald Reagan likewise mined the analogy. For him, like Lyndon Johnson and other Cold War presidents, the Munich Agreement was rooted in the the 1930s appeasement politics which he personally experienced. In a 1983 speech, he told the American Legion that (1983: unpagged): "Neville Chamberlain thought of peace as a vague policy in the 1930's, and the result brought us closer to World War II. History teaches us that by being strong and resolute we can keep the peace ". Reagan used the same*

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<sup>39</sup> This was the case in many Latin American covert operations. The most prominent one was probably the decoupling of Salvador Allende in Chile.

logic when giving his "Evil Empire" speech before the Evangelist Society, in which he criticized (1983: unpagged): "*historical reluctance to see totalitarian powers for what they are... We saw this phenomenon in the 1930s*".

Accordingly, the internationalism of Ronald Reagan was projected into his reasoning about the US global role in the Cold War struggle. This was an imminent part of Reagan's "political symbolism", which can be defined as allowing its counterparts to avow American providence, religious nature, and power by inflammatory public statements and concrete acts in foreign policy. From this standpoint, Reagan felt the Cold War was an ideal milieu to showcase such propensity.

Apart from the "Evil Empire" speech, he addressed the American nation with several other speeches, in which he underscored the role of the United States as a "beacon of hope" <sup>40</sup> or "the promised land" <sup>41</sup>. As can be observed, Ronald Reagan's perception of the clash between the United States and the Soviet Union was set across the lines between "the chosen" nation and the "evil empire", similar to previous Cold War presidents. Nevertheless, through the lens of "political symbolism", Reagan perceived threats the US needed to face as universal, in which other totalitarian regimes should replace Soviet communism. One such example was the Libya bombing in 1986. As will be shown, the threat of Soviet communism did not prompt the actual bombing, but it was rather the regime of Muammar Qaddafi. Yet still, Reagan invoked the Munich analogy when justifying his decision, regardless of the threat's nature.

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<sup>40</sup> "[...]And as we renew ourselves here in our own land, we will be seen as having greater strength throughout the world. We will again be the exemplar of freedom and a beacon of hope for those who do not have freedom" (National Archives 1981: unpagged).

<sup>41</sup> In his 1980 "A Vision for America" speech, he expressed his belief of American exceptionalism (1980: unpagged): "*I, in my own mind, have always thought of America as a place in the divine scheme of things that was set aside as a promised land*".

### 7.3 Libya Bombing (1986)

The problem in Libya had nothing to do with the communist threat. Unlike previous US interventions, the Libyan regime was not supported or stipulated by any help from the Soviet Union. Its local president, Muammar Qaddafi, whose anti-Israeli approach and the support of Palestinian territories, was a major obstacle for the United States in the MENA region<sup>42</sup>. The Qaddafi regime was a high priority for Ronald Reagan since his inauguration in the White House. The prospect of an anti-American folly in a geographically significant region, with a potential nuclear program and Chad's ongoing occupation, represented a valuable argument for Qaddafi's takeover.

Although not spurred by Soviet support, Ronald Reagan still evoked the Munich analogy when announcing the conducted airstrikes against the Libyan government. In his 1986 national address, he stated (1986: unpagd):

*"To our friends and allies in Europe who cooperated in today's mission, I would only say you have the permanent gratitude of the American people. Europeans who remember history understand better than most that there is no security, no safety, in the appeasement of evil".*

When examining the decision-making process, the usage of the Munich analogy by Ronald Reagan was hardly surprising. Reagan's personal experience with appeasement consequences of the 1930s was a self-serving memento in his foreign-policy reasoning based on the international "exceptionalism" of the United States. Moreover, in his attempt to evade "another Vietnam", he found the idea behind the Nixon Doctrine particularly useful; to use limited airpower and avoid deploying military forces on the ground. Strikingly, the American public was also supportive of an airstrike operation, with 71% approval of such military action (Gallup Poll 1986: unpagd).

Another important element was his advisory circle. Namely, the Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, opted for the Munich analogy with similar eloquence as Ronald Reagan. When describing the necessity to increase defense

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<sup>42</sup> The MENA is an abbreviation of the "Middle East –North Africa" region.

spending in order to fight against international threats, he summoned the 1930's lesson (1986: unpagged):

*"The 1930's hue and cry against building sufficient aircraft and ships finds a parallel today in those who would grasp every excuse for weakening America's defense [...] Americans encouraged by 'apostles of appeasement' at home and abroad 'retreated behind our ocean moats, naively' during World War I".*

During Ronald Reagan's presidency, the Munich analogy did not get stale as it found its place in the "political symbolism" of his presidency. Yet as it turned out, the international perception of the US strategic assumptions surpassed the somewhat rigid anti-Soviet foreign policy. The Libyan bombing in 1986 demonstrated such propensity, and this tendency followed suit even after the end of the Cold War.

#### **7.4 The Echoes of "Munich" After the Cold War**

With the Soviet Union being dismantled and the subsequent emergence of unipolar world order, the Munich analogy was expected to be devoided of its value. Surprisingly, the US foreign policy found itself still incarcerated in the Munich analogy reasoning. When George H. W. Bush commented on the planned 1991 invasion of Kuwait conducted on behalf of international support to help the local government from Saddam Hussein's aggression, he did not hesitate to imply the analogy (1991: unpagged): *"A half century ago our nation and the world paid dearly for appeasing an aggressor who should and could have been stopped"*.

Similarly, when justifying the US-led NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia, Bill Clinton stated (quoted in Mcgrory 1999: unpagged): *"What if someone had listened to Winston Churchill and stood up to Adolf Hitler earlier?"*. Moreover, George W. Bush found the Munich analogy appealing after the 2001 Afghan invasion, which was done with the international community's support. In one of his speeches, he commented on the terrorist threat by stating (2002: unpagged):

*"Like the threats of another era, this threat [terrorism] cannot be appeased or cannot be ignored".*

With Russia's waged war in Ukraine, some of the US politicians again declared their position by evoking the anti-appeasing posture. The Speaker of the House of Commons, Nancy Pelosi, for example, compared the invasion of Ukraine to Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938 (quoted in Nelson 2022: unpagged): *"This, my friends, is our moment. This is the Sudetenland, that's what people were saying there. You cannot ignore what Putin is doing"*.

Even after the end of the Cold War, the examples of George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and the current approach of American politicians toward the Ukraine crisis demonstrate how attached the Munich analogy is to the United States' strategic realm.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis aimed to illuminate the reasons behind American presidents' enduring utilization of the Munich analogy. As demonstrated, the Munich analogy was evoked during the Cold War, with a slight rift between Ford and Carter administrations. Based on the conducted study, it can be stated that the American presidents' habitual employment did not react to a simple Cold War struggle but was spurred by several aspects that go behind the usual bipolar conflict comprehension.

Firstly, the Munich analogy's nature was exceptionally well suited for the US strategic narrative of containing the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, it was not the seldom anti-Soviet politics that motivated them to keep employing it for the whole period of bipolar confrontation. In fact, the analogy resonated with the war experience of US policymakers, as well as the internationalist strategic assumptions and the "realist-idealistic" propensity of the US foreign policy to see any struggle across the lines of "good" and "evil".

All US presidents who used the analogy felt attached to it due to their personal experience with appeasement consequences during the 1930s, reinforcing their critical assumptions about the prospect of appeasing the enemy. The habitual tendency to keep using the analogy was also married to president's own ideological assumption, which mirrored the global US strategic perception and its role that needed to play in the post-WWII international order. The internationalist element of the Munich analogy in the hands of US presidents was further described in the case of the 1986 Libya bombing as an operation conducted with no anti-Soviet strategy in mind.

Secondly, the domestic environment further nourished the inner president's assumption of using the Munich analogy. From George Marshall and Dean Acheson in Harry Truman administration to Caspar Weinberger during Ronald Reagan's presidency, at least one member of the aide circle exposed a similar attitude toward using the 1938 analogy which only reassured the president's perception of not appeasing the enemy. Their influence can also be mapped outside the military operations, such as John Foster Dulles' projection of his

"collective security" vision into the Bagdad Pact, as well as the non-military approach by many of Kennedy's inner circle advisers during the Berlin Crisis and Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 contributing to the aversion of nuclear war. Public support was also a significant factor during the decision-making process, as it praised (at least in the early phase) most major US abroad interventions and by doing so

Thirdly, the Munich analogy blent seamlessly with other foreign-policy strategies. The containment strategy, first coined by George Kennan, collided with the intrinsic nature of "Munich" lesson that requires not stepping aside but actively participating in the enemy's curb. The same pattern was to be found with the domino theory during Eisenhower's presidency. In the last phase of the Vietnam War, the analogy managed to be efficiently modified through the Nixon doctrine and was subsequently used by Ronald Reagan.

Furthermore, the US foreign policy has aligned with the Munich analogy aspects in almost each of the examined interventions. In the case of the Korean War, the Americans found themselves intervening to support the South Korean non-democratic regime of Syngman Rhee while simultaneously conducting such operations on behalf of the UN international framework. A similar pattern was to be found with the Eisenhower administration, which operated on its own scale, yet also founded security alliances, such as Bagdad Pact, and supported the ASEAN role in Southeast Asia. In the case of Lebanon intervention, the US has also backed an authoritarian regime of Camille Chamoune.

This pattern paled in some aspects during the Kennedy presidency compared to previous interventions. In the case of the Berlin Crisis, the US leadership did not have to support any authoritarian regimes due to its non-existence in Western Berlin. There was even no international alliance the US either supported or formed. The following approach in Cuban Missile Crisis was, by its nature, missing any of the Munich analogy aspects.

The subsequent US intervention in Vietnam again collided with the aspects, as Washington formed an international muscle of other states to fight against Ho Ci Minh forces, while also supporting the non-democratic Southern Vietnamese

government. As for the post-war US foreign activities, the Munich analogy-related operation was the Cambodia bombing which was yet conducted as a covert operation, thus lacking some of the Munich analogy aspects. Lastly, the Libya bombing in 1986 was a sole US-led operation that only partially resembled the Munich analogy aspects, as it did not react to Soviet presence in the region but was done primarily to seize down Muammar Quaddafi.

Similarly, the analogy of 1938 went through its own evolution throughout the period. At the onset of the Cold War, Harry Truman evoked the analogy (yet here rather implicitly) as part of the Truman Doctrine announcement in 1947. What was initially implicit gained its explicit usage when justifying the American intervention in Korea. The for-war purpose was even furthered by the Eisenhower administration's reaction to the emerging communist threat in Southeast Asia and the Middle East.

With John Kennedy, there was a change to observe in terms of dealing with the Munich analogy. As was examined, the Kennedy administration initially favored the military engaging in the Berlin Crisis, and the analogy was even evoked to confirm such a stance. However, after the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Kennedy was determined to reverse the militaristic leaning of some of his aides and used the analogy for diplomatic solutions during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

As a return to a sole justification of military intervention, the Munich analogy employment during Lyndon Johnson can be understood. Its primary task was similar to the Korean War case in 1950; to engineer the Congress and the American public to support Johnson's decision to deploy ground forces in Vietnam. In the lingering phase of the Vietnam War, the lesson of Johnson's decision was reflected in the Nixon doctrine, which reoriented how American foreign interests were conducted. Thus, the Munich analogy, as being still evoked, has become a part of this new foreign policy strategy.

In the 1980s, the anti-appeasing posture expressed by the Munich analogy was once again refashioned as it became part of the "political symbolism" of Ronald Reagan. In such context, the employment of the Munich analogy was still framed by the international obligations of the US foreign policy and the historical pattern

from the president's personal experience. Nevertheless, as was demonstrated, the concrete interventions were used in light of the Nixon doctrine, and, based on the Libya bombing operation in 1986, the employment of the analogy was not spurred by the attempt to curb Soviet influence anymore.

Whatever the misleading utility of analogical reasoning, the thesis also argued that using the Munich analogy in foreign policy does not automatically lead to military catastrophes. The cases of the Korean invasion, where the result was rather disputable, and the 1958 Lebanon intervention, showed that foreign policy prompted by historical reasoning could be a valuable combination in reversing the enemy's expansionist behavior. On behalf of the 1990s and 2000s interventions, the thesis finally made a case that the tendency to use the Munich analogy for foreign-policy purposes is not expected to perish anytime soon.

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## **Resumé**

Ziel dieser Arbeit ist es, einen Einblick in die Entwicklung der Münchner Analogiebeschäftigung durch US-Präsidenten während der Zeit des Kalten Krieges zu geben. Gleichzeitig versucht es, die Gründe zu entlarven, warum die Analogie während der gesamten bipolaren Konfrontation verwendet wurde. Dabei bedient sie sich einer Methode der Außenpolitikanalyse in Verbindung mit der Kognitionstheorie. Die Kombination dieser beiden Methoden ermöglicht es, die Faktoren des Entscheidungsprozesses jedes amerikanischen Präsidenten von 1945 bis 1991 zu erfassen.

Obwohl die Verwendung historischer Analogien für außenpolitische Zwecke in vielen Veröffentlichungen auf fruchtbaren Boden gestoßen ist, widmet die Arbeit der Einzigartigkeit des Entscheidungsprozesses besondere Aufmerksamkeit. Gleichzeitig versucht es auch, über das übliche historische Narrativ hinauszugehen, dass amerikanische Präsidenten die München-Analogie nur verwendet haben, um eine ausländische Intervention im Kontext der sowjetischen Kürzung zu rechtfertigen. Innerhalb dieser Wahrnehmung zeigt die Dissertation, dass die kontinuierliche Verwendung der Münchner Analogie in den Vereinigten Staaten durch historische Wurzeln der Appeasement-Politik, persönliche Erfahrungen amerikanischer Politiker, das innenpolitische Umfeld, wie den Einfluss des engsten Mitarbeiterkreises des Präsidenten und der Öffentlichkeit, aber auch die strategische Ausrichtung der US-Außenpolitik, die ihrem Wesen nach international agieren will.