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THE DOMINO THEORY IN THE POPULAR GEOPOLITICS OF THE U.S. NEWS MEDIA,
1989 - 2009

By
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A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of Geography
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded:
Summer Semester, 2011
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This dissertation is dedicated to Anna, Canon, Cora and Gabe. I can only hope that someday you will be half as proud of your father as I am of mine.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this dissertation is the result of the contributions made by many people who supported me over the course of my life and throughout my academic career. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Patrick O’Sullivan who mentored me during my doctoral program offering scholarly guidance and remarkable patience while I grappled with all of challenges in bringing this project to fruition. I am profoundly grateful for his willingness to serve as my advisor and stick with me over many years of graduate work. Similarly, I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Michael Creswell who steadfastly remained my outside committee member over the years while my dissertation gradually moved away from conventional international relations and diplomatic history and into the realm of critical social theory. I am also thankful to Dr. Tony Stallins and Dr. Lisa Jordan who kindly stepped in to serve on my committee after earlier members moved on to other institutions. And finally, this dissertation would never have been possible without the support of my family, especially my wife Debbie. She put up with me over many years of marriage and scholarly pursuits, always providing support and expressing confidence in my academic abilities. She helped make this dissertation possible and, in many ways, was a crucial motivating factor in my efforts to achieve scholarly and professional success. I am perpetually grateful to my parents Paul and Donna who always expressed a faith in my abilities and a willingness to support my academic endeavors throughout my life. The fostered my love of learning and confidence from a very early age. I would be remiss if I didn’t also mention my siblings, Kim, Mike, and Scott. Kim helped endow me with a love of reading as a child. Scott taught me about critical reasoning and rhetoric before I even knew what the terms meant and has always exhibited a genuine interest in my academic research. Mike was a central figure in my early life that helped me through some difficult periods in my youth and offered genuine friendship that we shared over the years.
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the way in which the U.S. news media employed the domino theory as a (or part of a) geopolitical discourse in its coverage of foreign policy challenges facing the United States in the post-Cold War era in a manner that operated to frame the tone and content of it reporting on these issues for American news audiences. This study relies on the use of thematic content analysis of newspaper articles using the domino theory in their reporting on three distinct sets of geopolitical affairs issues appearing in the Lexis-Nexis newspaper database from 1989 to 2009 using a grounded theory-based research approach. This methodology assesses, documents, and illustrates the way in which the media’s representations relying on this well known geopolitical metaphor shaped the complexion of news coverage on the crises in Bosnia (from 1993-1995); Kosovo (1999); and Iraq (from 2003-2007). The results of this study advances our understanding of the domino theory’s enduring role as a geopolitical discourse that promotes certain political agendas and the role of America’s journalists in actively producing geopolitical knowledge about the world through their reporting.

The analysis of the U.S. news media’s discourse in these three case studies demonstrates that the domino theory was relied upon in the popular geopolitics produced by the American media on these three foreign affairs issues and revealed a series of patterns in the findings. The phrase most commonly originated from the country’s journalists rather than the individuals or groups to whom it was attributed. The American news media often used the phrase as a (or part of a) oppositional discourse to re-interpret arguments for military intervention in these international crises in an overwhelmingly negative light. This finding directly contradicts the claims embedded in hundreds of news articles on these issues that the domino metaphor was being harnessed to rationalize and legitimize interventionist military policies by American officials and their political supporters. This study also assesses and documents themes in the representational strategies used by journalists’ to condition their largely critical portrayals of these topics. The conclusions of this research should be of significance to those who are interested in exploring the news media’s role as an institution site implicated in the active production and dissemination of popular geopolitical knowledge about world politics and the role of geopolitical metaphors like the domino theory in these processes.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Within the scholarly literature on U.S. foreign policy, the so-called domino theory is widely viewed as one of the most significant geopolitical discourses underlying American geopolitical reasoning of the 20th century. Some scholars go so far as to claim that it was the “most famous metaphor in the history of American foreign policy” (Shimko, 1994, p. 656) or that it was “at the heart of American [Cold War] foreign policy” around the world (Slater, 1987, p. 105). The historian Walter LaFeber (1989, p. 231) asserts that “the domino theory was (and remains) one of the most dangerous ideas to attract Americans,” while Ó Tuathail, Dalby, and Routledge (1998, p. 6) write that the domino theory, as a geopolitical discourse, “marked the apotheosis of Cold War geopolitics as a type of power/knowledge.” The domino metaphor originally gained favor in the U.S. foreign policy establishment in the 1950s as a way to articulate the belief that the United States should take preemptive steps to stop a perceived wave of communist expansionism emanating from China and the Soviet Union from washing over Vietnam and threatening American security interests in Indochina and around the world. It was believed that the failure of the U.S. to adopt a muscular foreign policy response to this potential threat would lead to the inevitable collapse of other governments in Southeast Asia. The metaphor had powerful proponents in U.S. foreign policy circles, including presidents Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Ronald Reagan, who all employed it at various times to rationalize and promote their policy choices in the face of foreign affairs crises confronting the country.

The historical use of this metaphor as a form of geopolitical rhetoric and reasoning by U.S. officials during the Vietnam-era or in Central America during the 1980s has entrenched the notion that the domino theory operates as a geopolitical discourse used by American policy makers and journalists to rationalize aggressive military interventions around the world. In this regard, the domino theory became a powerful geopolitical discourse during the Cold War that is now associated with aggressive policies and the negative legacies of the America’s military intervention in Vietnam during the period. Several decades of research in political geography have established the social and political implications of the geopolitical discourses underlying
past and contemporary global politics. According to Dalby (1994, p. 90), this is because geopolitical discourses like the domino theory are not merely innocuous rhetoric used for the mimetic description of world politics, but rather represent “constructions of [geopolitical] knowledge” … “embod[y]ing the established institutional assumptions about forms of writing and speaking in specific contexts … that specify the world in particular ways with political consequences arising from the social values of the terms.” Ó Tuathail and Agnew (1992, p. 191) have pointed out that,

Geopolitics must be re-conceptualized in terms of discourse [because] it is only through discourse that [geopolitics] is made meaningful and justified. It is through discourse that leaders act, through the mobilization of certain simple geographical understandings of foreign policy actions are explained and through ready-made geographically-infused reasoning that wars are rendered meaningful.

The domino theory is conventionally seen as one of these discursive rationalizations and justifications for policies of military interventionism promoted by American officials in the face of various foreign crises around the world. This common view of the domino theory is illustrated by Colin Flint’s (2009, p. 173) entry on the topic in the Dictionary of Human Geography, 5th edition (2009), which defines the term as “a theory of geopolitics originally proposed by the USA in the 1950s … rest[ing] upon an analogy of toppling dominoes and was used to justify the military and political involvement of the USA in other countries, especially in South East Asia.”

Although the domino theory - as a metaphor for real and imagined processes of socio-political diffusion and connectivity and a way to describe world politics - was coined by non-geographers, the catchphrase, nevertheless, became associated with the discipline of geography. Perhaps this is because it has commonly appeared uncritically in many of the more popular world geography textbooks in the United States (e.g., de Blij and Muller, 2010 p. 549; Hobbs, 2009 p. 305) that continue to embed it in the consciousness of the country’s students (O’Sullivan, 1982 p. 58). Some geographers (Murphy, 1966; O’Sullivan, 1982; O’Sullivan, 1996; Ó Tuathail et al., 1998) have rejected the domino theory and tried to challenge it on numerous grounds, including its impoverished image of the world, its flawed logic, and its failure to correspond with conditions on the ground in various contexts. Despite these efforts to purge the discourse from the field and the American geopolitical vernacular, the metaphor has endured and continues to shape the way in which geopolitical issues are framed and rationalized.
in the United States. One indication of the resilience of the metaphor is its continued prevalence in the U.S. news media’s portrayals of global affairs. In fact, references to the domino theory have appeared in the news coverage of virtually every major foreign policy issue facing the country since 1989, including, for example, the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and Russia between 1989 and 1991, the Persian Gulf War (1991-1992), the conflicts and U.S. interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s, and the American-led invasions and occupations of both Afghanistan and Iraq.

In early 2011, the domino theory was commonly employed by U.S. journalists in their coverage of the political demonstrations and general instability that erupted across the Middle East in countries such as Egypt, Libya, Syria as well as the political debates in the country’s media and foreign policy establishment about the proper American response, if any, to these crises. The general tone of coverage relying on the term was critical of the Obama Administration’s diplomatic policies towards these crises, rhetorical support for the protestors, and the notion of increased U.S. involvement in the region. An editorial in the Chattanooga Times Free Press (2011) with the headline “Obama: Egypt’s Hostage” perhaps epitomized this view by claiming that U.S. President Barack Obama’s policies were actually causing a domino theory to play out in the Middle East. “By failing to back Mubarak,” asserted the writer, Obama is committing the same sin [as some past presidents who didn’t support international allies] … If Egypt falls, Obama will have permanently damaged America’s vital interests [and] …he may find himself confronted with a Middle Eastern version of the old domino theory, where one nation after another falls to Islamism, with each new theocratic conquest destabilizing its neighbor. …How much damage can one misguided American president do? We are about to find out.

Another example of an article critical of U.S. involvement in the Middle East appeared in The Augusta Chronicle in a piece titled “Domino theory proving itself again.” “It’s déjà vu all over again,” claimed the writer, “the domino theory is taking place in Islamic countries … Do not let them [U.S. officials] waste our monies to try to make them [Middle Eastern peoples] like us. This is an exercise in futility” (McMillan, 2011). The Post Standard (The Next Arab Leaders, 2011) also printed an editorial that exhibited skepticism toward the likelihood of a positive outcome of these democratic protests by asserting that, “the events of the past few weeks in northern Africa make it seem like the domino theory has a far better chance of playing out as
originally envisioned. The protests are spreading. If the dominoes keep falling, the big question is what kind of people the new leaders will be.” Obama Administration military officials, however, downplayed the applicability of the domino theory to these events in the region, claiming, ‘We are watching the dynamics of the region closely, but the domino theory doesn’t quite apply’ (Richter and Cloud, 2011). As these news reports demonstrate, the domino theory has clearly not been purged from the geopolitics of the American media and continues to condition the way in which foreign affairs issues are represented and debated in the popular geopolitics portrayed in the coverage of these international issues. No major scholarly study has been undertaken that specifically explores how the domino theory has continued to operate as a form of geopolitics in the United States throughout the post-Cold War era. An overarching purposes of this dissertation was to address this void in the geographic literature on this geopolitical metaphor long associated with the discipline by studying the use of the term in the U.S. popular news media from 1989-2009.

With these considerations in mind, the goal of this study was to explore references to the domino theory in American news media’s coverage of three major foreign policy crises facing the United States during the post-Cold War era to investigate whether or not (and if so, how) the domino metaphor was employed as a geopolitical discourse that operated to shape the complexion of news coverage of these issues in a particular way for news audiences. In the data source for this research (the *Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe, U.S. Newspapers and Wires* database), the three international issues that were most commonly discussed using the domino theory since 1989 were: the civil war and humanitarian disaster in Bosnia in the 1990s; the ethnic conflict in Kosovo in 1999; and the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq from 2003 - present. This project engaged in a series of analytical case studies in order to assess, document, and illustrate themes in the U.S. media’s discussion of these three foreign affairs topics during the study period. During each of these crises, there were heated political debates in America’s news media over the wisdom of a potential (or ongoing) U.S. military intervention in each of these regional conflicts. This research investigates the way in which references to domino theory contributed to journalists’ framing of the overall news coverage in each case.

In order to obtain a representative sample of the overall U.S. popular media’s reporting on these topics, this study relied on articles and news wires using the specific term “domino theory” in their title or content derived from a search the *Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe, U.S.*
Newspapers and Wires database. This database provided access to printed reports and wires from over 650 separate news organizations of varying audience size and type spanning the larger U.S. media market (see Appendix A for the complete listing of news sources). There is an established scholarly precedent in the social sciences for the use of resources obtained through searches of this database for studies of (geo)political discourse in various academic disciplines, including geography (Dittmer, 2003) and political communications (Paris, 2002). This collection of news pieces was then utilized as the source materials for an analytical study on each individual case using qualitative (and, to a lesser degree quantitative) thematic text analysis relying on an approach informed by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Using this research method, I set out to extract (or “discover”) common themes and patterns in the data through a rigorous, systematic, and recursive process of qualitative textual analysis.

This dissertation was theoretically situated in political geography within the field of critical geopolitics. The approach was influenced by an awareness of the ways in which the domino theory was employed as a geopolitical discourse during the Cold War to further certain interventionist foreign policy agendas toward Southeast Asia and Central America as well as the existing scholarship in critical geopolitics on the role of the media as an institutional site involved in the active (re)production of geopolitical knowledge about the world (Dittmer, 2003; Dodds, 2000; O’Sullivan, 1982; O’Sullivan, 1996, O’Sullivan, 2001; Sharpe, 1993). Collectively, the current literature in these areas led me to expect that geopolitical rhetoric using the domino theory would likely operate as a discourse that promoted certain political perspectives and that the term would likely be employed by journalists in the crafting of geopolitical knowledge for their audiences. This scholarship furnished a theoretically and historically informed foundation for the research approach undertaken in this project.

Another major outcome of this dissertation is a contribution to the effort among those promoting a critical geopolitics to better understand the popular news media’s role as an institutional site that actively (re)produces geopolitical knowledge about the world. This goal was achieved by illustrating how American journalists have used the domino metaphor as an oppositional discourse in their popular geopolitics constructed during the post-Cold War conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq. Although various studies have investigated the significance of the domino theory in American foreign affairs and its merits, if any, in the appreciation of global events (e.g., O’Sullivan, 1982; O’Sullivan, 1986; O’Sullivan, 1996; O’Sullivan, 2001) and
substantial research has been conducted in the geographic subfield of critical geopolitics illustrating the role of popular news sources (such as newspaper articles) as important institutional sites for the (re)production of geopolitical knowledge (e.g., Dittmer, 2003; Dodds, 2000; Sharpe, 1993), no research has been conducted that explores the way in which the American news media has harnessed the domino theory as a (or part of a) geopolitical discourse that operates to shape the character of news reports on major foreign policy crises facing the United States. This dissertation sought to make a contribution towards this gap in the geographic literature by illustrating how American journalists have used this geopolitical metaphor in their construction of popular geographical knowledge about the world. As Dodds (2000, p. 6) has pointed out, the study of geopolitics “should be attentive not only to the ‘high politics’ of states, intergovernmental organizations and territorial space, but also to a host of media, groups, and other institutions which seek to represent particular visions or interpretations of political space.” According to Sharpe (1993, pp. 491, 502), this is because “the geography written in the mass media” has a significant role “in the creation and dissemination of knowledge of the world …[and] knowledge reproduction in American society (especially in the context of the poor state of geographical education in this country).” This research contributes to this larger project in the field of critical geopolitics by illuminating the role of the domino theory in the imaginative geographies produced and disseminated by American news organizations in their coverage of foreign affairs since 1989.

The specific research purpose of this dissertation was to explore how American journalists used the domino theory in the geopolitical representations produced in their printed coverage of certain foreign policy issues since the end of the Cold War and to determine if their representations seemed to mediate certain political interests or perspectives to their readers. In other words, this project assessed the role of the domino theory in painting certain portrayals of world events in the U.S. media’s coverage of these specific foreign policy issues. The thesis of this research was that media references to the domino theory were a way in which American news writers perceived and/or choose to represent world affairs issues as part of an oppositional discourse that most commonly operated to promote certain perspectives or agendas and that it was possible to identify, document, and illustrate patterns in how the term was employed for these purposes. This thesis was explored through the investigation of the manner in which the domino theory was injected into the popular geopolitics of American news reporting by
journalists who chose to utilize the term in a way that colored the depictions embedded in their reporting on Bosnia (from 1993-1995); Kosovo (1999); and Iraq (from 2003-2007) in order to answer the following research questions: How was the specific phrase “domino theory” used in the U.S. news media’s coverage of these three regional conflicts as a (or part of a) geopolitical discourse that promoted certain political perspectives or agendas by portraying the stories in a particular light? Were references to the domino theory more common in news reports that expressed an overall tone of support or negativity toward a policy of American military intervention in these conflicts? Based on the material evidence available in each individual news source, were patterns evident in the characteristics of who was the apparent source of the references to the domino metaphor in each article? In other words, were motifs evident in who (i.e., the news writer, U.S. government officials, academics, etc.) seems to have introduced the association between the domino theory and the particular foreign policy issue under discussion? Based on the evidence provided in these reports, was it a U.S. official (e.g., a member of the Clinton or Bush administration) who explicitly employed the domino theory or does the appearance of the catchphrase in the news articles appear to have reflected the way in which the individual journalists perceived or chose to represent issues in their new coverage? Were there any patterns in the types (e.g., conventional news, opinion-editorials, letters-to-the-editor) of articles that employed the domino theory in their headline or content? And finally, were there common themes or associations (e.g., references to Vietnam) that were prevalent in the articles that used this metaphor in their reporting and did this contribute to the manner in which the topics were portrayed in these articles? This research will show that the phrase domino theory is a geopolitical catchphrase that is laden with assumptions, meanings, and historical associations (e.g., the Vietnam War) for many journalists and that these connotations were (re)injected into the news coverage on these foreign policy issues through their use of the term in their reporting. This project assessed and illustrated those themes in order to exhibit the role of the so-called domino theory as a discourse in the (re)production of imaginative geographies by U.S. journalists. In sum, this project substantiated how the domino theory was largely used as a geopolitical discourse by those in the American news media who appeared to oppose interventionist policies by the U.S. government in these three particular post-Cold War international crises facing the country. All of these research questions are addressed in this
dissertation in order to illuminate the enduring role of the domino theory in the discourse on United States foreign policy issues in the American news media from 1989 - 2009.

The collective findings of this research should be of significance to those who seek to deepen their awareness of how the geopolitical representations produced and circulated by the institutions of the U.S. news media work to shape the portrayals of the world that are mediated to the American people. In particular, this project contributes to our knowledge of the ongoing role of the domino metaphor as a geopolitical discourse and the way in which journalists have employed these types of metaphors to frame the popular geopolitics presented to the audiences in the content of their reporting. Since the popular media (especially the broadcast and popular press) enjoys a preeminent role in contemporary U.S. society as perhaps the most significant source of geographical knowledge for many Americans, it is important to further our understanding on this topic. This dissertation promotes this research agenda by illustrating how geopolitical rhetoric like the domino theory can shape the representations of foreign affairs issues embedded in the news coverage crafted by journalists for dissemination to the American public.

Chapter Organization

In order to convey the specific details of the scholarly influences, research methods, case studies, and findings of this research project to readers, this dissertation is organized into the following sections. Chapter Two reviews the existing scholarly literature on the domino theory in order to familiarize readers with many of the major perspectives on the origins, history, and merits or criticisms of the term as a geopolitical discourse used to represent global politics. This chapter emphasizes the fact that although the domino theory is strongly associated with the discipline of geography and has had considerable foreign policy implications when used to rationalize and rhetorically justify certain policies in places such as Southeast Asia and Central America in the past, it remains a highly contested concept. In fact, there is still no universally accepted definition of the phrase or consensus on its merits for understanding and representing global politics even within the discipline of geography. For these reasons, this dissertation rejects the notion that there is a single, universally accepted, domino theory. Instead, this research project embraces the perspective that the domino theory is simply a way in which global politics can be conceptualized or talked about by observers of foreign affairs (such as news reporters)
and that these representations condition how global events are perceived and reacted to by various actors in different political contexts.

Chapter Three (Theoretical Literature Review) situates this study within the larger project of critical geopolitics and shows how critical social theory influences the theoretical approach utilized for this study. It also demonstrates the precedents in this literature for significance of the study of geopolitical metaphors and the imaginative geographies produced by the institutions of the popular news media.

Chapter Four (Research Methods) outlines how the specific methods used for this research relying on thematic content analysis utilizing qualitative grounded theory-based techniques enabled me to extract findings from my data sources in an orderly, empirical, and recursive process in order to answer the major research questions for this project.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven are analytical case studies of the three major foreign policy debates in the United States news media where the term domino theory was most commonly invoked since 1989 in order to document important themes in how the metaphor operated as a (or part of a) geopolitical discourse produced by the American news media. The result of these chapters is a transparent record of patterns and variations illustrating the role of the domino theory in the geographical knowledge constructed by American journalists in their depictions of these three specific controversial foreign policy issues facing the country.

The final chapter, Chapter Eight (Conclusions), provides a brief overview of the collective findings from all three case studies and discusses the implications of these findings and their potential relevance for future research related to this topic. The conclusions from this dissertation enhance our awareness of the popular news media’s role in the construction of imaginative geographies through their reporting on world events. Furthermore, this project sheds light on how journalists employ geopolitical discourse such as the domino theory in these portrayals to frame the presentation of foreign affairs coverage for news audiences.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW: THE DOMINO THEORY

Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to survey the major academic studies on the domino theory and explore the history and many of the unresolved debates in the existing scholarly work on the topic. While the conventional narrative about the Cold War domino theory is widely known and the domino metaphor has been the subject of numerous studies over the last sixty years, surprisingly, important questions over the origins, meaning and efficacy of the term remain largely unsettled. As noted in Chapter One, the domino theory was introduced to the American geopolitical lexicon in the 1950s as a way to represent the belief that it was necessary for the United States to take preemptive action to forestall a perceived tide of communist expansionism emanating from China and the Soviet Union from inundating Vietnam and then washing across Southeast Asia and around the world. Some U.S. officials believed that a communist victory in Indochina could spread contagiously and endanger fundamental American national security interests across the globe. After completing this section, the reader should be familiar with the Cold War and early post-Cold War history of this geopolitical metaphor, many of the relevant scholarly works on the topic, and the various contending perspectives of these works on the meaning and applicability of the term for the appreciation of global affairs. This overview should situate this research project in the current literature on the domino theory and illustrate the contributions that this dissertation will make to discuss issues neglected in the scholarship on the topic.

The Origins and Implications of the Cold War Domino Theory

Although there is no indication in the current scholarship on the subject regarding when and where the precise phrase “domino theory” was coined, the origin of the domino metaphor in the U.S. foreign policy discourse is not disputed. U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower first uttered the term publicly during a press conference in 1954 when he suggested that the fall of South Vietnam to Vietnamese communists would endanger U.S. security by leading to the progressive loss of other countries in the region to communist domination. According to the President:
You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of disintegration that would have the most profound influences. (Pentagon Papers, 1971, p. 597-598)

The historian Robert Aspery (1994) writes that Eisenhower adopted the imagery from Admiral Arthur Radford who had used the phrase a few days earlier during a meeting of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff to promote the use of nuclear weapons to support the French garrison at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam. Backed by Vice-President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, Radford claimed “that Indochina must not be allowed to fall into Communist hands lest such a fate sets in motion a falling row of dominoes” (Aspery, 1994, p. 589). Eisenhower and Radford’s use of the catchphrase to frame their views on Indochina failed to secure the support of America’s allies for a rescue of the French in Indochina and the President ultimately resigned himself to the imminent collapse of the French military at Dien Bien Phu. By the following month, even Eisenhower distanced himself from the claim that the loss of South Vietnam would fundamentally threaten American security (Karnow, 1983, p. 198). Nevertheless, the so-called domino theory captured the attention of the media and foreign policy circles in the United States and quickly became entrenched in the country’s geopolitical discourse throughout the remainder of the Cold War (O’Sullivan, 1986, p. 34; O’Sullivan, 2001).

The domino theory fell in and out of favor with the changing political currents of the Cold War with subsequent political leaders, including Kennedy, Nixon, Johnson, and Ford, continuing to resurrect the imagery periodically to promote their foreign policies in Indochina. According to several studies on the topic (O’Sullivan, 1982 p. 58; O’Sullivan, 1996 p. 64), the theory permeated the U.S. foreign policy establishment and enjoyed powerful advocates such as Dean Acheson, George Ball, Dean Rusk, Walter Rostow, Maxwell Taylor, Robert McNamara and Henry Kissinger. Throughout the era, the domino theory remained a powerful form of persuasive rhetoric in the hands of these leaders to promote their foreign policies. It is impossible to know with certainty if they genuinely believed in the plausibility of the metaphorical comparison or the determinism and emaciated view of geography underlying the imagery but it seems likely that their beliefs were variable. Eisenhower, for example, appeared to have had a complicated relationship with the term he introduced to America’s popular geopolitical rhetoric.
After publically coining the phrase to represent the importance of South Vietnam to U.S. strategic interests and then changing his views, he ultimately readopted the metaphor to rationalize his past actions toward Indochina. In his memoir *Waging Peace* (1965), Eisenhower defended his efforts to draw a line in Vietnam to contain communism in Southeast Asia by re-invoking the imagery of dominoes. “The fall of Laos to Communism,” he said (p. 607), could mean the subsequent fall - like a tumbling row of dominoes – of its still-free neighbors, Cambodia and South Vietnam and, in all probability, Thailand and Burma. Such a chain of event would open the way to a communist seizure of all Southeast Asia.

Some early advocates of the domino theory like Robert McNamara seemed to have rejected the term by the late 1960s and then viewed it as one of the factors leading to the disaster in Vietnam (McNamara, 1995 p. 322). O’Sullivan’s (1994, pp. 64-65) claim that, “Presidents Kennedy and Nixon, Henry Kissinger and Presidents Ford and Reagan, who all employed the notion, did not believe that the spread of Communism was inevitable; they were merely using the image as a scare tactic” may be accurate, but, at least in their public pronouncements, many remained committed domino theorists throughout their lives and continued to draw on the representation to defend their views and actions. In 1970, President Nixon made his views on the domino theory clear in an interview in which he explicitly insisted on its validity (Aspery, 1994 pp. 710-714):

> Now I know there are those who say, ‘Well the domino theory is obsolete.’ They haven’t talked to the dominoes. They should talk to the Thais, Malaysians, to Singapore, to Indonesia, to the Filipinos, to the Japanese, and the rest. And if the United States leaves Vietnam in a way that we are humiliated or defeated … it will be immensely discouraging to the 300 million people [in] free Asia. And even more importantly, it will be ominously encouraging to the leaders of Communist China and the Soviet Union who are supporting the North Vietnamese. It will encourage them in the expansionist policies in other areas.

Even more recently, former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger has continued to resort to the domino theory to defend his own actions as well as those of his political allies over the course of his long career. In *Diplomacy* (1994), he wrote that the theory appeared correct at the time and that it was embraced by some of the leaders of the so-called dominos and that it may still be a useful concept today. According to Kissinger (p. 68), “for all the West knew at the time [of the
Vietnam War], the Domino Theory might nevertheless have been valid. Singapore’s savvy and thoughtful Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, clearly thought so and he has usually been proven right.” “The Domino Theory,” Kissinger went on to say, was not so much wrong as it was undifferentiated. The real issue posed by Vietnam was not whether communism should be resisted in Asia, but whether the 17th parallel was the right place to draw the line; not what would happen in Indochina if the South Vietnamese domino fell, but whether another defense line could be drawn, say, at the borders of Malaya (p. 68).

In a 1984 speech discussing the issue of chemical weapons and the U.S. need to grapple with instability in Latin America to defend Mexico, Kissinger insisted, “The only thing wrong with the Domino Theory is that it is true” (Kissinger Says U.S. Must Prepare To Wage Chemical Warfare, 1984). These unambiguous public statements leave little doubt about Kissinger’s opinions regarding the merits and validity of the domino theory. During this period, President Ronald Reagan also resurrected the domino theory to promote his interventionism in Central America to prevent supposed Soviet domination of the region (Slater, 1987 p. 105). In a 1984 speech, Reagan expanded his view of the domino theory’s transferability from Indochina to the rest of the world. ‘Let’s not delude ourselves,’ Reagan commented, ‘The Soviet Union underlies all the unrest that is going on. If they weren’t engaged in this game of dominoes, there wouldn’t be any hot spots in the world’ (Nijman, 1994, pp. 89-90). In retrospect, it seems clear that Reagan’s concerns were unwarranted and that Soviet expansionism spreading northward from Central America was never a realistic threat to the United States. Whether or not he believed his own rhetoric, the phrase nevertheless helped him to publically define, and possibly formulate, his own policies toward the region.

**The Contested Origins and Meaning of the Domino Theory**

While the origins of the explicit phrase “domino theory” with Radford and Eisenhower are well documented and largely undisputed in the academic literature on the subject, I would argue that the debates over the precise genesis of domino “thinking,” “beliefs,” “attitudes,” “assumptions,” etc. and the precise meaning of the term remain largely unresolved. This may be because as late as the 1980s, “there [was still] no formal statement of the theory to be found” and scholars interested in the subject were forced to make assumptions about the process implied
from the metaphor (O’Sullivan, 1982, p. 60). There does not seem to be a single domino theory, but rather, many different variants of the so-called theory in the existing studies (Kanwisher, 1989 p. 664). Jerry M. Silverman (1975, p. 915), for example, writes, “the domino theory serve[s] as an easy referent for a wide variety of opinions.” The political Scientist Keith Shimko (1994, p. 657) has pointed out that some well-known studies on the topic (e.g., Jervis and Snyder, 1991) are, in fact, studies of the “beliefs” that these scholars hypothesize are related to the metaphor and not a specific examination of the theory or how the metaphor structures policy formulation. One thing that is clear, according to Shimko (p. 657), “is …that [the] domino beliefs” that many scholars have studied actually “predated the domino metaphor.”

The interrelated questions of what the specific principles are underlying the rise of the domino theory and when these axioms originated is an important matter that remains very much unsettled and different researchers have variable claims regarding the topic. I would suggest that a thorough analysis of this lack of consensus over the origins and meaning of the domino metaphor is a neglected area in research on the subject. Although a comprehensive examination of these wide-ranging views is beyond the intended scope of this dissertation, I believe that a brief survey of several popular positions on the subject will contribute to a better overall understanding of the metaphor in order to illuminate its continued resilience and significance as a geopolitical discourse. This discussion will shed light, not just on the rather undefined and contested nature of domino theory, but also on the manner in which the domino metaphor operated as a geopolitical discourse during the Cold War and the way it may continue to shape understandings of the global politics.

The most common theory about the emergence of the domino metaphor is that it originated out of Cold War logic about the inherent expansionist tendencies of Soviet-inspired communism and the need of the United States to take preventative measure to avoid this eventuality. Beyond this generally-held view, however, studies on the topic then diverge about exactly when and where the ideas, beliefs and assumptions behind the domino theory originated. Certainly, the basic premise about Soviet expansionism had already begun to circulate widely among intellectuals of statecraft in the U.S. government by the end of the 1940s. In many ways it was a throwback to fears of the Soviet Union and communism that date back to the period of “Red Scares,” the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HCUA), and a literal interpretation of rhetoric originating from communist organizations like the Communist
International (Comintern) (Kennan, 1946). The so-called “Uncle Joe” (i.e., positive) representations of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin in the American media were a brief anomaly directly related to the national interests of the country during World War Two and disappeared shortly after the end of the war (Campbell, 1992 p. 148).

We also know, of course, that the notion of an ever-expanding threat to Western interests emanating from the core of Eurasia was not new in the late 1940s. It had been embedded in the consciousness of many security specialists by Sir Halford Mackinder in a series of lectures and publications dating back to 1904. Mackinder referred to this area as the “geographical pivot of history” (later renamed the Heartland) and claimed that it was one of the most geo-strategically significant regions on the planet and a potential threat to Western powers if seized by a malicious power (Nijman, 1994). His last work in 1943 focused on the threat of a German domination of Eurasia but by the end of World War Two the so-called ‘pivot’ corresponded almost directly with the position of the Soviet Union. Jan Nijman (1994, p. 155-6) suggests that because of these superficial similarities, Mackinder “remains the most widely quoted geopolitical writer … and allow[ed] the postwar superpower conflict to be interpreted in classical geopolitical terms.” Another potential link between the domino metaphor and Mackinder’s work is pointed out by O’Sullivan (1986, p. 34) who has discussed the striking similarities in Mackinder’s use of the image of a toppling row of ninepins to represent weak nations threatened by the expanding Eurasian power and the later imagery of falling dominoes. Since Cold War geopolitics often echoed Mackinder’s concerns about the rise of a Eurasian threat, it is possible that he contributed to some of the assumptions related to the domino theory but this is difficult to establish with certainty.

In the United States, the most well-know early expression of American assumptions about patterns of Soviet behavior and the potential spread of communism often linked to the origin of the domino theory was State Department official George Kennan’s famous “Long Telegram” (1946). In the communiqué, he compared the Soviets to a “fanatical,” “unruly and unreasonable individual” who “seek[s] security only in patient but deadly struggle for total destruction of rival power, never in compacts and compromises with it.” This diplomatic message expressed Kennan’s view that since the expansionist U.S.S.R. could not reach a modus vivendi with the U.S. but was “highly sensitive to the logic of force,” it could be resisted (or “contained”) through firm American counter-pressure around the world. This is probably the
most well-known articulation of these U.S. beliefs regarding Soviet tendencies in foreign policy from the early Cold War period. Such ideas among Americans about Soviet “conduct” were reinforced by Stalin’s efforts to dominate Central and Eastern Europe after the war as well as the propaganda emanating from the Soviet dominated Communist Information Bureau (the Cominform) during this period about the intent of communists to spread their ideology. This internal State Department telegram by Kennan was later popularized after it was adapted into an article published by the prestigious journal *Foreign Affairs* (1947) titled “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.” In the article, Kennan wrote,

> the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies... Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the Western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counterforce at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and manoeuvres of Soviet policy, but which cannot be charmed or talked out of existence (pp. 280-281).

Despite Kennan’s early role in popularizing such an image of the Soviets within the U.S. State Department, other scholars (O’Sullivan, 1982; O’Sullivan, 1996) credit former U.S. Ambassador to Moscow William Bullitt as the inspiration of the domino theory. This is because Bullitt seems to have promoted views about the dire need to forestall communist expansionism that many believe resembled what was later called the domino theory. In the opening paragraph of his article “A Report to the American People on China” in *Life* magazine (1947, p. 35), Bullitt claimed:

> Only two great powers have threatened to dominate China – Russia and Japan – and the U.S. has opposed whichever of these powers have been momentarily the more dangerous aggressor. … Today … Soviet imperialism … using the Chinese communists as instruments of Soviet power politics is striving to reduce China to the status of a satellite of the very Soviet Union. … In our own self-defense we must act to prevent Soviet domination of China and the eventual mobilization of China’s manpower for war against us.

While both Bullitt and Kennan may have laid the ideological foundation for what eventually developed into the domino theory, a number of scholars (Kissinger, 1994, p. 626; O’Sullivan, 2001, p.86; and Sheehan, Smith, Kenworth and Butterfield, 1971), all trace the “first expression
of this view” about communist tendencies in official U.S. policy to the 1950 National Security Council Document 64 (NSC 64).

Other studies instead focus the origins of the domino theory on the relationships between the perceptions and policies of influential actors in the U.S. foreign policy establishment during the Cold War. In much of this work, a connection is drawn between the events at Munich in 1938 and the beliefs of many of influential officials who formulated this stance toward communist movements around the world. They assert that public officials such as Dean Acheson and President Harry Truman viewed the totalitarian regimes of Nazi German and the Soviet Union as analogous and conflated their aggressive intentions. According to Kissinger (1994, pp. 641-642), “Munich [was] the seminal lesson of that generation of leaders, retreat was considered as compounding the difficulties and, above all, as being morally wrong.” In a contribution to the book *The Psychological Dimensions of War* (1990), B. Glad and C.S. Taber claim that the basic assumptions behind the domino theory emerged out of the historical experience at Munich and the self-perceptions of American statesmen regarding how to deal with aggressors, the extensive linkages between national interests great and small, the monolithic nature of global communism, and the “role” of the U.S. as the defender of the free world. They suggest that the first policy expression of these principles was the implementation of the Truman Doctrine in the late 1940s by aiding the Greek and Turkish governments in order to thwart the rise of communist movements in those countries. Their view is backed by the comments of President Harry Truman who certainly believed there were similarities in the behavior of communists and fascist movements and that it was America’s responsibility to intervene in foreign policy crises in Europe and Korea. In his book *Memoirs* (1956), Truman claimed, “Communism was acting in Korea just as Hitler, Mussolini, and the Japanese had acted ten, fifteen and twenty years earlier. I felt that if South Korea was allowed to fall, Communist leaders would be emboldened to override nations closer to our own shores.”

The diplomatic historian Frank Ninkovich’s (1994) study of the principles (or “axioms”) underlying 20th century American foreign policy also stresses the links between “domino thinking” and new notions of strategic interdependence and U.S. interventionism around the world. He differs from the previous writers by suggesting that these changes in geopolitical reasoning were initially articulated by President Woodrow Wilson during World War One. Glad and Taber (1990), however, point out that similar concerns about the linkages between all
strategic interests related to the domino theory were not original to the 20\textsuperscript{th} century or unique to the United States as a major power. They write (p. 66) that this “is a view of the world that many larger status quo nations have embraced [throughout history], though the images used may be of the spread of prairie fires or diseases rather than dominoes.” The authors then discuss other cases (e.g., Athens and Melos in the 5\textsuperscript{th} century BCE, Great Britain and the Falklands, etc.) where arguments that allegedly contained the same features were used to rationalize the use of military force to prevent the spread of an undesirable political process (p. 66). J.L.S. Girling (1970, pp. 370-371) concurs and writes that the domino theory, “unacknowledged or under different names, occurs throughout history” and “is not new” to the Cold War period. If these authors are correct that the domino theory is simply another example of a long line of varying types of metaphorical reductionisms (e.g., lines in the sand, rotten apples, slippery slopes, prairie fires, diseases, etc.) reflecting assumptions about the need to take some sort of action to defend foreign policy interests then it is apparent that the “assumptions” behind the domino theory may have no clearly definable historical origins. Political contagion is an undeniable occurrence throughout time under the appropriate geo-historical conditions. It seems that the “beliefs” underlying the so-called domino theory may have permeated the international relations discourse throughout history and the metaphor itself was simply a new means by which U.S. policymakers and journalists in the century chose to conceptualize, rationalize, and act upon, old beliefs about political contagion.

\textbf{Critiques of the Domino Theory}

This lack of clarity over when the domino theory originated and what exactly it is may go some way toward explaining why debates over its merits remain unresolved. Henry Kissinger (1994, p. 641) is undoubtedly wrong in his assertion that during the Cold War “the Domino Theory had become conventional wisdom and was rarely challenged.” This may have been the case among Kissinger’s political allies in several White House administrations and among many journalists, but the domino theory was never fully embraced by political scientists, historians, and geographers, who opposed it on empirical and theoretical grounds (Kanwisher, 1989 p. 664). As early as 1965, the historian C.P. Fitzgerald attempted to discredit the notion of toppling dominoes in Southeast Asia by rejecting the premise that instability in the region was dictated by the clash of Cold War ideologies. Rather, he viewed clashes in the region as a manifestation of
historical rivalries between various ethno-nationalist groups in the area. He believed policies based on the domino theory were counterproductive and would unleash the problems they were meant to control (O’Sullivan, 1982, p. 58). Similarly, the geographer Rhoads Murphy (1966) rejected the domino model and what he saw as its principle assumptions – the insatiably expansionist tendencies of China, the vulnerability to Southeast Asian countries to Maoist domination, and the need of the U.S. to contain this eventuality via military action. He also assailed crude historical comparisons between the intentions of Chinese communism and Nazi Germany that disregarded the inevitable differences in geo-historical contexts between the two countries. Murphy (1966, pp. 510, 515) disdainfully wrote;

The most remarkable thing about the so-called domino theory is that it is apparently taken seriously by so many otherwise intelligent people. …It is difficult, in conclusion, to find any reliable basis in fact – in past behavior, in realities of the present, or in predictable future courses – for the application of the domino theory to the Chinese role in Southeast Asia. It is at best simplistic, at worst (and perhaps most accurately) a model based on an inappropriate analogy and applied in either ignorance or defiance of an array of data which controvert it at nearly every point.

This interpretation of the merits of the domino theory in the face of historical and geographical circumstances was echoed during a 1969 speech in Honolulu by the Indonesian Ambassador to the U.S. Soedjatmoko. After voicing his beliefs about the difficulties in foreign powers, including China, to maintain long-term dominance in Southeast Asia, he pointed out the simplified logic of the domino theory as a distortion of history that misinformed U.S. policy toward the region. ‘Southeast Asian nations,” he said,

    do not constitute lifeless entities that automatically fall one way or the other depending on which way their neighbor falls. History does not operate that way. … The domino theory, therefore, is to us rather a gross oversimplification of the nature of the historical processes that go on in the area. It obscures and distorts rather than illuminates our understanding and offers no guidelines for realist policy (Aspery, 1994, pp. 973-974).

Similarly, Glad and Taber (1990, pp. 67-75) contend that the domino theory contains at least six questionable historical and psychological assumptions about the nature of global politics. The image, they claim, was adopted by many who misinterpreted the “lessons of Munich,” applied it indiscriminately around the world regardless of geographical context, ignored their own
assumptions about human psychology, and who overemphasized the threat of domino effects and the need to proactively intervene to prevent their occurrence. They argue that the domino metaphor invited diplomats to overemphasize external forces as the sources of foreign policy crises around the world while minimizing the realities in local difference.

Other researchers interested in the psychological basis of foreign policy decisions simply suggest that the domino theory is merely a reflection of flawed statistical reasoning or the inflation of relatively minor global issues to the level of national “interests.” From this perspective, such oversimplified reasoning practices resulted in counterproductive policies throughout the Cold War. Nancy Kanwisher (1989, pp. 663-665) sees the commitment of many intellectuals to the idea long after its shortcomings had already been exposed as analogous to the notion of the “hot hand” (or a streak) in sports. She asserts that policymakers seemed to have believed that communist successes were part of a causally related pattern that would increase the chances of further Soviet advances unless the U.S. proactively intervened. Shimko (1994, p. 667) writes that the underlying premise about the intimate linkages between all American geostrategic interests embedded in metaphor combined with a tendency to ignore the regional and national differences is the major shortcoming of the domino theory. He claims that the use of the imagery exaggerates the significance of global interconnections and obscures global diversity. “The domino metaphor,” he writes, “makes no real distinctions among dominoes …Certainly the differences which can be identified do not alter a domino’s susceptibility to being knocked over in a chain reaction” (p. 67). One common feature among most of these varied critiques is a general awareness that the domino theory provides an impoverished (or even distorted) image of world politics that can lead to unnecessary and tragic military interventions. Ó Tuathail et al. (1998, p. 6) point this out by arguing that the domino theory, as a form of geopolitical discourse and reasoning, “completely ignored the specific geographical characteristics of places, peoples and regions ... [and] ended with the US and other Western soldiers fighting for one side in a bloody civil war in a country they knew very little about and whose real strategic significance was marginal.”

In the discipline of geography, the most comprehensive and sustained critique of the domino theory and its array of shortcoming come from O’Sullivan’s several critical engagements with the metaphor (1982; 1986; 1996; 2001). In these works, he demonstrated the metaphor’s grievous inadequacies in describing, explaining and predicting the diffusion of political
processes occurring in global politics. O’Sullivan’s studies did this by pointing out its logical inconsistency, its excessive abstraction, its over-determinism, its use as an instrument of manipulation by policy-makers, and its failure to correspond with the fundamental realities of history and political geography. In his earliest research on the topic (1982, p. 57), O’Sullivan began his analysis with a reexamination of the origins and evolution of the metaphor and then proceeded to topple it by demonstrating that its logic and assumptions were “sadly lacking as abstractions of geographical processes.” The article demonstrated, for example, the practical inapplicability of the metaphor to the events being represented, its tendency to ignore the significance of geographical contexts, as well as the failure of its proponents to recognize the significance of physical and cultural barriers in retarding processes of expansion diffusion.

In a later article (1996) and book chapter (2001, p. 84), O’Sullivan confronted the reemergence of what he referred to as “neodominoism” – the use of the metaphor “in a more generalized form as an explanation of the geographical incidence of turmoil” and the belief “that the inspiration for violence spreads from one epicenter and proceeds from one neighboring country to another in contagious fashion.” This involved an empirical study in which he examined violent political events occurring around the world that appeared in the news media in 1993 in order to see if there was a correspondence between the domino theory and reality. After demolishing the domino theory years before, O’Sullivan was interested in the broad reappearance of the imagery in the media as well as the commitment of prominent geographers such as Harm de Blij and Peter Muller to the view of the domino theory as a useful and definable theory (2001, pp. 84-87). By the early 1990s, the classic image of the metaphor not only reappeared but it was also reformulated to encompass a wider variety of events and diffusion processes operating at and across various spatial scales via pathogen-like diffusion.

The specific variant investigated by O’Sullivan was a modification of the classic, negative, Cold War domino metaphor now adapted to describe the potential transmission process of instability and violence from neighboring country to country. This perspective was best exemplified in Harm de Blij and Peter O. Muller’s popular world geography textbook. Remarkably, “neodominoism” also surfaced in the Soviet Union in 1990 when a Politburo member invoked it to warn about potential instability threatening the country emanating from Lithuania. Simultaneously, the Soviet government’s mouthpiece Pravda issued a conflicting claim that a destabilizing domino effect was not occurring on the country’s western flank.
(Communist world not subject to “domino effect,” 1990). The Russians later used the domino reference to describe the threat to the country represented by the spread of Islamic fundamentalism emerging from Central Asia (O’Sullivan, 2001, p. 84). Some geographers also claim that the fear of a domino-like spread of instability in the Balkans caused by Albanian ethno-nationalism was a major motivation behind the decision of NATO leaders to initiate an air war (Operation Allied Force) against the Yugoslav Serbs in 1999 (Cohen, 2003 p. 25).

de Blij and Muller’s persistence throughout the post-Cold War era in clinging to the domino theory and promoting it in the mind of geography students was apparent in successive editions their popular world geography textbook, *Geography: Realms, Regions, and Concepts* (2010). From the 7th through the 14th editions of the text, the domino theory has even retained its status as a formal and definable “theory.” These books suggested the alleged utility of the theory for students unfamiliar with the classic metaphor in a convenient textbox that normalized the continued use of the imagery by clearly defining it as well as provided concrete examples of the domino theory in action (2010). According to de Blij and Muller (2010, p. 549),

…the domino “theory” seemed invalid [after the end of the Vietnam War]. But is the theory totally without merit? Unfortunately, some political geographers to this day mistakenly define this idea in terms of communist activity. Communist insurgency, however, is only one way a country can be destabilized (Peru came close to collapse from it). But right-wing rebellion (Nicaragua’s Contras), ethnic conflict (Bosnia), religious extremism (Algeria), and even economic and environmental causes can cause havoc in a country. Properly defined, the domino theory holds that destabilization from any cause in one country can result in the collapse of order in a neighboring country, triggering a chain of events that can affect a series of contiguous states in turn. A recent instance of the domino effect comes from Equatorial Africa, where the collapse of order in Rwanda spilled over into The Congo (then Zaire) and also affected Burundi, Congo, and Angola. Although the specific examples have changed in the new editions, this belief in the domino “theory” by de Blij and Muller is similar to their 1994 edition where they referred to instability in Southeastern Europe originating in the former Yugoslavia as an example of what they claimed to be a spreading domino-type impulse.

O’Sullivan’s aforementioned (1996; 2001) studies set out to test the merits of de Blij and Muller’s modified and expansive neodominoist version of the domino theory though an
empirical observation of actual world events in 1993 to see if they conformed with the basic assumptions of the theory. To operationalize the “neodomino” theory for study, O’Sullivan defined the more generalized version as “the simple proposition that political violence and instability, whatever its complexion is contagious and spreads to neighboring countries” (p. 3). This was explored by mapping out these incidences of political violence in order to provide “quantitative evidence of the possible transmission of violent impulses between countries” in order to test the merits of the theory (p. 87). O’Sullivan sought to observe whether or not “violence spreads from one epicenter and proceeds from one neighboring country to another in contagious sequence” or, if it instead, appears to be “a chance [occurrence of political violence] generated in response to local circumstances” (2001, p. 85).

After mapping and analyzing the data, O’Sullivan found that political violence appeared to be mostly a local matter and did not strongly diffuse into contiguous countries through an epidemiological process. His findings indicated that the domino theory still “had little to recommend it as an explanation of the pattern of global violence which emerged in the early 1990s” (p. 96). O’Sullivan acknowledges, however, that his study may have not examined events over a sufficiently long period to detect such processes at work and that “information collected over several years would be necessary to test the theory’s validity” in more depth (p. 96). Despite the countervailing evidence about the efficacy of the domino theory demonstrated in O’Sullivan’s study, De Blij and Muller, for their part, continued to retain the section lauding the merits of the “domino theory” in repeated editions of their text since 1996.

**The Domino Theory in Post-Cold War Geopolitical Discourse**

Despite its infamous history and the fact that it has been rejected by many scholars (Kanwisher, 1989 p. 652), the domino theory has endured in American popular geopolitical discourse and has continued to mutate into ever more generalized forms (O’Sullivan, 2001). It now seems to have become firmly embedded in the geopolitical vernacular as a default journalistic catchphrase for the real and imagined occurrence or contagious diffusion of virtually any form of instability, violence and political and/or economic change across space and at virtually any spatial scale. In fact, a review of the U.S. news media’s discourse on foreign affairs available in the *Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe* database reveals that the domino theory has appeared in the coverage of almost every major international crisis since 1989. Evidence of this
is demonstrated in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven of this dissertation. These chapters discuss the findings of case studies that explore the way in which references to the domino theory operated to shape American reporting on the ethnic conflicts and humanitarian disasters in Bosnia (from 1993-1995) and Kosovo (in 1999) and the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq (from 2003-2007). The term was also harnessed, for example, in coverage of the First Persian Gulf War, the disastrous American intervention in Somalia in the early 1990s, recent problems with piracy off the Horn of Africa, the U.S.-led war and occupation of Afghanistan, the dangers of international terrorism and many other foreign crises and cases of actual (or potential) regional instability.

In addition to de Blij and Muller’s modification of the negative version of the domino theory related to political instability, another variant appeared by the early 1990s as a device for describing and connecting many of the political transformations that swept across the post-Cold War international landscape as linked parts of some larger and inevitable historical process. On the surface of media reports, one novel application of the concept seems to have reflected the post-Cold War triumphalist attitudes and idealized self images of many Westerners and their self-satisfying perceptions of “historic” events taking place in the so-called “new world order”. Under this reformulation of the domino theory, Western-style democratic, liberal and capitalist governments are imagined as the realization of universal values and the forces of progress while dictatorial, illiberal regimes are the ones that are viewed as inherently unstable and vulnerable to revolutionary impulses that will ultimately cause them to topple.

During the early post-Cold War period, the domino image was reversed and it was not uncommon for international political changes to be described and linked in the media as part of a historical “democratic domino” process. As early as 1989, *The Jerusalem Post* (Litani, 1989) represented the changes in Eastern Europe as a “reverse” domino effect. “Things are developing quickly here [in Czechoslovakia],” wrote Yehuda Litani, “It is like watching a domino effect …” The following year a vast number of global periodicals used the imagery and even sought to link the process to a grand process of positive global transformation. In 1990, the executive director of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut asserted that, “there really is a domino effect” and it “involve[s] the conclusion of a great battle of ideas, with a clear victor [liberal individualism] (Ladd, 1990). Similarly, the historian Adam Przeworski (1991, p.21) wrote:
The “Autumn of the People” [the collapse of communism] constitutes one event, perhaps one and a half. Henry Kissinger’s “domino theory” triumphed; all he missed was the direction in which the dominoes would fall. What happened in Rumania was caused by what occurred in Czechoslovakia, what ensued in Czechoslovakia resulted from the breakdown in East Germany, what stimulated masses of people to fill the streets in East Germany followed the political changes in Hungary, what showed Hungarians a way out was the success of negotiations in Poland” the application of the domino imagery for the spread of democracy and free markets worldwide continued throughout the 1990s and after 2000.

Glad and Taber (1990, p. 74) concur with this view and point out that, “Ironically, from the American perspective, the only major domino effect in the post-World War II world took place in the Russian Empire.”

Some academics and news commentators argue that the appeal of this form of neodominionism, particularly among influential neoconservatives within, or close to, the Bush Administration, was one of the rationales behind the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Miller, 2003). According to Palestinian literary and cultural critic Edward Said (2004, pp. xix-xxi),

The major influences on George W. Bush’s Pentagon and National Security Council were men such as Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami, experts on the Arab and Islamic world who helped American hawks think about such preposterous phenomena as the Arab mind and centuries-old Islamic decline that only American power could reverse. …

Accompanying such warmongering expertise have been the omnipresent CNNs and Fox News Channels of this world … recycling the same unverifiable fictions and vast generalizations [and these experts]…using the same clichés, the same demeaning stereotypes, the same justification for power and violence (after all, runs the chorus, power is the only language they understand) … One specifically American contribution to the discourse of empire is the specialized jargon of policy expertise. You don’t need Arabic or Persian or even French to pontificate about how the democracy domino effect is just what the Arab world needs.

Apparently, some members of the U.S. State Department believed that this type of geopolitical reasoning had become so prevalent within the Bush Administration that they challenged the view in a leaked (but still classified) official report titled “Iraq, the Middle East and Change: No
Dominoes” (Miller, 2003). Other media reports, such as UPI, asserted that the domino theory was regularly invoked to justify the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 and to rationalize the continued occupation of the country on the grounds that a withdrawal would damage U.S. credibility, allow terrorism to spread, and destabilize the region (Bush articulates own domino theory, 2007). In contrast, some news outlets have referred to the domino metaphor to suggest that America’s policies have actually destabilized the region and enhanced the chances of a negative domino effect of chaos spilling across the Middle East (Fisher, 2007). Chapter Seven of this dissertation specifically explores the way in which allusions to this version of the domino theory were made by the U.S. news media in their reporting on the war and occupation in Iraq from 2003-2007.

In early 2005, for example, the global print and broadcast news media continued to use references to domino “theories” and “effects” to explain and connect the inexplicable appearance of various pro-democracy movements, successful elections, political changes, and the collapse of dictatorial regimes worldwide. In 2005, for example, Zbigniew Brezezinski suggested that democratic changes sweeping across Ukraine might also initiate a “domino effect” in other post-Soviet countries (Brezezinski, 2005). Similarly, The Economist magazine has explicitly and repeatedly drawn upon the domino simile to describe the virus-like spread of democracy throughout Central Asia inspired by events from as far away as Ukraine. The April 2-8th (2005) edition of The Economist not only used the domino metaphor in the text of the article but also contained a cartoon depicting the rulers in the region as an actual row of dominoes beginning to topple.

More recently, this trend has also been apparent in global news stories where various government officials and journalists have used the domino metaphor to portray a wide array of events and points-of-views. For example, both Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and NATO Lieutenant-General Roland Kather as well as reputable media outlets such as Reuters, The Associated Press, and National Public Radio drew upon the imagery to describe the implications that might result from Kosovo’s independence in distant places throughout the world (including Abkhazia, S. Ossetia, Basque Country, Flanders, and Scotland) (Kole, 2007; Kosovo status talks failure as seen by Western Balkan media 29 Nov, 2007; NATO force ready to act in case of Serb revolt in northern Kosovo, 2007; Russia denies Kosovo independent of Serbia, 2007). In contrast, Wolfgang Ischinger, the E.U.’s representative to the so-called “troika”
of nations negotiating Kosovo’s independence, asserted that Kosovo was a “unique” case that would “not cause a domino effect” (Nicola, 2007). In other cases, the domino theory was also used by *The Jerusalem Post* (Katz, 2008) to warn about the potential implications of a precipitous Spanish withdrawal from the UNIFIL peacekeeping force in Lebanon while a German news site claimed that cuts in Russian gas supplies to Ukraine might have a “domino effect” that could escalate into a regional “gas war” (EU fears domino effect as Russia cuts gas to Ukraine, 2008).

In 2009, the phrase remerged in news coverage on the ongoing U.S.-led occupation of Afghanistan. Although some of the reporting in which the term appeared employed it to discuss the death of Vietnam-era U.S. official Robert McNamara and the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, most of the reports on foreign affairs issues used it to refer to instability plaguing the Central Asian country. At this point, recently inaugurated President Barack Obama was confronted with a deteriorating military situation in the Afghan conflict that later provoked his decision to escalate American military involvement in the crisis. Obama decided to deploy thousands of additional military personnel to the region in an effort to resolve the chronic (and apparently worsening) instability in Afghanistan. This policy choice provoked an eruption in the number of news report relying on the domino theory. These wide-ranging uses of the metaphor indicate that rather than fall into disuse, the classic version of the domino theory has simply been transformed into new forms that have been applied to describe, predict, and connect all types of events occurring across the global landscape. As these references clearly illustrate, the domino theory has remained alive in the vernacular of contemporary popular geopolitics.

**Perspectives on the Diffusion of Neodominoism**

In addition to exhibiting common (and new) characteristics in form and usage as the classic Cold War version of the domino theory, the new variants of the domino theory appearing in the news also seem to have similarities and differences in the manner in which they are believed to diffuse across the international landscape. While the classic model was rightfully criticized for its excessive abstraction and determinism because it ignored local contexts and assumed that, unless halted by outside intervention, communism would inevitably spread from country to country based on the forces of momentum and sheer proximity, some of the more recent usages appear to employ more flexible and less deterministic epidemiological metaphors
for theorizing so-called domino effects. One of the earliest reference to these newer models for transmission appeared in Glad and Taber (1990) where they outlined an “epidemiological model” which they claimed “presage[s] the circumstances under which” domino effects will spread (p. 74). They content that this model was superior because it considered the particular contexts of the diffusion, the contagiousness of the ‘pathogen’, the possibility and means of transmission, and the vulnerability of the locale into which spreads rather than mere proximity alone (Glad and Taber, 1990, pp. 70-74).

In contrast, de Blij and Muller’s variant of domino-style diffusion shares with the classic metaphor an insistence that geographic proximity and contiguity continue to be major variables in the diffusion of political instability and/or change across space. de Blij illustrate this view in his most recent book where he claims that the domino theory: “properly defined…holds that destabilization from any cause in one country can [but, of course, may not] result in the collapse of order in a neighboring country, triggering a chain of events that can affect a series of contiguous states in turn” (2005, p. 511). Another, even more expansive, use of the domino theory relying on an epidemiological view regarding political changes appears to minimize the significance of territorial contiguity altogether and to instead emphasize the linkages between changes taking place anywhere throughout an interconnected international system. This seems to be a common media usage of the domino reference in an era of time-space compression (Harvey, 1990) in which physical distance has become less significant and supposed domino effects can leap both time and space and move through entangled global transmission networks. Ninkovich’s (1995) understanding of the domino theory seems to adhere to this view of global interconnectedness. From this perspective, social “distance” or “nearness” is given primacy over territorial proximity and the analysis of interactions is atomized down as far as the individual or group level of interaction. What seems to matter is the level of interrelation or influence and how traits (e.g., political instability, violence, etc.) move or initiate changes throughout a compressed global system. Territorial proximity, however, can still be an important consideration from this perspective because it can increase the likelihood and intensity of interaction between individuals, groups, regions, countries, etc.. In an article in Foreign Policy referring to the domino theory, Stephan Walt wrote, “contagion is most likely within particular geographic regions [because] states that are close to one another tend to trade more with each other and share higher levels of migration, tourism and communication flows [and] are also more likely to
have similar internal characteristics” (2000, p. 40-41). In this case, the forces influencing the fall of dominoes can be carried in print, across communications networks and the transmissions of the global media and by people traveling aboard aircraft (O’Sullivan, 1996; Walt, 2000).

Interestingly, many of these new epidemiological views on the domino theory pay considerable attention to both local contexts (vulnerability) and the specifics of even relatively minor political impulses and connections (transmission vectors) that can enable political contagions to leap across space and initiate revolutionary forms of change virtually anywhere. Because of this, those who are comfortable envisioning international relations in this manner remain committed to the plausibility of the domino theory as a viable explanation for, or way to predict, various events. Many proponents of the theory (de Blij and Muller, 2010) apparently cling to the notion that there must be something to the domino theory just because political events and geographical changes do sometimes spread. I contend that this application of the domino metaphor to describe virtually any political changes that are influenced by events or individuals from the most distant geographic locales is even more difficult to refute than the classic version of the domino theory because global events are undeniably interrelated. One of the longstanding criticisms of the domino theory continues to apply to the new versions because, while social, political and economic changes regularly diffuse across space, they only do so under the appropriate geo-historical conditions.

Even if we were to take these newer epidemiological models for the spread of “domino effects” seriously because they appear to be superior to the classic model - they seem less deterministic, less abstract, and take local circumstances seriously - they actually highlight the shortcomings of the catchphrase for simplifying world affairs if one sought to rely on them to promote geopolitical understanding and prediction. Using their own criteria, in order to discern a so-called domino effect taking place one must now understand the relationship between virtually all of the variables within local contexts and the entire global system as well as all possible vectors of transmission. This is clearly a difficult task that, if successfully completed, would provide a level of detailed knowledge that would negate the need of utilizing a domino metaphor as a form of mental reductionism or device for portraying global affairs altogether. Otherwise, this metaphor remains a powerful and persuasive means of framing a political argument or guessing about what may happen based on certain factors. It provides policy makers with a powerful imagery to aid their speculations about unfolding events or to use after all of the
political transformations have taken place and the elements involved in the process are readily apparent. I want to be clear that I am in no way promoting the argument that political contagion is not occurring throughout the world because it certainly is, only that the domino theory is simply one way in which the perceived connections between events can be talked about or rationalized. The decision to invoke (or not invoke) the metaphor to represent a particular set of foreign policy issues is a highly politicized matter and that is, in itself, an act that produces situated geopolitical knowledge by representing global politics from a certain perspective. The history and varied disputes over the validity and merits of the domino theory demonstrate that it is not a single well-defined theory or mere elegant rhetoric; rather, it is a form of geopolitical discourse that can have serious implications in the real world.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated that there is no consensus in the literature on what the domino theory is, what its origins, history, and underlying assumptions are, and if it has any merits for appreciating world events. Despite these unresolved debates the domino theory matters because it has endured in the rhetoric of foreign policy and continues to be invoked as a powerful imagery for representing, and formulating policies for dealing with, world events. Because of this, the seemingly trivial rhetoric of dominoes has consequences for people around the world today just as it did during the Vietnam War. It is also a significant topic of study for geographers because of its importance as a geopolitical discourse as well as its strong association with the discipline. The “theory” has been subjected to repeated critique and analysis within the field in the past (O’Sullivan, 1982; O’Sullivan, 1996; O’Sullivan, 2001) and continues to be popularized by some prominent geographers (de Blij and Muller, 2010) who link it to the discipline in the minds of thousands of Americans students every year. This chapter has reviewed some of the ways in which the domino theory has been employed to represent global affairs since 1989 in order to familiarize readers with its enduring prevalence as a geopolitical discourse.

Despite its relevance to geography and persistent global implications, this chapter has also shown that the domino theory remains a contested concept that is ontologically and epistemologically unstable. The perspective of this dissertation is that there is, in fact, not a single domino theory. Rather there are many contending views of the domino theory that
condition the way in which events are talked about and reacted to around the world in different political contexts. Because of this understanding, I will not seek to prove or disprove the domino theory by testing it empirically in this study; this endeavor has been done by other scholars where a version of the domino theory was clearly shown to be a deficient way of representing world events (O’Sullivan, 1982; O’Sullivan, 1996; O’Sullivan, 2001). Nevertheless, the domino theory survived these critiques and endured in the popular foreign policy discourse and continues to be embraced by well-known geographers, journalists, and intellectuals of statecraft. Leslie Hepple’s (1992, p. 153) study of the use of geopolitical metaphors in South America helps to explain the difficulty in permanently annihilating questionable metaphors such as the domino theory from the foreign affairs discourse. “Metaphors” he claims, “cannot be dismissed as epistemologically ‘wrong’” because “On the contrary, all metaphors are partial” and “are adopted by social groups in their own interests” (pp. 153, 142).

This dissertation will rely on this type of theoretical perspective, rooted in “critical geopolitics” and related forms of critical social theory, that embrace the notion that geopolitics are not, as so often is represented, simply politics based on geographical ‘facts’ or ‘realities.’ Instead, geopolitics are themselves a form of politics that represent and promote the agendas of certain individuals or social groups. Further, the news media has been implicated by critical geographers in these processes as an important source of images and understandings of world politics for the general public. In recent decades, geographers have tried to “investigate how [these news] sources construct particular interpretations of events, places, or processes … interpretations which influence courses of actions” (Dodds, 2004, p. 71). The following chapter (Chapter Three) will review the body of scholarly research in critical geopolitics that provides the theoretical underpinnings for this research on the domino theory as a geopolitical discourse used in the American news media’s reporting on global affairs since 1989. This theoretical literature review will situate this dissertation in the existing work in critical geopolitics and help illustrate how this project will contribute to the existing body of scholarly work in these areas by shedding light on how references to the domino theory have been used over the past two decades as a geopolitical discourse to re-frame political debates in popular geopolitics of the U.S. news media over major foreign policy crises facing the country.
CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the history and philosophical influences for the theoretical perspective underlying this research assessing the role of the domino theory in the geopolitical discourses of the U.S. news media since 1989. This strand of scholarship within geography is generally referred to as “critical geopolitics.” Critical geopolitics is the subfield within political geography that investigates the way in which geopolitical knowledge is actively produced at various institutional sites (such as the popular news media). The resulting imaginative geographies are seen as manifestations of the society (or groups) from which they emerge rather than accurate representations of global realities or revelations of universal geographical “truths.” Proponents of a critical geopolitics seek to interrogate this process of knowledge creation through a series of deconstructive strategies in order to expose its subjectivity, bias and political implications. The resulting geographies are now viewed by these scholars, not as windows on reality, but as inherently political activities that both reflect and constitute social reality (Barnes and Duncan, 1992). This body of research relies on poststructural, postmodern and postcolonial analysis that have demystified the conventional assumptions regarding seemingly innocuous forms of knowledge (e.g. maps, news reports, etc.) and revealed that they are socially constructed and always reflective of the assumptions of their producer(s) and the contexts in which they originate (Harley, 1997). From this perspective, geopolitics appearing in the news media represents an artifact of the discursive practices of its particular era and place that are themselves related to power and knowledge in that society that is then (re)produced through its mediation to their readership.

Based on a review of the literature on the domino theory (see Chapter Two), it is apparent that the domino metaphor has operated in various contexts as part of a larger geopolitical discourse by creating certain representations of world affairs. These imaginative geographies have had serious consequences when relied upon by U.S. leaders and their political allies to promote certain foreign policy agendas in places like Vietnam and Latin America. The so-called domino theory has long been associated with geography and has been engaged by a series of
geographers who have, for example, either rejected it as an impoverished image of world affairs (e.g., O’Sullivan, 1982; O’Sullivan, 1996; O’Sullivan, 2001) or have embraced it and popularized it in their widely-used textbooks (de Blij and Mueller, 2008). The preceding chapter also made it apparent that the precise meaning, merits and implications of the domino theory remain largely unsettled. I contend that the history of the metaphor demonstrates that there is not a single, uncontested, and universally accepted definition, image, or meaning of the domino theory. Rather, the domino theory seems to be one way in which policy makers, academics or news commentators (as well as others) perceived and represented foreign policy issues and world events at different times and for varying reasons. Furthermore, Chapter 2 illustrated that the metaphor has actually continued to be invoked by the American news media over the last 25 years in the coverage of various foreign issues (such as the U.S. interventions in Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq).

With these considerations in mind, this dissertation sets out to explore and document the imaginative geographies produced by the U.S. printed news since 1989 to assess if and how the so-called domino theory appeared as part of the geopolitical discourses that represented world affairs in a way that reinforced certain political perspectives. I also seek to determine if there were any common characteristics in and across the representations embedded in the overall news coverage to access potential implications of these imaginative geographies. The theoretical approach utilized to carry this out is rooted in the aforementioned geographic subfield of critical geopolitics. This chapter will examine the history, philosophical influences, and characteristics of critical geopolitics in order to demonstrate the precedents for, and significance of, this research project within this body of scholarship in geography.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the early forms of geopolitics that emerged along with the formal institutionalization of geography as an academic discipline in the 19th century. Early geopolitics was crude body of work that was eventually discredited, leading geographers to largely eschew the study of geopolitics for most of the 20th century. In the interim, most of the academic research on topics relevant to geopolitics was conducted by scholars in other disciplines such as political science and diplomatic history. The second section of the chapter illustrates the resurrection of research on geopolitics by geographers in the early 1980s and the variety of work that was conducted during this transitional period. This is followed by a discussion of the rise of a self-consciously “critical geopolitics” as a specific subfield within
geography and an extensive overview of the various strands of critical social theory (postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, etc.) on which it is based.

The final section will situate this research in the study of critical geopolitics by examining the practice’s general concerns and how its mode of research has been successfully used in the past to explore topics relevant to this dissertation. For example, I will explore a number of specific studies on geopolitical metaphors and the popular media’s role as an institutional site for the (re)production of geopolitical knowledge (Sharp, 1993; Dittmer, 2005). When considered collectively, previous work in critical geopolitics has demonstrated the significance of a critical investigation of geopolitical language, reasoning practices, metaphors, and media representations in the production of geopolitical knowledge, thereby providing a strong precedent for the research topic of this dissertation. After completing this chapter, the reader should be aware of how this dissertation specifically fits in with the larger body of scholarship in critical geopolitics. They can also expect to be familiarized with the theoretical perspectives rooted in critical social theory underlying the core questions, approaches, and interpretations involved in this research.

**Background**

**The Rise and Fall of Early Geopolitics**

The study of geopolitics (a sub-branch of political geography) emerged along with geography’s formal institutionalization as an academic discipline in the late 19th century. This was a period in which the fledgling field was seeking to establish and legitimize its position in the newly developing academic division of labor by transforming it into a “useful” and objective “science” that studied the “natural laws” of state development and behavior and of social-environmental relations. This task was sometimes accomplished by borrowing concepts from the predominant natural science theories of the era in a manner that sought to directly link state interactions, group characteristics, social structures and cultural traits to causal environmental features and processes. Environmental deterministic and geopolitical reasoning supposedly objectively analyzed the natural manner in which environmental conditions and locations exerted a controlling influence on the physical and mental capacities (and aptitude for success) of certain social groups, particularly races and states. This period in geography was characterized by a political geography and/or early geopolitics that sought to rationalize and naturalize the existing
social and geopolitical order as beyond human control to provide a satisfying and supposedly scientific explanation for a European dominated status quo that was natural and could not and should not be upset. It also served as a convenient intellectual rationalization for the imperialist and militaristic polities for major colonial and/or aggressive powers such as Great Britain and Imperial (as well as Nazi) Germany. As a result of the entrenchment of these widespread intellectual currents in the geographic tradition, mainstream geography entered an era dominated by the geopolitical and environmental deterministic perspectives that had crippling effects that largely discredited the subfield until it finally reemerged once again in the 1980s (Agnew, 2002; Holt-Jensen, 2003; Peet, 1998).

Although crude forms of what could be characterized as variants of “environmental determinism” characterized geographic tradition at least back as far as the time of the ancient Greeks, it was in the late 19th century when naturalistic concepts from the physical sciences were imported into the field by geographers attempting to transform their field into a “science” seeking to discover laws of human-environmental relations (Holt-Jensen, 2003, p. 42). This obsession with an “objective” and “scientific” understanding largely resulted from the particular interests and training of those who were most influential in the founding and institutionalization of the discipline. During this early phase, “it was primarily a group of natural scientists with interests in physical geography who won the subject academic respect” (Holt-Jensen, 2003, p. 40). This naturalistic reasoning enabled geographers, dissatisfied with the widespread perception of their field as an unscientific handmaiden to history, to justify geography as a both a distinctive and scientific academic discipline.

The obsession with naturalistic reasoning is inextricably linked to the so-called “Darwinian Revolution” in new scientific philosophy that followed the publication of Charles Darwin’s famous work, *Origin of the Species*, in 1859. Darwin’s central themes were that forms of life gradually evolve from lower and simpler to higher and more complex forms and that this process involves struggle and natural selection, and that humanity was part of a dynamic ecological system. According to Holt-Jensen (2003, p. 38), the influence of Darwinism was powerful and these ideas “dominated scientific debate in the latter part of the nineteenth century, in both the natural and social sciences.” Unfortunately, these exchanges also popularized the existing work of other natural scientists such as Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck and the early social scientist and philosopher Herbert Spencer, who arguably had a more powerful influence than did

These ideologies were embraced by many geographers who attempted to transform their field into a “science of human-environmental relations” (Holt-Jensen, 2003, p. 327) with elaborate “systems of environmental/geographical accounting; classifying states and regions [and groups] in terms of inventories of resources, racial characteristics, economic and political organization, and climate types” (Agnew, 2002, p. 62). This mode of analysis was appealing because it simplified an infinitely complex world, taking social processes “out of the historically contingent” and reducing them to “geographically [and biologically] predictable” outcomes of unavoidable natural forces (Agnew, 2002, p. 69).

The geographer most associated with this early geopolitics, Friedrich Ratzel, (also considered the founder of political geography), was himself trained in the natural sciences and seems to been influenced by much of the predominant “scientific” thinking as well as the political developments of his era. At a time when his home country, Germany, was undergoing political unification, much of his work centered on a supposedly “scientific” (but, in fact, highly biased) study of questions regarding the “nature” of the European-style nation-state. To accomplish this task, he borrowed concepts from biology and constructed an analogy of the state as a social organism, with it then becoming his primary unit of social analysis. Ratzel’s naturalistic theories suggested that the state organism was “subjected to the [same type] laws that governed the evolution of all organisms” (Peet, 1998, p. 317) and, as a result, its form … [was] determined by natural conditions” (Holt-Jensen, 2003, p. 42). For Ratzel, the state was an expanding organism that, like all organisms, was compelled by “natural laws” to perpetually expand, struggle against, and subsume other inferior states and peoples until it reached its natural frontiers and extent. He viewed the growth and ultimate size of a given state a reflection of the inherent superiority of its people and their level of civilization. The failure of the state to conform to the imperatives of these natural conditions signified its inferiority and would inevitably result in its “resources exhaustion” and death as a social organism (Agnew, 2002, p. 65). Ratzel’s (1896, pp. 526-527) geopolitical worldview is illustrated by his assertion that, the state is a living organism…an application of the forces of civilization under particular conditions… …the areas of states grow with their civilization, people in a low state of
civilization are naturally collected in very small political organizations, and the lower their condition the smaller are the states.

In this view, states must always be mindful of the geopolitical realities of natural processes and environmental and spatial constraints and opportunities. Although Ratzel’s account was seen as an “objective” and “scientific” “account of why Germany required a larger space that it currently occupied” (Agnew, 2002, p. 15), it actually provided a scientific justification for his newly united country’s aggressive expansion and imperialism. Ultimately, Ratzel’s state-based views of international relations were adopted and greatly “simplified and popularized” by his disciples, Ellen Churchill Semple and the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellen. Kjellen is credited with providing the sub-field with the name “Geopolitics” in 1899. For Kjellen, “Geopolitics referred to the harnessing of geographic knowledge to further the aims of specific national states” (Agnew, 2002, p. 15).

In Great Britain, a British-style geopolitics was greatly popularized by the country’s major founding geographer, Sir Halford Mackinder. Himself trained as a biologist at Oxford, Mackinder was profoundly influenced by intellectual currents of the day and believed that a geographical science could serve to “bridge the gap between the natural sciences and the study of humanity” (Holt-Jensen, 2003, p. 33). Mackinder viewed Great Britain as a “force for good” (p. 32) in the world and developed a spatial model of geopolitics based on geographical “realities” intended to served his nation (and all of humanity) by providing a “naturalistic bases for British foreign policy” decisions (Peet, 1998, p. 13). In his well-known paper ‘The geographical pivot of history,’ he argued that sea-power was declining relative to land-based powers and provided a simplified model to inform British foreign policy with the ultimate goal of preventing the so-called ‘Pivot’ or ‘Heartland’ (Central Eurasia, the area from which he believed threats to Europe has historically originated) from being dominated by a single (or any coalition) of unfriendly powers (Mackinder, 1904). In has been argued that Mackinder’s geopolitics was actually more ‘spatially deterministic’ than social Darwinist, however, in that it “privileged the distribution of continents and oceans more than climatic or racial characteristics of different areas” (Agnew, 2002 p. 69).

By the 1920s, the grievous shortcomings in the logic of the naturalized knowledge claims of crude environmental determinism and geopolitics became more and more apparent to many intellectuals and the approach was subjected to a sustained and withering critique. Within a
few decades it was finally dismissed as an academic pursuit that was suspect and quasi-scientific (or pseudo-scientific) at best. First, it slowly became evident that much of the work in this mode of thinking had fundamental inadequacies in logic and consistency (and academic rigor) that had been thinly veiled by drawing upon elegant rhetoric and devices such as the society-organism analogy. Peet claims that the analogies, for example, “between [natural] organisms and social organism” served as “crude methodological device[s]” of the sort that “can enable leaps in understanding; but such leaps may be in the wrong direction” (1998, p. 325).

These pseudo-scientists had a tendency to accept a European dominated 19th/early 20th century global status-quo as a given, the ‘natural’ pinnacle of civilizations progress, and then crudely theorize from that given, selectively looking for environmental causes that seemed to explain this ‘natural’ condition. The resulting sub-discipline often had an overt tendency toward racist and/or nationalistic theorizing thinly veiled as ‘objective science’ that often served to rationalize and justify clearly immoral activities such as military aggression, imperialism and the mistreatment or extermination of non-European peoples. Ultimately, crude forms of Social Darwinism and Geopolitics were even embraced and popularized by geographers such as Karl Haushofer and became an intrinsic part of Nazi ideology and Geopolitik, serving as a justification for later German military expansionism.

Although these critiques and world events drove early geopolitics into decline as a legitimate form of geographic inquiry, it continued to exert a powerful influence on the subsequent trajectory of the discipline well into the 20th century. As the shortcomings and tendencies toward racism/nationalism of its supposedly “scientific” and “objective” naturalistic ‘truth’ claims became more readily apparent, most clearly by its alleged association with Nazi ideology and Geopolitik, many academics began to reject geopolitical and environmental deterministic forms of study. For decades, geographers ended up abdicating their role in the study of international politics and these areas of inquiry were taken over by other disciplines such as political science and diplomatic history.

The Reemergence of Geopolitics in the 1980s

The study of geopolitics within geography largely disappeared for most of the remainder of the 20th century until the field began to reemerge once again in the 1980s. The resurrected subfield, however, was vastly changed because the new generation of scholars were acutely aware of the field’s disreputable heritage and profoundly influenced by the humanistic and
critical social theory (postmodernism/poststructuralism, postcolonialism, Marxism, Feminism, etc.) that saturated the social sciences at the time. They recognized that the supposedly “objective” knowledge produced by their disciplinary predecessors had actually been laden with bias and promoted the interests of certain social and political groups. Many from within this eclectic group of scholars displayed varying levels of skepticism (largely related to their particular ontological and epistemological views) toward the “truth” claims of conventional forms of geopolitics and sought to position their subfield in direct opposition to mainstream. Over time, their efforts, often generally referred to as “critical geopolitics,” began to explore the study of geopolitics not as the discovery of “truth” but as a set of socio-political acts and processes through which geopolitical knowledge is constructed by various actors in order promote (even if unwittingly) certain interests (Ó Tuathail et al., 1998). This new branch of political geography opened-up and greatly expanded the study of geopolitical issues to include the geopolitics produced at and across various scales and institutional “sites” (e.g., government, the classroom, the popular media, etc.).

As a result, the last thirty years have witnessed a dramatic resurgence in the study of geopolitics within the field of geography. According to Leslie Hepple (1986), the term “geopolitics” was not actually resurrected by political geographers. He claims that it was brought back into the geopolitical vernacular almost “single-handedly” in the 1960s and 1970s by former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who used it to describe Realpolitik-style global politics between the two major superpowers. Nevertheless, since that time the explicit use of the term by geographers has reappeared and geopolitics has reemerged as a specific sub-field and mode of inquiry within the discipline. In general, these varied approaches to geopolitics initiated a marked departure from the work in mainstream geopolitics because they demonstrated both a critical skepticism towards conventional approaches as well as a greater appreciation for questions of language, perception, ideology, logic and geography on which the production of geopolitics is based that had long been ignored in the more orthodox traditions. According to Simon Dalby (1994, pp. 56-57):

From a variety of theoretical positions, critical scholars have challenged the conventional understandings of geopolitics … [and] the state-centered formulations of politics and the ethnocentric, determinist, exceptionalist traits in classical geopolitical writings and their
current reiterations. The more theoretical critiques have gone further and challenged the epistemological and ontological presuppositions of geopolitical reasoning.

Much of the earliest work appearing during this initial reexamination of geopolitics in the discipline emphasized a more critical and sophisticated view of geopolitics (with an interest in rhetoric, perception, logic, ideology, etc.) while also concerning itself with the geopolitical tradition and “blatant errors of fact or geography” (Dalby, 1994, p. 57) and the “objective’ global factors, resource access, contiguity of competing states, etc. conditioning geopolitical relations” (Dalby, 1994, p. 57; Agnew 2002, pp. 107-108). Dalby (1994) suggested that there was a spectrum of scholars whose work could be generally labeled “critical geopolitics” with some in the relative mainstream and others relying on radical forms of social theory. One of the earliest forays into the study of perception and global politics was Alan K. Henrikson’s (1980) historical analysis of America’s perceptual shift regarding its place in international relations from a more peripheral placement to a central role by the mid-twentieth century. Another example was Liebowitz’s (1983) interrogation of 1980’s American political discourse in which he “demystified the ideas of “Finlandization” ” (by which it was believed that the Soviet Union dominated Finland) by illustrating that it was demonstrably inaccurate (Dalby, 1994, p. 57). Similarly, John Agnew (1983) exposed the taken-for-granted assumptions regarding America’s supposed “exceptionalism” as a form of ideology that conveniently worked to veil the pursuit of U.S. political interests.

Henrikson’s article titled “The Geographical “Mental Maps” of American Foreign Policy makers” (1980) was perhaps the first salvo in the resurrection of geopolitics. This article sought to improve conventional foreign policy analysis and decision making by bringing the subconscious misperceptions, thought processes, and images of policy makers “to the surface and attempt[t] to rationalize them, [so] one can see their deficiencies and perhaps make adjustments” (p. 525). “Statesmen,” he wrote, “respond to the world as they perceive or imagine it – which may not be the way the world really is” (p. 495). Henrikson’s article, which specifically relies on Yi-Fu Tuan’s notion of “image-plans,” provides an example of a political geographer attempting to incorporate some of the influences of the humanistic geography that appeared in the 1970s into the study of foreign affairs. Some of these influences included an emphasis on the investigation of meaning, perception and language that had largely been ignored by positivistic political geographers.
Humanistic geography is often associated with both Tuan and Anne Buttimer who exhibited a concern with how humans experience the world, make sense of reality and bring this into their consciousness and the role of language in mediating and structuring these processes. They recognized that language is the manner through which sense perceptions are categorized, assigned meaning and acted upon by individuals. Language, however, is not just a vehicle through which humans engage their environment and one another, it is a problematic medium that conditions the way that reality is experienced and understood.

Many other influential geographers also helped to initiate the return to the study of geopolitics in the discipline, particularly Patrick O’Sullivan. O’Sullivan’s article (1982) and book Geopolitics (1986) were some of the earliest substantial contributions in this reemerging strand of critical geopolitics. In the book, interrelated questions of geopolitical perceptions, motives, theory, and practice and “gaps between geographical myth and reality” were explored within a perspective that maintained a concern for the significance of the geographical factors (particularly distance) underlying global politics (5-7). O’Sullivan’s practical vision for geopolitics was one that promoted “the use of geographical good sense in understanding or governing the relations between groups of people” and improves foreign affairs by “emphasiz[ing] the defence which geography offers against the ambitions of rivals and ...instill[ing] the defence which geography offers against the ambitions of rivals and...” 1, 5). “If politics is the art of government,” he wrote, “then the ‘geo’ prefix implies the application of geographic knowledge to this end” (1986). He also expressed a strong interest in the role of perception, language, discourse, and ideology in geopolitical motives, perception and practice. O’Sullivan’s focus on the role of perception, power and representation is indicated in the following passage in his book: “The geographical images of world politics which have been drawn are important not because they objectively explain reality, but because they interpret the intentions of certain powerful sets of people” (1986, p. 24). This study demonstrates an important point in the transition of geopolitics from the “reality-based” research of the early 1980’s to the more openly radical critical geopolitics that appeared toward the end of the decade.

Obviously, O’Sullivan’s aforementioned (see Chapter Two) critical examinations of the so-called domino theory also provide an important precedent for this research. As previously noted, in these works O’Sullivan demonstrated the domino metaphor’s numerous inadequacies for the description, explanation, and prediction of foreign affairs and the processes of diffusion in
global politics. He did this by exposing the weaknesses of the domino theory in logic, consistency, excessive abstraction, determinism, and its failure to correspond with the fundamental realities of history and political geography (1982; 1996; 2001). In his latest studies on the topic (1997; 2001) O’Sullivan engaged the reemergence of the metaphor “in a more generalized form as an explanation of the geographical incidence of turmoil” through an empirical study in which he examined violent political events that appeared in the news media in 1993. This study also provided a basis for this dissertation through its reliance on representations from the global news media as the data sources used for the analysis. From an alternative theoretical perspective, the research in this dissertation carries this study of the so-called domino theory in news coverage up to date from this period.

The Emergence of Critical Geopolitics

Although these examples indicate how a varied strands of theories and approaches characterized the resurgence of work under the banner of geopolitics, it is an entirely new group of theoretical perspective, collectively referred to as “critical geopolitics,” that have been on the ascendance within the field and in most of geography’s major academic journals in the last two decades. Critical geopolitics is conducted by a heterogeneous group of geographers who arose in direct opposition to traditional and mainstream visions of geopolitics by drawing on a combination of critical, postmodern, post-structural, and postcolonial theoretical perspectives. They have called for the active creation of critical forms of geopolitics to critique, de-legitimize and displace the more conventional forms geopolitics. The term “critical geopolitics” first appeared in 1986 when Peter Taylor used the term while discussing Gearoid Ó Tuathail’s earliest article entitled “The Language and nature of the “new” geopolitics: the case of US-El Salvador relations” (Ó Tuathail, 1986). The term was co-opted by proponents of the approach because it was “deliberately oxymoronic, so as to open up and displace the traditional meaning of geopolitics…exposing the supposedly objective geographical element of geopolitics to be a contingent rather than an absolute variable” (Sharp, 1996, p. 59). For a variety of reasons, this form of geopolitical inquiry saw a meteoric rise throughout the 1990s within the discipline of geography.

Ó’Tuathail et al (1998, p. 3) claims that this form of scholarship differs from conventional geopolitics and international relations theory because it is a geopolitics that,
seeks to reveal the hidden politics of geopolitical knowledge. Rather than defining geopolitics as an unproblematic description of the world political map, it treats geography as a discourse, as a culturally and politically varied way of describing, representing and writing about geography and international politics.

Simon Dalby (1994, p. 58) writes that the approach “directly challenges the discursive practices of geopolitical reasoning and works to reveal the power of geopolitical thinking [that specifies] the world in ways that maintain relations of domination.” Put more simply, these scholars seek to use deconstructive social theory to de-center traditional perceptions about geopolitics and knowledge in order to demonstrate that geopolitics is not rooted in any objective reality but instead made up of discourses and practices that produce geopolitical knowledge that often works in certain interests. In this view, geopolitics represents an inherently power-laden and socially constituted way of discussing, representing, and geo-graphing that actively works to promote the perspectives and interests of the certain groups while masquerading under a pretense of “truth” or “objectivity.”

Critical geopolitics represents a perspective or mode of analysis that often involves an analysis of language and “discourses – of rhetoric, metaphors, symbolism; of feminist approaches” and of marginalized social movements and alternative conceptions of geopolitics (Cohen, 2003, p. 28). It analyzes language because it conceives of “reality” as “understood and discussed through the medium of language” which is then “used to justify conduct, coordinate activity and explain the social order” (Dalby, 1996, p. 658) “Investigating the construction of the processes of rationalization of power,” asserts Dalby, “is a useful critical step in unraveling how power works” (Dalby, 1996, p. 658). In order to understand the development of critical geopolitics as a specific academic pursuit it is useful to explore the varied theoretical perspectives that provide the edifice on which this form of scholarship rests. The following section of this chapter will provide a detailed overview of varied forms of critical social theory that influenced the rise and epistemological and ontological foundations for the practice of critical geopolitics and the theoretical bases for this dissertation.

The Theoretical Foundations of Critical Geopolitics

Those advocating for a “critical geopolitics” appeared initially in the 1980s during an intellectual era when geography was grappling with the need to absorb and reconcile the sheer
diversity of contending critical theoretical perspectives vying for dominance in the field. During the period from the 1970s through the 1980s, however, there was growing uncertainty and a questioning of many taken-for-granted assumptions as the discipline was forced to incorporate new and diverse perspectives from Marxist, post-colonial, feminist, humanist, and many other scholars into the field alongside the dominant paradigms using more conventional scientific approaches to research. The subsequent competition for legitimacy and exchange of ideas and critiques among scholars privileging different factors in their analysis and adhering to profoundly different, and sometimes contradictory, ontological and epistemological, perspectives proved highly unsettling to the philosophical foundations of knowledge in geography.

During this time, novel social theories, philosophies, and forms of literary critique from other scholars were imported into geography and literally revolutionized the field’s capacity for dealing with its growing complexity, heterogeneity, uncertainty, and shifting theoretical foundations. One of the major changes involved a broad movement, sometimes labeled the “postmodern (and poststructural) turn,” that relied on critical perspectives influenced by literary theory. This change was not merely another in a long line of successive paradigms in philosophy and the social sciences, but instead proved to be a fundamental and revolutionary break with the past, because it questioned the very bases upon which contemporary knowledge had been predicated – the modernist project rooted in the tradition of the European Enlightenment. According to Roseanau (1992, pp. 4-5):

The appearance of post-modernism in the humanities and the social sciences signals more than another novel academic paradigm. Rather… In its most extreme formulations, post-modernism is revolutionary; it goes to the very core of what constitutes social science and radically dismisses it… Post-modernism proposes to set itself up outside the modern paradigm, not to judge it by its own criteria but rather to contemplate and deconstruct it. …[Post-modernism] constitutes one of the greatest intellectual challenges to established knowledge of the twentieth century.

This is because postmodern theorists question and critique “all that modernity has engendered” – rationality, objectivity, science, order, the search for (and, in some cases, even possibility of) truth and grand theory and the notion of progress – and replace them with a
concern for interrelated topics such as complexity, difference, context, mutability, subjectivity, relativistic and politically laden knowledge, identity, language and social constructivism (Roseanau, 1992, pp. 4-5). According to Warf (1992, p. 163), rather than searching for explanations for a singular social reality grounded in so-called facts, totalizing theories, and universal laws of social relations, “the postmodern picture of reality is that of a puzzle of infinite complexity, an eclectic kaleidoscope, a collage so multitextured that it can never be captured by a single theory.”

The Rise of Postmodernism in the Social Sciences

Postmodernism arose as a rejection of the modernist narratives that had dominated the last several hundred years of scholarship in the so-called West. Over the course of the 20th century, world events (such as the Holocaust) seemed to demonstrate that modernity’s promise was left unfulfilled and the notion of “progress” began to be viewed with increasing skepticism throughout the world as a morally and intellectually bankrupt concept. As a result, leftist “thinkers began …to react once more to the aspirations of modernism as a whole, …there was a revival of interest in anti-modern philosophies” and growing “interest in critically modern writings”, and “notions of a post-industrial society…merged with cultural critiques of modern aesthetics in a series of new philosophies and social theories” (Peet, 1998, p.195). This led to the rise of the bundle of perspectives collectively referred to as postmodernism (and poststructuralism) in the humanities and their subsequent importation into the social sciences and geography.

The individual responsible for introducing the actual term “postmodernism” into the contemporary lexicon was the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard, when he used the word in the title of his famous work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979). In the book, Lyotard questions fundamental modernist assumptions regarding underlying order, truth and demonstrated a suspicion towards generalization and what he refers to as universalizing “metanarratives” – general theories that simplify reality in order to facilitate a certain form of ‘rational’ understanding. In his view, “modern,” and therefore highly questionable, sciences are “any [sciences]…legitimated by appeal to metadiscourses,” while “postmodernism, by comparison, is defined as “incredulity towards metanarratives” and a heightened sensitivity towards heterogeneity, subjectivity, complexity, context and relativistic truth (Peet, 1998, p. 209).
Lyotard asserted that the modernist vision of a single, discoverable truth was a construction of the Enlightenment and that knowledge about the world had, in fact, become too diverse, complex, segmented, contradictory and hyperspecialized to be captured through the generalizations of any universalizing metanarrative. Postmodern knowledge, he argued, abandons grand narratives and the fruitless search for objective truth and, instead, embraces the multiplicity of positioned (and sometimes contradictory) understandings. According to Peet (1998, p. 210), Postmodern knowledge is …against metanarratives and foundationalism, avoids grand schemes or legitimization, is for heterogeneity, plurality, constant innovation and the pragmatic construction of local rules and perspectives agreed upon by participants. In brief, the new condition of knowledge demands a new epistemology. This new epistemology emphasizes the situatedness and constructedness of understandings and an interest in the role that subjectivity, language, meaning, metaphors and discourses play in constituting social reality.

**Postmodernism, Language, Deconstruction and Textual Analysis.**

The rapid ascendance of postmodernism throughout academia was related to the so-called “linguistic turn” in the social sciences in general in which topics regarding meaning and multiple, positioned viewpoints and understandings are taken seriously and questions regarding language, discourse, and narratives are both privileged and problemitized in critical forms of analyses. The sources of this alternative approach are derived from the diverse constellation of linguistically-oriented theorists (such as Saussure, Wittgenstein, Foucault, Derrida, etc.) whom many postmodernists/ poststructuralists appeal to in an effort to legitimize their philosophy. In *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), Lyotard, for example, drew heavily upon Ludwig Wittgenstein’s theories of language and ‘language games’ to assert that modernity and modern science are merely one bundle (among many) of ‘language games’ and have no special claim to legitimacy and authority in the construction of knowledge (Peet, 1998, p. 210). Postmodernists often draw upon the ideas of such philosophers to demonstrate that language is not just a vehicle through which humans engage their environment and one another, but is instead a problematic medium that conditions the way that reality is experienced and understood or even constitutes reality (Barnes and Duncan, 1992).
The lineage of this linguistic tradition is rooted in the theories of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Swiss structural linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Wittgenstein is often credited as one of the earliest scholars to problematize the issue of language by claiming that it acts as a barrier to a full comprehension of reality by limiting, filtering and shaping understanding and restraining human interaction to a mere play of ‘language games.’ In *Philosophical Investigations* (1968), Wittgenstein claimed that although language is the ‘essence’ of the human experience, it is actually ‘not accountable to any reality – hence, language misleads and holds people captive, bewitching them to misunderstand’ (Peet, 1998, p. 26). From Saussure work on structural linguistics postmodernists/poststructuralist imported their modified “understanding that meaning is produced within rather than reflected through [relational linguistic structures]: language [being] therefore constitutive rather than reflective of social reality” (Johnston, 1994, p. 468).

Another major figure in this tradition, the French literary theorist Jacques Derrida, introduced another distinctive set of ideas and the technique known as “deconstruction” in the 1960’s that has, after being initially embraced by literary scholars, has now had a more widespread impact that has resonated throughout the social sciences. Beginning with his most famous work *Of Grammatology* (1967), Derrida argued that language is not a neutral vehicle for bringing reality into consciousness but instead imposes an artificial sense of coherence on the world that influences and limits how it is experienced by humans and privileges some meanings at the expense of others. To help overcome the violence inflicted upon the complexity of reality he advocates his unique “deconstructive” techniques intended to destabilize the privileged understandings of texts (and truth claims) in order to illustrate their contingency and multiple meanings.

Derrida’s deconstructive technique typically involved the proposal of alternative and contradictory interpretations that involved the reversal and displacement of the binary “oppositions that structure the text” and the privileging of the reader over the original intent of writer (Johnston, 1994, p. 468). This process can be seen as the antithesis of hermeneutic modes of analysis and is intended to demonstrate that texts can be unraveled and reinterpreted from alternative positions (such as that of the individual reader) and shown to have multiple meanings that provide varied perspectives on reality and that conventional perspectives lack authority because they fail to capture the full spectrum of human experience and reality. This technique, which initially emerged in the humanities, has had major implications for geography because it
has now been embraced by social theorists (and proponents of critical geopolitics) and leveled at the study of the “texts” such as culture, the media, political discourses, landscapes, and entire societies. “This expanded notion of text,” claim Barnes and Duncan (1992, p. 5), “originates from a broadly post-modern view, one that sees them as constitutive of reality rather than mimicking it – in other words, as cultural practices of signification rather than as referential duplications.”

A provocative and extreme example of this approach of postmodern work can be seen in the work of one of its most prominent advocates and popularizers, the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard. In works such as Simulations (1983) Baudrillard asserted that in contemporary consumer societies symbols and simulations have become more significant and ‘more real’ than the material world they represent, ultimately even leading to the (re)structuring of space [the world] itself (Peet 1998, p. 214). He refers to this condition, where the distinction between the real and their simulations have become blurred as “hyperreality,” and claims that in this era the consumption and control over signs, images, and spectacles has “replaced the logic of production” and the traditional loci of power (Peet, 1998, pp. 213-214). This ascendance of simulation over reality leads to “societ[ies] of simulations,” such as the United States, which Baudrillard claimed in America (1999) was an enormous version of Disneyland, itself the epitome of the hyperreal simulacra. He also suggested that postmodern broadcast media, in particular, has created a hyperreal “mediascape” that has displaced authentic representations of reality. These theories led him to claim, for example, that ‘Operation Desert Storm’ (the first Persian Gulf War) was a fabrication of CNN with a reality that existed only on the television screen.

**Postmodernism vs. Poststructuralism**

These more extreme variants of postmodernism led some radical theorists to recoil from such techniques because their rejection of a fixed ontological reality and notions of universal truth and justice seemed to impoverish their value for promoting an emancipatory political agenda. Many suggested that it was a blunt tool that could easily be brandished by “reactionaries” to mortally cripple fundamental arguments and justifications for progressive policies and movements for social justice. Others have argued that these approaches produce nothing, and are instead inherently destructive and disempowering because deconstructive techniques, when carried down the “slippery slope” to their logical conclusion, inevitably lead to
intellectual nihilism. This alleged destructiveness was because their relativistic emphasis on multiple perspectives on truth can work to destabilize the grounds on which value judgments are made about what is true or untrue, real or imaginary, just or unjust. Although it must be acknowledged that “there are no sharp differences between poststructural and postmodern philosophies,” it is along this fault line that the hazy boundary has developed between those who promote postmodern versus poststructural varieties of scholarship (Peet, 1998).

Poststructuralism differs because its theorists view the construction of meaning and knowledge is the politically-laden process based on the exercise of power that works to the benefit of certain groups and the marginalization or exclusion of others. They seek to utilize their scholarship in the openly progressive (and/or radical) agenda of exposing how discourse operate to reinforce unequal power relations and legitimize some interests and to promote the perspectives and discourses of groups on the “margins,” such as minority groups, women, homosexuals, the poor, and the victims of colonialism and neocolonialism. Peet (1998) claimed a suspicion of purist (Baudrillard-style) postmodernism because he believed it represented an “extreme form of philosophical skepticism” (than poststructuralism) that “carries [critique] further” and over the brink into antimodernism and nihilism (Peet, 1998, pp. 208, 214). Other scholars concur that while postmodernism and poststructuralism share fundamental ‘links,’ they “differ in some quite important respects”. For example, Hubbard, Kitchin, Bartley and Fuller (2002, p. 85) assert that, “while postmodernism may be described as a broad epistemological movement/attitude, rejecting the ‘truth’ of grand theories in favor of more local, grounded accounts which open geography to Other voices, poststructuralism is essentially a form of analysis that raises more profound questions about ontology, and [the relationship between power and] claims to truth.” Poststructural theories are heavily influenced by Freidrich Neitzsche’s skepticism toward truth and his emphasis on questions of power. ‘Truths,’ wrote Neitzsche, ‘are illusions we have forgotten are illusions’ (Peet, 1998, p. 198). “Truth,” from this perspective, was sutured to the so-called “will to power.”

The foremost authority to whom many poststructuralist often appeal to as the theoretical basis of their work is the French philosopher Michel Foucault, the individual usually credited with theorizing the relationship between knowledge, discourse and power in any given social context. In his most famous works such as Madness and Civilization (1965), The Archaeology of Knowledge (1972), and Discipline and Punish (1979), Foucault sought to utilize archaeological
and genealogical (anti-historical) analysis to demonstrate how differing sets of discursive and institutional formations develop (‘regimes of truth’) under varying historical and spatial context (or *epistemes*). These regimes of truth dictate what is considered, or “counts,” as a legitimate form of knowledge in that particular society.

Utilizing these approaches, Foucault sought to reveal that the discourses regarding what is considered “true” and who produces “legitimate” knowledge in any particular social context (spatial and historical) is actually an artifact of the power-relations in that society and that the hegemonic discourses always reinforce particular interests while marginalizing others. He believed that these historically-specific discursive complexes, such as those regarding rationality, sanity, deviance, progress, and the body, exert enormous power in channeling humans to think about the world in certain ways rather than another and to discipline those who transgress across the accepted “norms” in that society. Because of his emphasis on “difference, fragmentation, and discontinuity, multiple forms of analysis rather than single truths,” however, Foucault did not perceive the hegemonic source of authority as absolute and instead favored a view of power that “rethought” it as coalescing and emanating from multiple sites rather than a single source (Peet, 1998, p.200). Foucault’s more sophisticated view of power (as existing at the margins as well as the center) has had major implications for those who seek to take the side of marginalized groups because it provides a theoretical (and inspirational) basis for the poststructural “promot[ion of] a micropolitics in opposition to the existing macropolitics” (Peet, 1998, p.200).

**Postcolonialism**

One of the most prominent scholars influenced by Foucault and other radical social theorist such as the Marxist Antonio Gramsci (and his concept of cultural hegemony) was the Palestinian literary and cultural critic Edward Said. In his most famous work *Orientalism* (1978), Said introduced his notion that the physical act of imperialism was accompanied (and reinforced) by a process of discursive and mental “colonization” in which the West (or *Occident*) literally “produced” the Orient (imaginatively and materially) from its own perspective and imposed this representation on colonized peoples (Peet, 1998, p. 228). Said’s ideas denaturalized conventionally accepted Eurocentric understandings of the West and its counterpart, the Orient (and East), by showing them to be particular ways of seeing and understanding the world from a distinctively European perspective. Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci’s influence is apparent in Said’s focus on power, discourse and hegemony because he saw Orientalism as a set
of discursive and institutional practices, resulting from, and reinforcing, the colonial-era nexus between power and knowledge. These understandings continue to persist and influence contemporary scholarship and culture because they were inscribed in the landscapes of, and understandings about, the non-Western world. Essentially, Europe’s military and economic power gave it the ability to impose its vision of what the Orient represented on its colonial possessions and that this worked to reinforce its own material power, and sense of intellectually and moral superiority (Said, 1978; Gregory, 1995).

Said claimed that the West’s imperial power enable it to create a dualistic worldview in which the Orient represented its “Other” concept, a contrasting entity that helped Europe to define its own identity and self-image in a comforting way by “intensify[ing] its own sense of itself” (Said, 1978, pp. 415-418). Said claimed that the Orient has always represented as “something more than what was empirically known about it” and has long served Europe with “one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other,” “its great complimentary opposite (Said, 1978, pp. 418-419). Orientalist discourses operated through a binary imagery in which the East was used to help Europe to define itself by representing all that it was supposedly not. The Orient was represented, for example, as weak, irrational, dangerous, immoral, mysterious, immature, feminine, backwards, passive, eternal, despotic, and dark (skinned), thereby implicitly endowing Europe with the exact opposite attributes and a sense of physical, intellectual, and biological superiority. The existence of the Orient assumed the existence of an unstated Occident (or West) that supposedly embodied all of the redeeming traits that the East was imagined to be devoid of (Said, 1978).

According to Said, Orientalism manifested itself, not only as a mode of discourse, but more tangibly in imperial institutions, the landscape, language, imagery, doctrines, colonial styles and through exploration and scholarship, all of which represented the non-European world (through theories, epics, novels, social descriptions and political accounts) in particular ways that reinforced the power of the West (Said, 1978, pp. 415-416). During this era, for example, scholars developed a tradition that served the imperial project by establishing and promoting certain ways of understanding the world from the perspective of (and for) the West. Derek Gregory asserts that European specialists established an “empire of the gaze” and these writers appropriated for themselves the authority to look upon the Orient and to write (or ‘geo-graph’) about what the Orient was and what it (and who it) was not (Gregory, 1995, p. 458). Although it
may be somewhat unfair to other scholars, Said claims that this tradition still “lives on” today in certain theories and theories and that “anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient…is an Orientalist” (Said, 1978, p. 415). In his view, the late eighteenth century witnessed Orientalism’s ascendance as a “corporate institution for dealing with the Orient…by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” … [Orientalism was ] the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage –and even produce- the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively (Said, 1978, p. 416). It saturated and shaped the nature of the “encounter between East and West,” and meant that the “Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought and action” (Said, 1978, pp. 416, 419).

Although the concept of Orientalism has been rightfully critiqued for various reasons – for example, its questionable essentialization of regions into crude binary categories – the perspective has provided a new generation of critical geographers influenced by postcolonialism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism with a general theoretical framework for interrogating and challenging the ethnocentrism that continues to permeate the humanities, social sciences, and contemporary societies. As a result, the negative legacies of colonialism (and continuing neocolonialism) and embedded Orientalism in many taken-for-granted worldviews have finally begun to be exposed, alternative perspectives and views of history were investigated, and the role of different academic disciplines and the media in promoting and reinforcing the imperial project have been highlighted. This has even been expanded well beyond Said’s original view of the Orient as a region to other areas such as Eastern Europe and Russia (Dittmer, 2003). Colonial geography, for example, has been fully exposed as a pursuit that worked as an “extension” or “midwife” “of colonial power” and many critical geographers are actively seeking to use their work to promote a postcolonial agenda (Driver, 1992, pp. 354, 359).

These forms of scholarship often attempt to denaturalize past and persisting Western ethnocentric representations of the “Orient” and contribute to the ‘decolonization’ of the minds of people throughout the world, helping to restore their capacity for self-representation and a more complete liberation (Clayton, 2003). Said’s ideas regarding Orientalism as a set of interrelated discursive and institutional practices linked to imperialism and identity has forever changed the way in which scholars can engage the interrelationships between the so-called
“West” and non-Western worlds. Said acknowledged the significance of his contribution in 2001 by asserting that: “The landscape and topography of literary study [and the social sciences] have… been altered dramatically and irreversibly… [S]cholars of the new generations are much more attuned to the non-European, genderized, decolonized, and decentered energies and currents of our time” (2001, p. 64).

Critiques of Critical Social Theory

The rapid ascendance of critical social theory within geography was challenged by a wide array of (sometimes unfair) critiques from across the ideological spectrum and its eschewal by the majority of “mainstream” scholars. Assaults have been leveled, for example, that it is at the same time both politically detached while also being mere “political prejudice…masquerad[ing] as scholarly analysis” (Review of Colin Flint’s The Geography of War and Peace: From Death Camps to Diplomats, 2005, p. 138). It has been claimed that it ignores geographic “realities” and instead excessively focuses on discourse, language and the social construction of truth, knowledge, reality and mutually reinforcing work from among a limited group of intellectuals and can make little practical contribution to knowledge or policy. Ironically, much of the effort of these critical social theorists has specifically been to problematize the so-called “realities” and “truth” claims of those making these types of accusations against them. Others have suggested that it produces nothing and is instead inherently destructive and disempowering because deconstructive techniques, when carried down the “slippery slope” to their logical conclusion, inevitably lead to intellectual nihilism. This is an unfortunate misperception because scholarship based on these social theories has made (and can continue to make) a major contribution to academia and society by illuminating aspects of social relations (such as the problematization of objectivity and the power of discourse) that are insufficiently engaged by other intellectuals.

The Implications of Postmodern, Poststructural and Postcolonial Thought

The rise of postmodern, poststructural, postcolonial thought and their emphasis on chaos, difference, disorder, complexity and power, has had major implications for all the social sciences. As previously noted, its abandonment of the fruitless search for a single universalizing theory, its sensitivity for diversity, fragmentation, ambiguity and indeterminacy and its recognition of the importance of the context and value of diverse situated perspectives has contributed to geography’s ability to grapple with the existence of an abundance of varying, sometimes contradictory, but nonetheless valuable, perspectives. Instead of attempting to
advance the modernist search for a singular “objective” truth, these new approaches embrace a world of complexity and chaos in which identities (gender, ethnic, cultural, etc.), societies and knowledge are contingent and are perpetually (re)constructed through social relations. According to Warf (1992), a postmodernist epistemology has the following “four essential elements”-complexity, contextuality, contingency and criticality - to offer a sophisticated and enhanced version of geography. This geography would not only embrace complexity over modernist grand theory but would engage with the situatedness (context) and mutability (contingency) of geographies and self-critically recognize its own role in legitimizing certain interests rather than others and to promote an emancipatory political agenda.

Another set of implication are linked to the capacity of these radical forms of scholarship for opening up questions of discourse and language as reservoirs of power and their role in both representing and constituting social reality. This perspective provides a vehicle for recognizing the situatedness of differing perspectives, and illuminating the role of discourse in reinforcing or challenging particular views of the world that operate on the behalf of certain interests, thereby uncoupling knowledge from power. “The task of a socially critical social science”, claims Warf (1992, p. 168), “is to unveil the biases of existing discourses and engage in the construction of new ones in which these biases, and their political implications, are clear.” Critical geopolitics is part of this larger project within political geography.

**Critical Geopolitics**

As the preceding discussion of critical social theory has made clear, “critical geopolitics” draw on an eclectic mix of influences from critical, postmodern/post-structural, postcolonial and feminist philosophy in order to challenge conventional geopolitics by interrogating its political production through a problemitization of the language, reasoning practices, and taken-for-granted assumptions on which it is based but that have long been ignored in more mainstream work. Gerard Ó Tuathail et al (1998, p. 3) asserts that critical geopolitics, “Concisely defined,” …seeks to reveal the hidden politics of geopolitical knowledge. Rather than defining geopolitics as an unproblematic description of the world political map, it treats geopolitics as a discourse, as a culturally and politically varied way of describing, representing and writing about geography and international politics. Critical geopolitics does not assume that “geopolitical discourse” is the language of truth; rather, it
understands it as a discourse seeking to establish and assert its own truths. Critical geopolitics, in other words, politicizes the creation of geopolitical knowledge by intellectuals, institutions and practicing statesmen. It treats the production of geopolitical discourse as part of politics itself and not as a neutral and detached description of a transparent, objective reality.

Similarly, Simon Dalby (1994, p. 58) suggests that it is a mix of approaches “that directly challenge the discursive practices of geopolitical reasoning and works to reveal the power of geopolitical thinking [that specifies] the world in ways that maintain relations of domination.” Put more clearly, these scholars seek to use deconstructive social theory to examine traditional perceptions about geopolitics in order to reveal that geopolitical knowledge is never an unproblematic description and analysis of the ‘truths’ and ‘facts’ constituting the ‘realities’ of global politics. Instead, geopolitics is always a form of power-knowledge that is politically produced through the use of discourses and practices that structure the understanding of the world in particular ways rather than others. In this view, geopolitics represents an inherently power-laden and socially constituted way of discussing, representing, and ‘geo-graphing’ that actively works to promote only a certain perspective on the world and, yet, pretends to represent a mimetic description of “objective realities.”

One of the earliest major published works in this genre was a paper by Ó Tuathail and Agnew in 1992 in Political Geography entitled “Geopolitics and discourse: Practical geopolitical reasoning in American Foreign Policy.” In the article, the authors challenged orthodox approaches to geopolitics by arguing that geopolitics “should be re-conceptualized” not as an unproblematic and objective description and analysis of geographical realities but “as a discursive practice by which intellectuals of statecraft ‘spatialize’ international politics in such a way as to represent a ‘world’ characterized by particular types of places, people and dramas …[through] an innately political process of representation …All statespersons engage in the practice; it is one of the norms of the world political community” (pp. 192, 194). Their “foundational premise” in the article was the contention that “geography is a social and historical discourse which is always bound up with questions or politics and ideology” (p.195) and that its study must always then “involve the comprehensive study of statecraft as a set of social practices” (p. 194).
According to Ó Tuathail et al., (1998), a critical geopolitics can expose the political production of geopolitics through a critical examination involving two general “methods of study.” First, the geopolitical knowledge formulated by intellectuals of statecraft can be situated within a larger geopolitical formation of the social contexts in which it is produced, thereby demonstrating it as both more and less than “eternal truths” about global “realities” (p. 7). Second, it is possible to see geopolitics as a socio-cultural artifact by examining the “processes by which certain intellectual figures become “expert” and get promoted or certified by institutions like the media, academia and the state [and, therefore, become the producers of authoritative knowledge], whereas other intellectual voices and perspectives get marginalized” in different historical and spatial circumstances (Ó Tuathail et al., 1998, p. 8). To do this, one can carefully study the interrelationships between intellectuals, institutional structures, and ideology that lead to the development of geopolitical knowledge in a given society.

Using these two “methods” Ó Tuathail has been able to unravel the ontological and epistemological bases of geopolitics and expose how past geographers were elevated to an authoritative status as “experts” because they reinforced conventional institutional and ideological perspectives (and the interests of the powerful) by “specify[ing] and proclaim[ing] certain “truths” about international politics” (Ó Tuathail et al., 1998, pp. 7-8). Their works “offer[ed] normative and imperative rules for the conduct of strategy and statecraft…[based on] a “problem-solving” approach to theory, [that took] the existing institutions and organization of state power as they [found] them and theoriz[ed] from the perspective of these institutions and relations of power” (p. 8). Their knowledge was embraced as a way to inform policy-making because it seemed to offer an “Olympian viewpoint” of the “global chessboard” (pp. 8, 11) supposedly based on an “objective” and a panopticonic “view from nowhere” (Sharp 2000, p. 361). These grand perspectives legitimized geopolitical discourses of power that “support[ed] the prevailing economic and cultural establishment” and excluded alternative worldviews by masquerading “in the name of “common sense,” “reason,” and an “objective perspective” (Ó Tuathail et al., 1998, p. 10).

In contrast, the explicit goal of a “critical geopolitics’ is to utilize critical deconstructive techniques to “render the relations of power embedded in geopolitical discourses visible and manifest” (Ó Tuathail et al., 1998, p. 11). This is often done by contrasting them with counter-hegemonic discourses of the marginalized, silenced or alternative groups, thereby demonstrating
that different forms of geopolitics are possible, thus denaturalizing the claim that the hegemonic version of geopolitics represents objective reality. From this perspective, a ‘critical geopolitics’ is one that recognizes and demonstrates the “essentially contested nature of geopolitical readings and texts” and deploys “an anti-geopolitical eye” that illustrates “acts of transgression that call into question dominant relations of power, truth and knowledge” (Ó Tuathail, et al., 1998, p. 3).

This often involves deconstructing the language of foreign policy-makers (practical geopolitics), scholars (formal geopolitics) and popular media representations (popular geopolitics) to illustrate that they are suspect or compromised forms of knowledge.

In order to do this, proponents of a “critical geopolitics” often analyze geopolitical language, discourse, underlying assumptions because it conceives of ‘reality’ as “understood and discussed through the medium of language” which is then “used to justify conduct, coordinate activity and explain the social order” (Dalby, 1996, p. 658). “Investigating the construction of the processes of rationalization of power,” claims Dalby (1996, p. 658), “is a useful critical step in unraveling how power works.” Ó Tuathail and Agnew go on to assert that (1992, p. 191):

Geopolitics must be re-conceptualized in terms of discourse…

[because] it is only through discourse that [geopolitics] is made meaningful and justified. It is through discourse that leaders act, through the mobilization of certain simple geographical understandings that foreign-policy actions are explained and through ready-made geographically-infused reasoning that wars are rendered meaningful.

Critical Geopolitics and the Study of Geopolitical Metaphor

This emphasis on language, discourse, and metaphor has major implications for this dissertation for two reasons; First, it has specifically established another corpus of precedents in geography for the importance of studying geopolitical metaphors as a form of geopolitical knowledge or part of a geopolitical discourse. An early example of this was the same Ó Tuathail and Agnew (1992) article which contained an analysis of the widespread significance of the flood metaphor in much of the practical (and formal) geopolitical reasoning of the 20th century in places as varied as Fascist Germany and the United States (where it was related to the policy of “containment”). Of similar importance was Leslie W. Hepple’s (1992) exploration of how the “metaphor of the state as a spatial organism, first developed by Freidrich Ratzel in 1896” and
later popularized in classical geopolitics by Rudolf Kjellen (1917) had reemerged in South America late in the 20th century and affected the geopolitics of the region as well the internal politics of particular countries. Heppe (1992, p. 136) contends that:

There exists a close historical connection between the military establishment and its interests and the institutional and intellectual development of geographical knowledge, and this connection is very important in the case of South American geopolitics. Geopolitical discourse, and the organic metaphor, have been very influential in the military academies and in military thought about the state. Moreover, the state-as-organism metaphor has not only been adopted and used, but has been extended and transformed to apply to the internal as well as external security of the state. These concepts have had a major political impact in providing ideology of the military regimes that have dominated the major South American states over the last twenty-five years.

The importance of both Agnew’s and Ó Tuathail’s and Heppe’s studies for my research cannot be overstated because they provide convincing examples illustrating the political power of geopolitical metaphors as far more than trivial rhetoric or unproblematic descriptions of geographical ‘realities’ and of their relevance for geographical study.

The Study of Popular Geopolitics

In order to understand and illustrate another reason why critical geopolitics is especially significant in supporting the approach used in this dissertation it helps to first understand how work in “critical geopolitics” is often subdivided into four broad categories of research that investigate different (but related) aspects of conventional geopolitical reasoning, practices and its consequences: formal, practical, structural and popular geopolitics (Ó Tuathail and Shelley, 2002, p. 26). The most common form of geopolitics, practical geopolitics, concerns itself “with the geographical politics involved in everyday foreign policy” conceptualization and decision-making (p. 27) and is typically predicated upon common and “unremarkable assumptions about places and their particular identities” (Ó Tuathail and Agnew, 1992, p. 194). Formal geopolitics investigates the more formal reasoning of foreign policy “experts” and situates their work within the geopolitical tradition (p. 194). In contrast, structural geopolitics studies the “structural processes and tendencies that condition how all states practice foreign policy” (Ó Tuathail and Shelley, 2002, p. 27; Agnew, 1998). Finally, popular geopolitics explores the significance of the
media and other sources of popular culture in influencing the (re)production of geopolitics (Sharp, 1993; Sharpe, 1996; Dodds 1998; Dittmer 2005).

Of all of these categories, studies of popular geopolitics are of particular relevance in influencing my research on the recent resurgence of the domino theory in the U.S. news media because they highlight the importance of studying the geopolitics produced at a multiplicity of popular sites, including news sources. According to Klaus Dodds (1998, p. 73), “an examination of popular sources such as television and magazines offers critical geopolitics ample possibilities for discerning how other places and people [and events] are represented within variety of national and cultural contexts” including films, television, popular magazines and news sources, cartoons and music. One of the earliest published arguments for the “necessity” of studies on these sources in critical geopolitics also came from Ó Tuathail and Agnew (1992, pp. 194-195) who asserted:

Geopolitics is not a discrete and relatively contained activity confined only to a small group of ‘wise men’ who speak the language of classical geopolitics, [but rather], the study of geopolitical reasoning necessitates studying the production of geographical knowledge …at a multiplicity of different sites throughout not only the nation-state, but the world political community …from the classroom to the living-room, the newspaper office to the film studio, the pulpit to the presidential office geographical knowledge about a world is being produced, reproduced and modified.

It is Joanne Sharp, however, who is often credited with laying the theoretical foundation for geographical research on popular news sources as an institutional site at which geopolitical knowledge is (re)produced. In a pioneering study, she demonstrated how The Reader’s Digest magazine was actively involved in the normalization and (re)production of a certain geopolitical worldview in Cold War America (1993, 1996). In a series of articles in various journals, Sharp’s work made it clear that popular sources of geopolitics are significant sites at which the production of geopolitics can be examined because they both reflect how a particular society engages issues in global politics and then work to (re)condition that society’s outlook on the global politics of the present and future. According to Sharp (1993, p. 491), “It is … important for geographers to study the geography written in the mass media because of the role of this institution in the creation and dissemination of knowledge of the world.”
Since these early studies opened up these popular sources for geographic inquiry, a host of other proponents of critical geopolitics have accessed the significance of popular sources of geopolitics through an analysis of a remarkable variety of sources including magazines, newspapers, and cartoons and on topics as wide-ranging as the Falklands War (Dodds 2000) and Captain America’s role in the American geopolitical imagination (Dittmer 2005). Dodds (2000, p. 6) points out that these researchers have demonstrated that “geopolitics should be attentive not only to the ‘high politics’ of states, intergovernmental organizations and territorial space, but also to a host of media, groups and other institutions which seek to represent particular visions or interpretations of political space.” This research fits in within this larger body of work within critical geopolitics by exploring the role of the media as an active producer of imaginative geographies and the so-called domino theory in this process.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of the theoretical perspectives in geography that underlie this study of the role of the so-called domino theory in the geopolitical discourses produced through coverage in the U.S. news media. This approach, known as “critical geopolitics,” displays a marked skepticism toward the “truth” claims embedded in conventional geopolitical knowledge and seeks to interrogate the socio-political processes by which it is (re)produced as well as its political consequences. Critical forms of geopolitics appeared in geography in the 1980s in open opposition to the type of geopolitics associated with the discipline’s past and the orthodox geopolitics that dominated the study of such subjects at the time. These scholar’s ontological and epistemological positions also tended to be heavily influenced by the critical social theories of postmodern, poststructural and postcolonial views that had entered the discipline and revolutionized the field by questioning the entire bases on which the contemporary knowledge had been based. This chapter also discussed the overall features of studies rooted in critical geopolitics to illustrate their relevance to this study of the imaginative geographies constructed in the American media and their political implications. It also situated this research in the subfield by discussing several precedents for the study of geopolitical metaphors as well as the geopolitics produced in the popular media. The subject of this dissertation engages both of these areas of interest within the study of critical geopolitics by investigating the use of a metaphor by the media in the geopolitics created by news reporting.
After reading this chapter, the theoretical bases of this study and the relevance of this topic for geographical research should be evident to readers as should the use of popular news sources in the critical study of geopolitics. The next chapter of this dissertation will review the research questions and thesis for this project informed by the literature in critical geopolitics before moving on to illustrate how my research methods utilizing qualitative thematic content analysis enabled me to explore these topics and successfully answer each of these questions.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODS

Chapter Introduction

As indicated in Chapter Three, this research explores how American journalists have used a well-known geopolitical metaphor, the domino theory, in the imaginative geographies produced in their printed coverage of certain foreign policy issues since the end of the Cold War. It examines the role of the term “domino theory” as a geopolitical discourse that mediates particular views of global affairs to newspaper readers during times when these foreign policy debates are taking place in the U.S. popular news media. In order to do so, I examine the themes prevalent in printed news reports where journalists chose to invoke the phrase domino theory in their construction of geopolitical knowledge for the public about these controversial topics. Dalby (1994, p. 90) has pointed out that “commonly used geopolitical terms” [such as the so-called domino theory] … are artificial constructions of knowledge that specify the world in particular ways with political consequences arising from the social values in the terms.” For many journalists, the phrase domino theory is laden with assumptions, meanings, and historical associations that are injected into the news coverage through their use of the term. There are also common themes and characteristics that are prevalent among the articles that employ this phrase in their printed news reporting. This research explores, documents, and reports those themes in order to access the role of the so-called domino theory in the (re)production of imaginative geographies by journalists during three particular foreign policy debates in the United States media since the end of the Cold War: Bosnia (from 1993-1995); Kosovo (1999); and Iraq (from 2003-2007). I do this through a systematic analysis and recording of U.S. news articles using the term “domino theory” in their news coverage of these topics. This chapter provides an overview of the data sources and research methods that are used to address the primary research questions of this dissertation, provides concrete examples about how those methods were carried out in practice, and discusses the limitations of this research approach. After completing this chapter, the reader should be aware of my research goals and how my chosen research methods contributed to the realization of objectives.
As indicated in Chapter One, the specific research purpose of this dissertation was to explore, document, and illustrate how American journalists used the domino theory in the geopolitical representations produced in their printed coverage of certain foreign policy issues since the end of the Cold War and to determine if their representations seemed to mediate certain political interests or perspectives to their readers. In other words, this project assessed the role of the domino theory in painting certain portrayals of world events in the U.S. media’s coverage of these specific foreign policy issues. This was done through the investigation of the manner in which the domino theory was injected into the popular geopolitics of American news reporting by journalists who chose to utilize the term in a way that colored the depictions embedded in their reporting on Bosnia from 1993-1995; Kosovo in 1999; and Iraq from 2003-2007 in order to answer the following research questions: How was the specific phrase “domino theory” used in the U.S. news media’s coverage of these three regional conflicts as a (or part of a) geopolitical discourse that promoted certain political perspectives or agendas by portraying the stories in a particular light? Were references to the domino theory more common in news reports that expressed an overall tone that was either supportive or negative toward a policy of American military intervention in these conflicts? Based on the material evidence available in each individual news source, were patterns evident in the characteristics of who was the apparent source of the references to the domino metaphor in each article? In other words, were motifs evident in who (i.e., the news writer, U.S. government officials, academics, etc.) seems to have introduced the association between the domino theory and the particular foreign policy issue under discussion? Based on the evidence provided in these reports, was it a U.S. official (e.g., a member of the Clinton or Bush administration) who explicitly employed the domino theory or does the appearance of the catchphrase in the news articles appear to have reflected the way in which the individual journalists perceived or chose to represent issues in their new coverage? Were there any patterns in the types (e.g., conventional news, opinion-editorials, letters-to-the-editor) of articles that employed the domino theory in their headline or content? And finally, were there common themes or associations (e.g., references to Vietnam) that were prevalent in the articles that used this geopolitical phrase in their reporting and did this contribute to the manner in which the topics were portrayed in these articles? For many journalists, the phrase domino theory is laden with assumptions, meanings, and historical associations (e.g., the Vietnam War) that were (re)injected into the news coverage on these foreign policy issues.
through their use of the term in their reporting. The specific thesis for this dissertation was that references to the domino theory in the U.S. news media were a way in which news writers perceived and/or choose to represent world affairs issues as part of an oppositional discourse that typically operated to promote certain perspectives or agenda in their coverage on these three foreign policy issues and that it was possible to identify, document and illustrate patterns in how the term was employed for these purposes. This research explores and reports those themes in order to assess the role of the so-called domino theory as a discourse in the (re)production of imaginative geographies by U.S. journalists. All of these questions are addressed in this dissertation using the research methods outlined in this chapter in order to illuminate the enduring role of the domino theory in the discourse on United States foreign policy issues in the American news media from 1989 - 2009.

**Thematic Content Analysis in the Social Sciences**

The research method that I have chosen to address the research questions for this study is a series of case studies that rely on thematic content analysis to study U.S. newspaper articles and wires appearing in the *Lexus-Nexus* database spanning a 20-year period (1989-2009). Thematic content analysis is a method-based technique that enables researchers to use a systematic approach in order to discover themes (commonalities or patterns) that emerge directly from the raw data of texts (such as newspapers articles) in order to develop and/or test a hypothesis (Neuendorf, 2002). These themes, according to Boyatzis (1998, p. 30), are often “constructed inductively” from the sources materials because “working directly from the raw information enhances the appreciation of the information.” Earl Babbie (2001, p. 314) claims, “content analysis is particularly well suited to the study of communications” such as newspaper rhetoric and “answering the classic question of communications research; ‘Who says what, to whom, why, how, and with what effect?’.” The suitability of this method is particularly significant for this dissertation, because this project is largely dedicated to an examination of how the term “domino theory” has been deployed as a geopolitical discourse by journalists in their constructions of geographical knowledge. According to Stone (1997, pp. 36-37), thematic text analysis often involves “noting recurrent information embedded in texts” through an examination of their manifest (surface) or latent (underlying) characteristics. He suggests that despite the potential loss of a degree of context, when the appropriate level of rigor is observed,
this technique is similar to other analytical methods and offers to provide fundamental insights on any number of research topics relevant to the social sciences. Some researchers use this method to explore and test deductively produced hypothesis while others construct them inductively from the sources materials. Many research projects find it fruitful to utilize a combination of both deductive and inductively developed themes in their studies using thematic content analysis.

Perhaps the most important concept in this form of content analysis is the notion of theme itself. Boyatzis (1998, p. 4) defines a theme as “a pattern found in the information that at a minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at a maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon.” Similarly, Stone (1997) describes a theme as the “attributes, as well as subjects, of texts.” Babbie (2001, p. 17) defines an attribute as the specific “characteristics or qualities that describe an object,” thing or person. A theme, in contrast, could be reflected by the presence or absence of a certain attribute or common set of attributes (i.e., a theme) within an entire text (e.g., book, interview, survey), across texts (e.g., a corpus of news articles, commercials, or within segments of texts (e.g., words, sentences, paragraphs) (Bernard, 2002, p. 479). Researchers using various forms of thematic text analysis typically explore and record the relevant attributes in their raw data, assemble these collections of attributes into logically connected themes, and then search these for potential subthemes and larger thematic categories. A careful analysis of the resulting findings (or even the process of data explorations itself) often helps them use this method to address the underlying questions of their individual projects.

Content analysis is a well-established research approach in the social sciences and has been relied upon for decades to study the representations embedded in various forms of text (or media) by subjecting them to systematic quantitative and/or qualitative analysis. In fact, many scholars believe that the genesis of this approach may date back to the study of propaganda by the U.S. government during World War II (Severin, 1992). One of the earliest documented uses of the technique occurred in the early 1940s when the U.S. Government Communications Commission decided to monitor Nazi radio propaganda in order to investigate common themes appearing in the broadcasts (Bernard, 2002, p. 476). American analysts decided that 14 themes regularly recurred in German radio propaganda. In 1942, the U.S. Department of Justice arrested William D. Pelley for publishing pro-Nazi materials while the country was at war with Germany. Pelley’s publications were analyzed by coders who scoured his materials looking for the
appearance of the documented Nazi propaganda themes. During the later trial, one of the government’s researchers testified that the majority of Pelley’s publications ‘were consistent with and suggested copying from the German propaganda themes’ (Bernard, 2002, p. 476) and he was convicted of pro-Nazi sedition. The U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the verdict and the precedent for the admissibility of evidence derived from content analysis was legitimized in the American legal system (Bernard, 2002, p. 476). Since this time, the approach has been regularly used by various U.S. government agencies and became popular in the social sciences as a way to investigate themes appearing in various types of texts. For example, researchers at the Centers for Disease Control (the CDC) regularly use thematic content analysis to study the public perception and media representations of various public health issues.

Many of the earliest major studies in using content analysis were based on a quantitative technique that emphasized an effort to develop consistent codes and classifications to transform the raw data derived from source materials into reliable and valid numerical statistics and percentages. These efforts tried to conform to the conventions of the scientific method by relying on an *a priori* research design and striving for objectivity, reliability, validity, replicability, etc. in their coding and analysis. This standardized approach to coding, data classification, and analysis was believed to increase the reliability and validity of the findings by limiting the researchers’ subjectivity, making them more scientific. Kimberly Neuendorf’s (2002, p. 1) definition of content analysis reflects this perspective: “Content analysis is the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics” as does Krippendorff’s (1980, p. 21) who describes content analysis as “a research technique for making replicative and valid inferences from data to their context.” Similarly, Riffe, Lacy, and Fico, (1998, p. 2) claim that, content analysis involves drawing representative samples of content, training coders to use the category rules developed to measure or reflect differences in content, and measuring the reliability (agreement or stability over time) of coders in applying the rules. The data collected in a quantitative content analysis are then usually analyzed to describe what are typical patterns or characteristics, or to identify important relationships among the variables measured. If the categories and rules are conceptually and theoretically sound and are reliably applied, the researcher increases the chance that the study results will be valid (e.g., that the observed patterns are meaningful).
More recently, the use of content analysis has been expanded by researchers using qualitative as well as (or to the exclusion of) quantitative techniques. To some degree this emerged out of the larger critique of the scientific methods that had dominated many of the social sciences for much of the 20th century. These critiques, which were varied and legion, were discussed in detail in Chapter Three of this dissertation. Essentially, many academics began to acknowledge that the scientific goal of “objectivity” sought in some forms of quantitative content analysis was actually a normative goal that was difficult (or impossible) to attain because the researcher undeniably influences the choice of subject, the source material, the research design, the coding principles, the themes, and the coding itself through their interpretations and decisions during the entire research process. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 223) claim that these researchers often have a “zeal for careful verification and for a degree of accuracy they can never achieve.” Because of this, some qualitative critics point out that quantitative content analysis is, at some level, always interpretative and qualitative (Tesch, 1990).

Despite these limitations, I do try to draw on a few of the strengths of basic quantitative techniques in this dissertation, especially for detecting and then cross-checking my developing findings. Many of the overarching thematic codes (once developed using other methods) were systematically organized, counted, and compiled into basic descriptive statistics. I did find these useful in verifying (or refuting) the existence of various developing themes, theories, hunches and findings that I investigated during the research process to see if they were actually prevalent in the data and not rooted in possible misperceptions. The resulting statistics were also helpful in analyzing and cross-analyzing the various themes and their interrelationships and to later illustrate to my readers that overall patterns were not simply anecdotes, cherry-picked representations, or unsubstantiated claims.

Later, with the increasing influence of both humanistic (Tuan, 1976) and critical (Marxist, feminist, post-colonial, postmodern, post-structural, etc.) paradigms on the social sciences, varied qualitative methods became more widely-accepted alongside of (or in lieu of) of the established quantitative techniques (e.g., Tuan, 1976). By the 1970’s, there was a general paradigm shift underway that challenged the “quantitative revolution” and led to the increasing popularity of various qualitative techniques among an eclectic group of scholars with varying ontological and epistemological views. This research differed, claim Dwyer and Limb (2001, p. 6), because,
Qualitative methodologies do not start with the assumption that there is a pre-existing world that can be known, or measured, but instead see the social world as something that is dynamic and changing, always being constructed through the intersection of cultural, economic, social and political processes. … Qualitative methodologies are characterized by an in-depth, intensive approach rather than an extensive or numerical approach. Thus they seek subjective understanding of social reality rather than statistical description or generalizable predictions. … [they] also posit a particular approach to theory building. Rather than being methodologies to test pre-existing theories, qualitative methodologies are used to build ‘grounded theory’ through intensive research so that meanings are clarified and interpreted through the research process.

One prominent qualitative method that ascended in the social sciences during this period was Glaser and Strauss’s grounded-theory approach (1967). This method popularized the search for patterns (themes) in text using a (mostly) inductive coding technique in which the findings are “discovered” through the careful study of texts that can lead to the development of higher-level (and empirically grounded) theories (Crang, 2001, p. 219). In its purest form, researchers are expected to begin their analysis without any preconceived notions (or theories) about the subject and then build-up theories directly from their raw data sources (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 37). In practice, however, those using such an approach often begin with a few deductively produced codes and then proceed in “open” qualitative coding of the attributes of the text until they begin to perceive what they interpret as themes in the data. They then make notes (or memos) on the coding and various hypotheses and then proceed to go back to code and recode the material through a recursive process until they have extracted findings from the source material. According to Bernard (2002, p. 463), “Grounded theory is an iterative process by which you, the analyst, become more and more grounded in the data. … you come to understand more and more deeply how whatever you’re studying really works.” These coded themes are built-up into larger theories and then often supported with exemplar quotes from the sources to support, and provide concrete examples of, the findings. Because of this approach, grounded theory is sometimes critiqued as un-theoretical, overly empiricist, and too grounded in its data-sources (Thomas and Duncan, 2006). This, of course, is also one of its major strengths because, as pointed out by Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 4), understandings and theories “based
on [grounded] data can usually not be completely refuted" since they are “too intimately linked” to empirical information. “In contrast,” they claim,

logically deduced theories based on ungrounded assumptions, such as some well-known ones on the “social system” and on “social action” can lead their followers far astray in trying to advance sociology. However, grounded theories – which take hard study of much data – are worth the precious time and focus of all of us in our research, study and teaching.

Grounded theory has become especially prominent in many of the social science (especially sociology) and is one of the methods of choice for some researchers doing qualitative studies for various U.S. government agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control. Although this dissertation does not employ grounded theory rigidly, the approach has been used to loosely inform my research method, particularly the manner in which themes were carefully and systematically extracted directly from the news sources used in the study through the iterative examination and coding of the source material. I began with some general deductive hypotheses and thematic codes about how the term domino theory might be utilized as a form of geopolitical rhetoric in the news (based on other sources and critical theory) that are used to explore the data but I also “open” coded the articles to discover themes and associations that emerged directly from the raw source material. This process also helped me to collect and arrange a set of newspaper quotes derived from my raw data sources that illustrated “characteristic examples” of my themes and subthemes in order to provide examples of general patterns in my qualitative and/or quantitative findings (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 5).

In the discipline of geography, qualitative approaches became especially critical for the humanistic and critical approaches that have risen to prominence since the 1970s (Dwyer and Limb, 2001). When the sub-field of critical geopolitics (and its precursors) emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, qualitative approaches using thematic content analysis opened-up entirely new areas to geographical research (such as newspaper articles, literature, films, cartoons, maps, metaphors, regions, etc.) (Barnes and Duncan, 1992; Campbell, 1992, Harley, 1988; Henrickson, 1980; Said, 1979). Since this time, these researchers have fruitfully used thematic content analysis to explore the manner in which geopolitical knowledge is produced at various institutional sites and the political effects of that knowledge (Dodds and Atkinson, 2000). For example, Joanne Sharpe’s work (1993) demonstrating the significance of popular sources of
geopolitics (such as *The Reader’s Digest* magazine) in the production of American geopolitical knowledge during the Cold War relied on a form of thematic text analysis to explore the discursive content embedded in the popular media (Sharp, 1993). Ó Tuathail’s (1992) critical geopolitics of the heated debate in U.S. Congress over the proposed deal to develop and produce the FSX (modified F-16) fighter for the Japanese government also utilized qualitative content analysis. Jason Dittmer’s work on the role of the media representations in the construction of regional identities relied on a thematic content analysis of newspaper articles derived from the *Lexus-Nexus* newspaper database (Dittmer, 2003). He has also studied popular sources of geopolitical knowledge using this approach on topics as varied as the popular religious beliefs about the apocalypse (Dittmer and Strum, 2010) to the role of comic books in the re-imagining of American identity (Dittmer, 2005). Other geographers (O’Laughlin and Grant, 1990) have successfully used thematic text analysis to look at Presidential State of the Union addresses as a source to determine what geographical regions are perceived by U.S. officials as strategically significant during certain four years periods. Collectively, these studies provide an important precedent for the method used in this dissertation because they provide concrete examples of accepted research projects in the discipline of geography exploring popular sources of geopolitics (such as news reports) by drawing on varying forms of qualitative thematic content analysis.

**Thematic Content Analysis as a Research Method in this Study**

Since I recognize the merits of both quantitative and qualitative content analysis, this dissertation relies on a combination of the two methods in order to organize and make sense of the data and shed light on the research questions of the project. My primary research approach is largely qualitative in nature and loosely based on Anselm Strauss’s and Barney Glaser’s ‘grounded theory’ research methods supplemented with some other techniques. The remainder this chapter will provide a detailed summary of exactly how my research method were utilized to investigate the core research questions for this project though a clear, systematic, rigorous research process. This clearly records how this project was carried out so that the research process is transparent and the merits of my assertions can be accessed, double-checked and the study can potentially be replicated in the future by interested parties.
In order to assess how the term domino theory has been deployed as a geopolitical discourse in the American news media since the end of the Cold War it was necessary to find a way to analyze the overall trends in American news coverage during the period. Since it was obviously difficult for me to gain access and then examine the entire universe of news reports utilizing the term domino theory throughout the period it was important for me to find a representative sample of the overall body of news articles that could be analyzed to address the research questions for this project. As pointed out in Chapter One, I resolved this challenge by relying on articles derived from the *Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe, U.S. newspapers and wires* database as the corpus of articles that were used as data sources for this research. This convenient online database provided me with access to articles from over 650 news sources dating as far back as 1980 covering a wide geographic distribution throughout the entire United States media market. It includes an eclectic variety of newspapers published in the U.S. and news reports from wire services where more than 60 percent of the stories originated in the country (see appendix “A” for a full listing of newspapers and wire surveyed). I contend that *Lexus-Nexus* provides a sample of news reports that can be considered representative of the overall news media in the United States. My decision to utilize this database for source materials was informed by an established scholarly precedent in the social sciences in other studies of geopolitical discourse and rhetoric appearing in the news by researchers in fields such as geography (Dittmer, 2005).

I began this research by collecting a set of newspaper articles and wires that were located through a search of the aforementioned *Lexus-Nexus* database for all reports that utilized the phrase “domino theory” in their headline or body since 1985. These individual newspapers articles and wires were used as material evidence to explore and document overall patterns in how the so-called “domino theory” has been used as a geopolitical discourse in the U.S. media. Each of these social artifacts provided me with a snapshot of how the journalist conceived of the relevance of the domino theory to the topic of their news reporting that, when aggregated and analyzed, helped me access overall patterns in how the term operated as a form of geopolitical knowledge in the media. Although this project is confined to the geopolitical use of the term during the 20 year period since 1989 the examination of articles from the longer time span (dating back to 1985) enabled me to develop a baseline mean that made it easier to detect
variations in the general number of articles in a given year. This scan recovered 2,159 separate articles that referenced the specific term during the 25-year period. I then counted the articles by individual year and charted these finding on a graph to help determine if there were any periods in which the term appeared to be more prevalent. The findings of this tabulation are illustrated in Figure 4.1 below. It was apparent that since 1985 there were three distinct periods (1993-1995, 1999, and 2003-2007) in which there obvious surges in the appearance of the phrase in news accounts available from *Lexus-Nexus*.

![Figure 4.1](image-url)

*Figure 4.1: Total articles containing term “domino theory” appearing in the *Lexus-Nexus* Academic Universe, U.S. Newspapers and Wires* database since 1985

My next step was to undertake a detailed qualitative analysis to determine inductively if these spikes were related to any particular event or foreign policy issue or debate in the U.S. media. Using these individual newspaper articles as my material evidence, unit of observation, and unit of analysis, I carefully examined the content of each individual source documents to see if any common themes (topics) were evident across the body of articles during each of these periods. I found that each surge in the appearance of the term “domino theory” was largely related to a particular foreign policy issue from the period being discussed or debated in America’s news at the time – the civil war and humanitarian crisis in Bosnia (1993-1995), the violence and humanitarian crisis in Kosovo (1999), and the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq.
(2003-2007). In each of these cases, the media coverage largely revolved around heated political disputes over the appropriate role of the United States in the situation or the wisdom of a potential (or ongoing) U.S. military intervention in each respective crisis.

The information from this initial database search and qualitative analysis was then used to inform my decision to embrace a case study approach for this study seeking to examine if, and if so how, the so-called domino theory operated as a form of geopolitical rhetoric (or discourse) in the U.S. media’s coverage during each of the three aforementioned foreign policy crises. In each case study, I selected a sample of individual articles from *Lexus-Nexus* chosen because their title or body used the term “domino theory,” they specifically covered the foreign policy topic for each case (e.g., Bosnia, Kosovo, or Iraq), and appeared in the database at some point during the year (or years) where the use of the term was most prevalent. For the Bosnian case this was 1993-1995; for Kosovo 1999; and for Iraq 2003-2007. For each individual study, I used thematic text analysis as a method to study the first 200 articles (if 200 were available) appearing in the database and then sampled every fifth article thereafter. In the case study on Iraq, I initially recovered just over 240 articles using this approach and the decided to randomly select additional articles from my data set until I reached a total of 250 news reports to use for my analysis. I then went through each of the articles individually and then recorded the ones that contained a headline or content matter containing attributes (a specific mention of the place, crisis or topic) related to the foreign policy issue under study. These reports were then collected and subjected to a detailed qualitative (and to a lesser degree quantitative) study seeking to explore and document themes (common patterns) prevalent in the reporting. This process is referred to in qualitative thematic text analysis as “coding.” This coding process helped me organize, analyze and make sense, of the body of empirical information accumulated from the documents. “The purposes of coding,” writes Cope (2005, pp. 223-225), “are partly data reduction (to help the researcher get a handle on large amounts of data by distilling along key themes), partly organization (to act as a ‘finding-aid’ for researchers sorting through data), and partly a substantive process of data exploration, analysis, and theory-building.” This is an orderly and “substantive process of data exploration, analysis and theory-building” (Cope, 2005, pp. 223-225). When performed properly, she claims that this techniques helps to “make the most out of qualitative data” by “enabling the
data to be organized in such a way that patterns, commonalities, relationships, correspondences,
and even disjunctures are identified and brought out for scrutiny” (Cope, 2005, p. 226).

Based on my understanding of the scholarly literature in critical geopolitics, I began each case study with the expectation that a geopolitical metaphor like the domino theory (like any form of geopolitical knowledge) appearing in the news was likely to be laden with the political bias and assumptions of those choosing to invoke the term (e.g., politicians, journalists, commentators, etc.) in the reports. This meant that I could anticipate that the decision to use the phrase would likely intentionally or unintentionally (which is often impossible to determine with absolute certainty from the qualitative analysis of newspaper articles) reflect the biases of the journalist and promote the agendas and preferred policies of certain actors. This assumption was supported by historical evidence from the Vietnam-era, when the domino theory first entered the geopolitical lexicon and was used to rationalize the disastrous American military intervention in Southeast Asia. With this in mind, I began my initial coding of the articles seeking to explore the manifest (surface) content of each to discern how the journalist using the domino metaphor explicitly represented American involvement or potential involvement in the foreign policy issue being covered. I started with a single set of deductively produced themes (or codes) that were used to code the overall “tone” of each article’s reporting toward the foreign policy topic (e.g., negative/critical tone, positive/supportive tone, neutral/other). Basically, I coded each article for the presence or absence of these nominal variables related to tone. I believed that the collective findings from this theme (aggregated from the entire body of articles on each case) would help me determine if the term domino theory seemed to be more commonly associated with news coverage that either supported or opposed certain policies during the debates over the foreign policy issues in questions. I then proceeded to use a grounded theory-style strategy to code each of the articles for this characteristic while beginning a search for other themes and subthemes that could be inductively derived from the raw data that would help to illuminate how the metaphor operated in other ways as geopolitics in the news during these debates. This was admittedly an interpretative task but I took considerable care to work my way through the data in a consistent manner so that all the relevant data was coded into the appropriate thematic categories and no representations were excluded.
In general, I used this form of thematic content analysis by starting with a few codes (such as article tone) based on my background research and then examined the news reports to note the presence or absence of themes in the representations embedded in each article. I read each article carefully and kept track of themes that began to appear prevalent (or emerged) over a series of article. As I became aware of new themes that emerged from the overall set of news reports, I then went back and re-coded previously covered articles in order to explore them for these same characteristics. For the purposes of this project, a potential emergent theme was defined as the recurrence of at least five times of a prominent attribute (e.g., a Vietnam reference in the article; editorial) manifestly evident in the text of the several different articles. This was a recursive process that required the repeated coding and re-coding of the sources until I believed that I had examined all of the articles, eliminated dead-end themes, and exhausted the development of significant new themes and subthemes. I then used my code book (i.e., master list of theme codes) to re-code the entire body of articles relevant for each case study and drew on these findings to look for commonalities and interconnections between the themes in the body of reports (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Bernard, 2002).

Although this type of qualitative coding is an admittedly interpretative endeavor - because it was based on my subjective judgment whether or not to assign articles to particular categories - I was conscientious of the need to perform this task systematically and consistently throughout the process so this method was clear and verifiable to my readers and the study would be reproducible if anyone ever decided to do so in the future. I was aided in this task by using \textit{NVivo 8: Qualitative Analysis Software} from QSR International. This reputable computerized research tool facilitated the collection, organization and analysis of the data by allowing me go through my source documents and assign certain attributes in each to specific theme categories, collect, compile and organize representative quotes for each theme, make notes on emergent ideas, and subject the themes to quantitative analysis (by counting the number of times certain themes appeared in the data). \textit{NVivo 8} helped me to both qualitatively analyze the data as well as quantify certain aspects into standardized numeric codes suitable for categorization and analysis (Babbie, 2001, p. 318). This process ended in a comprehensive set of tabulated themes and associated news quotes that had been extracted directly from the group of articles and been catalogued (or “coded”) according to their content. It also provided me with a representative
collection of newspaper quotes for each theme. These codes and quotations were then used in my three case studies to look for recurring patterns in the way in which the domino theory was used as a geopolitical discourse in the U.S. media’s representations of certain geopolitical topics in the news in each instance.

These methods ultimately enabled me to detect a number of common themes and subthemes that were prevalent in the newspaper coverage of these cases and then explore these patterns using a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques. For example, the review of the raw data indicated that the term domino theory did not seem to usually originate with the political officials or groups with whom it was often associated. They were seldom (or never) quoted explicitly uttering the phrase in their rhetoric in the news articles referring to them. Rather, the metaphor seemed to be one way in which journalists conceived of the topic or chose to represent foreign affairs issues or the policies of others to whom the metaphor was often attributed. Because of this pattern, I adopted a series of codes that helped me explore the apparent origin of the domino theory in each article. Similarly, I noted a strong tendency for the term to be utilized in editorial pieces rather than traditional news coverage and adopted the notion of article type (e.g., editorial, letter-to-the-editor, regular news, etc.) into my coding strategy. Further analysis helped me to discover a number of other themes and subthemes such as the common appearance of the domino theory in articles also referring to past mistakes by U.S. officials during Vietnam. The Vietnam theme, in particular, was commonly invoked in the new coverage that opposed or criticized certain policies by drawing an analogy between Vietnam-era mistakes and the current events being discussed in their coverage. Through the hard work of coding, analysis, and cross-analysis, I became increasingly familiar with the themes, commonalities, and interconnections in the overall body of raw data and used these to find macro-scale patterns in each set of news reports on each foreign policy case considered in context. Bernard (2002, p. 465) claims that using this method, “by the time you identify the themes and refine them to a point where they can be applied to an entire corpus of texts, a lot of interpretative analysis has already been done.” ‘Coding,’ he asserts, ‘is analysis.’ The result of this approach was an extensive compilation of summarized, organized, and catalogued data on the thematic content present in my source documents that could also be quantified and/or substantiated with direct exemplar quotations from the newspapers themselves to provide concrete evidence of my findings.
To illustrate how my coding strategy was used to code each individual article it may be helpful for me to provide a few specific examples of how this was used in the actual newspaper reports used in my study. These articles appeared in U.S. newspapers and wires during the debate in the U.S. media over a potential American military intervention in Kosovo in spring 1999. In this excerpt from an article titled “Playing at war until we find one?” from the Copley News Service, the news commentator wrote (Bailey, 1999):

Like a proverbial phoenix from the ashes, “The Domino Theory” has once again taken flight. Lacking any U.S. strategic or political imperative, the theory that sent more than 50,000 American soldiers to their deaths in Vietnam has now been updated and burnished to justify sending the newest generation into another unwinnable confrontation in another hell-hole thousands of miles from home. If we and NATO don’t intervene in Yugoslavia, the theory goes, the butcher Slobodan Milosevic would knock off neighboring countries one-by-one, destabilizing Europe eventually.

This article’s association between arguments for intervention and the domino theory is never actually validated with a quote from advocates of a U.S. involvement in Kosovo uttering the term. Rather, it appears that this was the way in which the journalist himself saw (or chose to talk about) the rationale of others for an intervention in the Balkans. This article was coded under some of the following themes: origin of term - journalist; tone/content - negative/critical; article topic - Kosovo; article type - editorial; other themes - Vietnam analogy and quagmire.

The following passage from an editorial in The Herald-Sun (Yugoslav Airstrikes; Clinton's Domino Theory, 1999) provides another example:

When he was a mere lad facing the prospect of military service in Vietnam, Bill Clinton stretched ethics like a rubber band to avoid a McNamara Fellowship. However, when he justifies U.S. participation in NATO airstrikes against Yugoslavia, Clinton doesn’t hesitate to reach for one of the linchpins of the Vietnam era – the domino theory. It all sounds eerily familiar: If we don’t stop Serbian Strongman Slobodan Milosevic in 1999 (North Vietnamese strongman Ho Chi Minh in 1965) from unleashing a reign of terror in Kosovo province (South Vietnam), all the states of Southern Europe (all the states of Southeast Asia) are at risk of falling in a wider war. What’s wrong with that view? The domino theory was a fiercely deterministic policy lashed to a mistaken assessment of
Communist influence in Southeast Asia. In many respects, Ho Chi Minh was more nationalist than Communist. The same can be said of Slobodan Milosevic. This editorial later went on to claim that “President Clinton’s assertion … should be taken with skepticism.” Although it specifically accused Clinton of relying on the domino theory, the writer did not decide (or wasn’t able) to quote Clinton or White House official relying on the phrase in their public rhetoric about the crisis. Actually, reporters made this claim repeatedly during the coverage of the U.S. military intervention but no such quote substantiating such an assertion was found in any of the articles examined in this study. This report was coded under some of the following theme categories because of its surface content: origin of term – journalist; tone – negative/critical; article topic - Kosovo; article type – editorial; other themes: Vietnam analogy, lack of competence/experience/clear thinking, and avoidance of Vietnam military service/“draft-dodger.”

These two examples illustrate how the articles used in this study presented me with a snapshot of how each journalist conceived (or chose to represent) the topic of their reports that were then coded systematically in their original context for certain prevalent characteristics. Once all of the coding was complete, I was left with an aggregated and catalogued body of findings organized by theme that could be notated and then analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively for common patterns and logical interrelationships relevant to my research question. It also provided me with a summarized list of exemplar newspaper quotes catalogued under each of the theme categories that helped me in my analysis and provided concrete examples of each theme. Taken together, all of this provided me with the ability to interrogate my developing themes and hypotheses throughout the research process and double-check the efficacy of my findings through a process of triangulation. For example, the grounded qualitative approach to coding allowed me to become aware of the contextualized intricacies in the data as I went along and to increase the potential validity of my findings. The aggregated descriptive statistics organized by theme helped to detect overall numeric patterns, double-check my qualitative hunches and verify that they were actually commonalities and not my own possible misperceptions. It also helped to demonstrate that the exemplar quotes were common in the raw data and not selected to make unfounded and inaccurate assertions. The catalogued list of exemplar quotes also served as a checking procedure by providing concrete examples of each theme that helped to reinforce the accuracy of my other qualitative and quantitative findings. In
the end, this process enabled me to address each of the major questions that this dissertation set out to explore by documenting and accessing overall trends evident in the how the so-called domino theory was used as a form of geopolitics by the American media in their printed coverage of certain foreign affairs issues confronting the country.

**Limitations of This Study**

Ultimately, my research methods helped me successfully access overall patterns in how journalists used the term domino theory to talk about certain foreign policy issues in the imaginative geographies of their reporting on the three specific case studies for this dissertation. There were some questions and issues, however, that I consciously did not seek to address in this dissertation and/or were outside the scope of this research project because of my philosophical position, my data sources, and my research techniques. I believe it is important for me to acknowledge these to my readers so they do not misinterpret the basic intentions and applicability of this research. For example, I did not try to evaluate the relative accuracy or “truthfulness” of the representations embedded in the newspaper reports used as my raw data sources. Some may be accurate or inaccurate or a combination of both. I do not have the means of definitely establishing or refuting their direct correspondence with reality. This would be an entirely different undertaking than the purpose of this dissertation. All of newspaper reports, however, are social artifacts that represent particular interpretations of the world laden with the positionality, assumptions, understandings, and perception of their writers that must later be re-interpreted subjectively by their reader (including me) and, thus, mediated though all these same filters once again. Nor do I try to access the unwritten thought patterns and motivations of the journalists in their reports. This, like an evaluation of their “truthfulness” is beyond my capacity and available data. I seek only to analyze and document patterns in their surface (manifest) content to see how they explicitly represent foreign affairs to address the questions of this research.

Next, I contained my case studies to instances where the American news media employed the specific term “domino theory.” This means that I did not attempt to investigate every use of the domino metaphor (e.g., domino effects) that appeared in the printed news reports and wires produced by U.S. journalists since 1989. There were thousands of newspaper articles and wires that somehow relied on the phrase “domino” or mentioned “domino effects” in their coverage
and an engagement with all of these sources was beyond the scope of this dissertation. Because of this, it is possible that a more expansive future study of the domino metaphor in the media may arrive at findings that differ from this research. An investigation of the possible differences in the use of the catchphrase (for example, domino theory vs. domino effect) as a geopolitical discourse may be an interesting topic of future research in geography that would contribute to our knowledge in this area. Nevertheless, I contend that those findings would not refute the fundamental conclusions reached in this dissertation.

And finally, I did not seek to prove or disprove the relative merits of the so-called “domino theory” or the “domino metaphor” for appreciating world events or either’s correspondence with reality. This research does not set out to “prove” or “disprove” the so-called domino theory or the domino metaphor by testing it empirically. That would be an entirely different undertaking that is not the subject of this dissertation. As pointed out in Chapter Two, this effort has already been undertaken effectively in other scholarly works where certain versions of the domino theory have been shown to be demonstrably lacking in their logic, excessive abstraction, determinism, objectivity, and correspondence with empirically-based observations of global politics (e.g., O’Sullivan, 1982; O’Sullivan, 1996; O’Sullivan, 2001). In fact, my philosophical position and interpretation of the history of the catchphrase differs in that I posit that there is not any such single, universally accepted, “domino theory” or use of the metaphor at play in the popular geopolitical discourse that I can subject to this type of analysis for final validation or rejection. Instead, I submit that the use of the term “domino theory” reflects a way in which a journalist may envision or choose to represent geopolitical issues in their reporting. These reports are the material evidence of the media’s creation of popular geopolitics that may reflect a (or is part of a larger) geopolitical discourse that promotes a certain appreciation of world events that is then mediated to the public through news reporting.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates how my research methods relying on thematic content analysis utilizing qualitative techniques - loosely-based on grounded theory combined with limited quantitative methods - enabled me to address the major questions of this research project by extracting findings from my data through an orderly, empirical, and recursive process of data collection, analysis and interpretation. This allowed the answers to my research questions to be
systematically extracted (or “discovered”) from the media reports used as the artifacts of this research. After reading this chapter, my reader should be aware of how this methodology led to the finding presented in each of the three case studies in this dissertation and why my findings and the exemplar quotes used to represent them are credible. This approach is also made clear to my readers in the detailed discussion contained in each of the individual chapters. The result of this approach is a transparent record of patterns and variations in how the domino theory operated as part of an overall geopolitical discourse in the geographical knowledge that was constructed by American journalists in their depictions of three specific controversial foreign policy issues facing the country. These findings enhance our knowledge of the popular news media’s role in the construction of imaginative geographies through their reporting on world events using the domino theory. This sheds light on the media as an institutional site responsible for the production of popular geographical knowledge about the world for the general public. The nature of these representations can shape the overall complexion of these foreign policy debates and sometimes have social and political consequences. The next few chapters of this dissertation involve a series of specific case studies analyzing the use of the domino metaphor by the U.S. news media in its coverage of Bosnia (1993-1995), Kosovo (1999), and Iraq (2003-2007). This research will show that the imaginative geographies contained in these collections of newspaper accounts are contending visions, not necessarily of “truth,” but of the world as the journalists perceive or choose to represent it through their use this well known geopolitical metaphor.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE DOMINO THEORY AND THE BOSNIA DEBATE

Chapter Introduction

This chapter examines the foreign policy debate in the United States related to the first major surge in the appearance of the domino theory in relation to geopolitical issues in U.S. newspapers and wires during the post-Cold War era – the civil war in Bosnia from 1993 - 1995. The material evidence for the reemergence of the metaphor in the popular media used for this study is derived from a search of the Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe database for transcripts from U.S. newspapers and wires utilizing the term “domino theory” in the title or body of the article. The resulting data show that during the eight-year period between 1985 and 1993, the phrase was rarely invoked by American print journalists to refer to any particular set of foreign policy issues. In fact, it was uncommon for the term to be utilized in any way except with regard to a wide array of issues in American local politics, business, sports, or historical discussions of past U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Beginning in 1993 the frequency of the term began to intensify until 1995, when there was a sudden and dramatic expansion of the use of the phrase in U.S. papers and it was utilized 171 times throughout the course of the year. During that three-year span (1993 – 1995) there was a 103 percent increase in the number of occasions in which the term “domino theory” appeared in the Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe database over the preceding period between 1990 and 1992. In 1995 alone, there was a 235 percent increase over the average from the first three years of the decade – a mean of 51 times per year. Figure 5.1 (see below) illustrates this pattern by showing that 1995 was one of the three periods since 1985 in which there was a dramatic heightening in the use of the domino metaphor in the U.S. printed news media. The figure also shows that, after 1995, the appearance of the phrase suddenly plummeted until it remerged again in 1999.

A close qualitative analysis of this reemergence of the term “domino theory” between 1993 and 1995 reveals that the appearance of the phrase was concentrated almost entirely on two particular topics – the publication of former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s memoir on America’s involvement in Vietnam and, to a lesser extent, the heated political controversy in
the U.S. popular media over how the U.S. should deal with the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. These two issues account for virtually the entire increase in the appearance of the metaphor in the U.S. media during the three-year period over the typical average between 1990 and 1992. For example, 61 percent (105/171) of all articles in 1995 that invoked the phrase involved discussions of one or both of these issues. McNamara’s book detailing the mistakes leading to the tragedy of American involvement in Vietnam accounts for the overwhelming majority (43 percent or 73/171) of the sudden eruption in the use of the metaphor. This may be because he specifically mentioned the importance of the domino metaphor in his flawed and admittedly impoverished views of Southeast Asia while he was U.S. Secretary of Defense in the 1960s. “Two developments after I became secretary of defense reinforced my thinking about Vietnam,” wrote McNamara (1995, p. 32),

the intensification of relations between Cuba and the Soviets, and a new wave of Soviet provocations in Berlin. Both seemed to underscore the aggressive intent of Communist policy. In that context, the danger of Vietnam’s loss and, through falling dominoes, the loss of all Southeast Asia made it seem reasonable to consider expanding the U.S. effort in Vietnam.

It should be noted that in the decade before the publication of this book, McNamara’s name seldom appeared in U.S. news articles using the phrase “domino theory” in the Lexus-Nexus database. After this time, his name in articles referring to the domino metaphor only briefly reemerged in the news in relation to the 2003 documentary The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert McNamara and his death in 2009.

The remainder of the resurgence of domino metaphor in the U.S. news media from 1993 - 1995 can largely be attributed to articles discussing various foreign crises confronting U.S. policy-makers, particularly the prolonged Bosnian conflict. This crisis – the most violent and destructive conflict seen in Europe since 1945 - was widely viewed in the United States as the most significant and embarrassing foreign policy challenge confronting the international community at the time. By the end of 1995, the disintegration of Yugoslavia had lead to the deaths of 200,000 people, created over one million refugees, humiliated the U.N. and substantially challenged the credibility of the U.S., the European Community (now the European Union) and NATO (Crampton, 2002). Although the term did appear during 1995 in other media coverage of events in Israel, Liberia, Cuba, Mexico, Chechnya, Algeria (1 time each
respectively) and China (2 times), it was the political dispute over how (or if) the U.S. should respond to the conflict that accounted for the most significant proportion of surge in the use of the phrase “domino theory” in the news. 80 percent (or 32/40) of all articles that continued to use the term to discuss current events in global politics in 1995 also involved a discussion of the circumstances in Bosnia.

This chapter analyzes how the reemergence of the domino theory between 1993 and 1995 in U.S. print news covering geopolitical issues was associated with the American political debate over the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. This was a crucial period in which the Clinton Administration was attempting to formulate a policy response toward the ongoing violence in the region that would be palatable to the American people. It illustrates the way the metaphor appears to have operated as a geopolitical discourse in the media that influenced the nature of this debate and the popular view of Americans toward the crisis. The use of the phrase may have also reflected geopolitical understandings common among Americans toward the wisdom of a potential military intervention in the region. In this regard, the use of the metaphor may reveal the manner in which journalists, news commentators, and the public perceived the circumstances related to this foreign policy crisis confronting U.S. policymakers. While the history of the use of the term domino theory by American politicians and journalists during past conflicts in Vietnam and Central America has shown how it has been manipulated to rationalize and justify military interventionism in the past and might lead us to expect that this also occurred in the debate over
Bosnia in the 1990s, this chapter will show qualitative and quantitative evidence that this was not the case. Although, consistently accused of relying on the domino theory as the basis of their rationalizations, those promoting a more robust intervention in the crisis (usually within the Clinton Administration) largely avoided utilizing the term and instead relied on other rhetorical devices to define the situation in the media. During the Bosnia debate, there was a clear pattern in which it was primarily news commentators opposed to a potential military intervention in the former Yugoslavia who most commonly chose to invoke the phrase domino theory in support of their own political purposes in news accounts. This strategy conditioned the discussion of the topic in the popular media in ways that challenged policies advocating the use of force to resolve the Balkan conflict. This chapter highlights how the domino theory was often injected into the debate over the crisis in America’s popular print media in a variety of ways, most notably by associating the potential use of force in Bosnia with discredited military adventures, rationalizations, and mistakes of past presidential administrations in Vietnam.

**Background to the Bosnia Crisis**

The introduction of the domino theory to the discussion of the crisis in Bosnia in the U.S. media between 1993 and 1995 was a manifestation of intense political controversy among American policy-makers, journalists and the general public over the appropriate array of diplomatic and military policies toward the ongoing conflict and war crimes plaguing the former Yugoslavia. During this period, the Clinton Administration had devoted considerable effort and diplomatic capital in its attempts to formulate a consistent and effective set of policies to resolve what Secretary of State Warren Christopher called ‘the problem from hell’ in the Balkans that would be also be acceptable to the U.S. Congress, the Pentagon, the American people, and the country’s allies (Rogel, 1998, p. 64). For almost three years, the proper alignment of policies eluded Clinton’s officials attempting to end the bloodshed in the region. This was, in part, the result of the evolution of President Clinton’s sometimes inconsistent policies and rhetoric toward the issue as well as the complexity involved in conflict and the need to consider the concerns of the large number of domestic and international actors involved in the issue.

After the fragmentation of Yugoslavia in summer 1991, the situation in Bosnia began to quickly careen toward civil war between the Serbs, Croats and Muslims living in Bosnia. By
early-1992, all three groups formed their own ethnic militias and open warfare erupted as each attempted to seize portions of the region for their respective ethnic groups and/or defend themselves and their respective interests. The Bosnian Serbs were most successful because their new political entity, the Republika Srpska (RS), inherited huge caches of armaments from the former Yugoslav National Army (JNA) and enjoyed direct military assistance of neighboring Serbia. These advantages enable them to seize and link over 70 percent of the region into a contiguous zone under their control also linked to Serbia (Crampton, 2002, p. 266). Throughout the conflict, the Bosnian Serbs remained the most adamant group opposed to efforts to resolve the war diplomatically because of the military imbalance in the region. The violence was exacerbated by the involvement of not only the Serbian military, but the Croatian military as well, which sought to carve out a Croat controlled region in Bosnia that would be linked with Croatia (Crampton, 2002). At various points in the civil war the three main sets of combatants fought one another in varying arrays of combinations. According to historian R.J. Crampton (2002, p.258),

Muslim, Serb and Croat [militias] were all at war with each other … and at one stage in Bihac the Muslims even fought each other. The complexity and absurdity of the conflict may be gauged from the fact that in 1993 the Bosnian Croat soldiers were fighting alongside the Muslims in Sarajevo and against them in Mostar.

It was during this conflict that Serb leaders infamously introduced a new euphemism to the geopolitical lexicon when they described their crimes against humanity seeking to systematically clear areas of non-Serbs as “ethnic cleansing.” The intentional policies of ethnic “cleansing” implemented by the various combatants in the former Yugoslavia led to the worst violence and humanitarian catastrophe seen in Europe since the 1940s.

The Clinton Administration inherited this intransigent diplomatic crisis in the Balkans from the George H.W. Bush Administration when it arrived in office in 1993. Bush-era policymakers had concluded that the situation in Yugoslavia was largely a European regional conflict in which the U.S. had few strategic interests and should, therefore, avoid compromising the country’s international and military credibility. Several major European leaders actively discouraged American leadership on the issue and asserted the European Community’s (EC) responsibility to handle the Bosnian civil war. Jacques Poos, the Foreign Minister of Luxembourg, for example, (in)famously proclaimed, “This [the Bosnian crisis] is the hour of
Europe, not the hour of Americans” (Bert, 1997, p. 139). The Bush Administration, having just emerged victorious from the Persian Gulf War and consumed by Middle East negotiations and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, happily allowed European and U.N. diplomats to seize the initiative in Yugoslavia. According to former Secretary of State James A. Baker, “the Bush Administration felt comfortable with the EC taking responsibility for handling the crisis in the Balkans” (Baker, 1995, p. 636). Instead, the U.S. attempted to align its policies with those of its European allies. By fall 1992, U.S. officials simply decided to back peace initiatives by the E.C. and U.N. that tried various enticements and punitive measures to stem the fighting but ultimately failed to ameliorate the descent into chaos in Bosnia. The Bush Administration’s only flirtation with the use of force came in summer 1992 when a plan labeled “Game Plan: Next Steps in Bosnia” was approved by Bush and supported by various nations, including Russia, to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Muslims besieged by Serb forces in Sarajevo (Baker, 1995, pp. 647-648). The plan was never implemented because Bosnian Serbs backed down when confronted with firm international pressure backed by the threat of military force.

In addition to the perceived absence of U.S. national interests in the former Yugoslavia and the desire by some E.C. leaders to resolve the conflict without American interference there were powerful domestic forces that frustrated a U.S. military involvement in Bosnia. There was little appetite at the Pentagon to entangle the U.S. military in a local conflict in a mountainous and foggy terrain against one of the largest armies in Europe – the Yugoslav Peoples’ Army (JNA). In 1992, the Bosnian Serbs were undefeated on the battlefield and backed by the full force of the Serb-controlled JNA. According to Baker, in 1992 U.S. officials believed that a successful intervention might require the “massive use of military force, including ground forces” and that “the American people would never have supported it” (Baker, 1995, pp. 635-636). This policy of non-interventionism was reinforced by a conviction that permeated Washington in the early 1990s, particularly the military establishment, the Bush Administration, and Congress, that the U.S. should not take even limited action in the crisis such as air strikes unless it was also committed to ultimately use every available means, including ground forces, to ensure a successful outcome that would promote U.S. national interests (Bert, 1997, pp. 107, 115). Anything less was believed to potentially compromise America’s military and diplomatic credibility. This widely-held view was commonly referred to as the so-called “Powell Doctrine” because it was popularized by former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (later Secretary of
State) Colin Powell in an article in the prestigious journal *Foreign Affairs* in 1992 (Powell, U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead, 1992). In the article, Powell famously outlined his various criteria for any potential U.S. military intervention that included a series of high benchmarks that should be met *before* the country committed its military in any crisis. Powell, who was profoundly influenced by the experiences of Vietnam and Lebanon, asserted that, “War should be the politics of last resort” and that his generation “would not quietly acquiesce in halfhearted warfare for half-baked reasons” (Powell, My American Journey, 1995, pp. 148-149).

It was in this context that presidential candidate Bill Clinton’s foreign policy team, including Richard Holbrooke, began to formulate the contours of their geopolitics toward Bosnia and articulate them publically. In general, Clinton publically advocated a more muscular diplomatic, humanitarian, and military responses to the bloodshed in Bosnia that stopped well short of a commitment of American ground forces in the region. The candidate openly accepted the representation of the conflict in the Balkans as a potential “quagmire” and his reaction to the crisis was complicated by domestic considerations as well as the views of American allies. During the first presidential debate in St Louis in October 1992 Clinton asserted (PBS: Debating Our Destiny, The First 1992 Presidential Debate, 1992):

> I agree we cannot commit ground forces to become involved in the *quagmire* of Bosnia or in the tribal wars of Somalia. But I think that it's important to recognize that there are things that can be done short of that and that we do have interest there. There are, after all, two million refugees now because of the problems in what was Yugoslavia, the largest number since World War II. And there may be hundreds of thousands of people who will starve or freeze to death in this winter. The United States should try to work with its allies and stop it. I urged the President to support this air cover and he did and I applaud that. I applaud the no-fly zone and I know that he's going back to the United Nations to try to get authority to enforce it. I think we should stiffen the embargo on the Belgrade Government and I think we have to consider whether or not we should lift the arms embargo now on the Bosnians since they are in no way in a fair fight with a heavily armed opponent bent on ethnic cleansing. We can't get involved in the *quagmire* but we must do what we can.

In general, Clinton was more adamant than his predecessor about the need to intervene somehow to stem the bloodletting in the Balkans but his policy recommendations and
representations of the issue vacillated over the next few years. After his inauguration in January 1993, Clinton officials pursued a limited escalation of U.S. military involvement known as “lift and strike” seeking to end the violence by creating a greater balance of military power between the combatants. This involved the removal of an arms embargo in the region that he viewed as having merely disadvantaging the Bosnian Muslims and Croats because the Bosnian Serbs had access to JNA weaponry and assistance. The basic purpose was to create a greater equity of force between combatants by allowing the Muslim forces to finally arm themselves while NATO airstrikes would prevent a major Serb offensive in the interim. This policy was publically opposed by influential members of the U.S. military hierarchy, including Colin Powell and John Shalikashvili, who cautioned that “limited” military strikes might entangle the armed forces in another potential Vietnam-style fiasco (Rogel, 1998, p. 62). Warren Christopher, who traveled overseas to convince EC leaders of the wisdom of this option, also found them unreceptive to a strategy they felt would lead to a further infusion of weapons into the region that might escalate and widen the war. Many feared it would endanger peacekeepers present on the ground that might be subject to retaliation by Serbs enraged by NATO strikes. Others felt it would compromise EC and UN neutrality and damage efforts to reach a final settlement of the crisis. British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd publically criticized the Clinton plan, arguing that it promised only to ‘level the killing fields’ in Bosnia rather than end the civil war (Bert, 1997, p. 182).

With the failure of Clinton’s early policies as well as plans promoted by the EC and UN, the international reaction to the catastrophe in Bosnia remained largely ineffective in 1993. The U.N., by default, filled the vacuum and assumed responsibility for grappling with the violence by moving UNPROFOR forces to Bosnia to engage in peacekeeping operations and to help protect humanitarian mission throughout the region. The U.N. Security Council created “safe areas” protected by its peacekeepers in the cities of Sarajevo, Tuzla, Gorazde, Zepa, Bihac and Srebrenica and then passed a resolution (UNSCR 816, March 31, 1993) authorizing establishment of a “no-fly” zone over all of Bosnia enforced by NATO aircraft who were authorized to use “all necessary measures” to enforce the resolution. A later resolution (UNSCR 836, June 4, 1993) extended NATO’s military authority to the protection of safe areas. The fighting in Bosnia continued unabated throughout the remainder of 1993 and 1994 and U.S. policies had little palpable effect on the situation (Crampton, 2002).
In 1994, there were some diplomatic breakthroughs although the fighting itself actually intensified in some areas of Bosnia. In February 1994, a brutal mortar strike on a Sarajevo market that killed 68 and wounded over 100, led most EC members (except Greece) and NATO to authorize the use of air power to break the Serb siege of the city. A NATO ultimatum backed by the threat of force and Russian diplomatic pressure resulted in an agreement by the Bosnian Serbs to remove their heavy weapons from the area surrounding the city and averted the use of force. In April, the U.N. safe area in Gorazde was attacked by Serb forces and the U.N. commanders requested and received approval for NATO air strikes to relieve the city. By late April, the air strikes had been ineffective and the city was overrun by Serb militias (Crampton, 2002, p. 264). Although the NATO assault failed to achieve its stated goal, it was significant because it set the first precedent for the use of NATO force in the conflict backed by President Clinton. That spring another achievement was the successful creation of a tenuous military and political alliance, known as the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina between the Bosnian Muslims and Croats. This helped to further isolate the Bosnian Serbs and alter the balance of military power in the region. The U.S. also began to ignore the infusion of weapons to the new alliance in Bosnia and later acquiesced to a contract between Croatia and a U.S.-based paramilitary firm known as Military Professional Resources that began to train the Croatian forces for their showdown with their Serb adversaries (Glenny, 1996, p. 283). By December, a military alliance was officially established between the new federation and the country of Croatia. U.S. diplomats, including Clinton’s emissary Richard Holbrooke, contributed to a diplomatic breakthrough when he began to play a leading role in a new association, known as the Contact Group – including the United States, Britain, France, Germany and Russia - that sought to pursue a coordinated international plan to end the war (Holbrooke, 1998). It was later Contact Group diplomats led by Holbrooke that negotiated the treaty that finally ended the war in Bosnia in 1995.

During the first eight months of 1995, however, the situation in Bosnia only further deteriorated for the civilians in the region and a resolution of the war appeared to be nowhere in sight. In May, after NATO attempted to punish the Serbs with limited air strikes for attacking U.N. “safe zones,” the Serb response humiliated the U.N. by taking over 350 U.N. peacekeepers hostage (Ramet, 2002, pp. 235-237). That same month, Croatian forces launched a major offensive to re-conquer the region of Slavonia (north of Bosnia). This was a calamity for Serb
civilians living in the area but did hint at the changing alignment of military power in the region in favor of the Croats and their allies (Crampton, 2002). Perhaps the most notorious incident occurred that summer when Bosnian Serbs launched an offensive aimed at overrunning the remaining Muslim enclaves in eastern Bosnia. Despite the U.N. “safe zone” designation and a token peacekeeping presence, the areas were viscously attacked (Post, 1995). The enclave at Srebrenica was overrun on July 11, 1995 by General Ratko Mladic’s forces who massacred over 8,000 civilians that had sought refuge in the “safe zone.” According to Holbrooke, Srebrenica was the scene of “the biggest single mass murder since World War II” (Holbrooke, 1998, p. 69).

In August, Croatia initiated another massive offensive (“Operation Storm”) aimed at reconquering their lost Krijina region (west of Bosnia) that had been held by rebel Serbs for almost four years. The successful Croat attack inflicted a humiliating defeat on the Serbs in the Krijina, crushing an aura of military invincibility they had enjoyed since the beginning of the war. Perhaps most importantly, Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic abandoned them and made no effort to intervene to prevent their defeat. According to Holbrooke, this “eliminated one of our [the Clinton Administration’s] greatest fears – that Belgrade would reenter the war” and high-level U.S. officials began to believe that limited military solutions could be imposed on the Bosnian Serbs without an escalation or expansion of the war (Holbrooke, 1998, p. 73).

The situation was complicated, however, by a measure approved by both houses of the U.S. Congress during the summer calling on the President to unilaterally lift the arms embargo in place against Bosnia (Rogel, 1998, p. 66). This placed the Clinton Administration in a precarious situation because it threatened to provoke some European powers into withdrawing their peacekeepers from the region. Simultaneously, the new French President, Jacques Chirac began to publically call for either a more aggressive Western action toward the crisis or a complete withdrawal of peacekeeping forces (Rogel, 1998). In a statement consistent with Chirac, French Prime Minister Alain Juppe asserted, ‘If once again there is no will to act against the Serbs, France is ready to let the arms embargo be lifted with UNPROFOR, and let the combatants fight’ (Bert, 1997, p. 221). This threatened pull-out of U.N. forces had a dramatic impact on Clinton’s willingness to consider various military alternatives because his administration had already approved a classified Pentagon contingency plan, known as Op Plan 40-104 or “Operation Determined Effort.” The plan obligated NATO to insert 25,000 NATO ground troops, including 10,000 Americans, to support a withdrawal of the U.N.’s peacekeepers from the Balkans.
(Thompson, 1995). Although, Clinton retained the ultimate right to prevent the deployment, that decision was believed by his own foreign policy team to have threatened his primary foreign policy achievements and the NATO alliance itself. According to Holbrooke (1998, pp. 66-67),

If, in the event of a U.N. withdrawal, he [Clinton] did not deploy American troops, the United States would be flouting, in its first test, the very NATO process it had created. The resulting recriminations could mean the end of NATO as an effective military alliance. …Clearly, we had to find a policy that avoided a disastrous U.N. withdrawal.

That meant greater U.S. involvement.

High-level members of Clinton’s foreign policy team now saw the situation in Bosnia as a threat to America’s strategic interests necessitating some form of U.S. military intervention. The president was faced with an option of either potentially undermining his administration’s foreign policy achievements, attempting to use limited force such as air strikes to ameliorate the crisis, or inserting thousands of American ground troops in an operation that by its very nature guaranteed defeat in the Balkans.

By late July British Prime Minister John Major called for a “crisis meeting” in London in response to French demands for intensified western intervention or a withdrawal. At the same time, military units composed of British and French troops were sent to Bosnia. At the London Conference, the Americans, in a frantic effort to prevent a U.N. withdrawal, implied that they might intervene with military force to defend remaining Muslim “safe area” such as Goradzde (Crampton, 2002). This plan was accepted by the NATO Council and later expanded to Sarajevo. By late August American diplomats, including Holbrooke, began to circulate on the Sunday morning news circuit giving interviews where they made thinly-veiled threats against the Serbs for future acts of violence (Holbrooke, 1998, p. 89). The Clinton Administration did not need to wait before they faced a test of their new-found resolve. On August 28, 1994 the images of a bloody mortar attack on the Markale marketplace in Sarajevo that killed or wounded over 70 civilians flooded the international media (Zimmerman, 1996, p. 222). Holbrooke claimed that, “this was the final test for the West. …the brutal stupidity of the Bosnian Serbs had given us an unexpected last chance to do what we should have done three years earlier .. it [the attack] was different because of its timing; coming immediately after the launching of our diplomatic shuttle and the tragedy of Igman1, it appeared not only as an act of terror against the innocent people of

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1 Mount Igman road was the site of an automobile accident that killed three American diplomats in 1995
Sarajevo, but as a direct affront to the United States (Holbrooke, 1998, p. 93). Clinton finally decided to promote a robust military reaction to Serb provocations. His decision was facilitated by the leadership of NATO Secretary-General Willy Claes who personally authorized his Mediterranean commanders to use force in Bosnia. The resulting military assault against the Bosnian Serbs (known as “Operation Deliberate Force”) began two days later. The fifteen day action was a massive and unprecedented demonstration of NATO military power – the largest in the forty-five year history of the alliance (Holbrooke, 1998, p. 99). This attack involved a series of air strikes, including over 800 bombing missions and the use of Tomahawk cruise missiles, against the Serbs throughout Bosnia that lasted until mid-September (Crampton, 2002, p. 266). A simultaneous attack on the reeling Bosnian Serbs by a coalition of Croatia and the Bosnian Federation of Muslims and Croatians overran their forces in western Bosnia. The Serbs quickly lost over 20 percent of the territory that they had controlled in Bosnia for over two years. The Bosnian Serbs army, as an effective military force, was nearly annihilated by these attacks. It was preserved only by the diplomatic efforts of Serbian President Milosevic who was able to secure a cease-fire and an agreement among the leaders of Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia’s Serbs that allowed him to personally negotiate on the behalf of the Bosnian Serbs (Crampton, 2002, pp. 266-267).

The cease-fire created a temporary window of peace until a series of negotiations were held at the beginning of November at Paterson Air Base in Daytona, Ohio that led to a resolution of the civil war. Holbrooke represented the United States and Milosevic the Serbs, while the British, French, Russians, Croatia, the Bosnian Muslims also sent influential delegations to the negotiations. An agreement was reached by late November in which Bosnia as divided roughly in half between the Bosnian Serbs and the Federation with a joint central government overseen by the international community. The integrity of the territorial agreements and the ceasefire were to be enforced by the deployment of an Implementation Force (IFOR) of 60,000 NATO troops deployed to the region immediately, including thousands of U.S. forces. A European High Representative (HR) was appointed to oversee the implementation of the agreement. By the end of 1995, these efforts finally ended the war in the former Yugoslavia. The heightening of the crisis in 1995 and Clinton’s decision to use military force in the Balkans and deploy U.S. ground troops in the region as peacekeepers only further fueled the political controversy in the American news media between those advocating greater U.S. involvement in the Balkans and their
opponents. During this political debate, each side relied on their own rhetorical strategies to publicly support the wisdom and legitimacy of their policies in their efforts to (re)define the discussion of the crisis in the U.S. news media. The remainder of this chapter will explore how the resurrection of the domino theory in the popular geopolitics of the U.S. news media from 1993-1995 was often part of a larger discourse that worked in opposition to American involvement in the Balkans. The evidence from news sources demonstrate how the metaphor reflected the assumptions and associations of journalists discussing the crisis or their views that direct activism in the civil war was somehow analogous to mistakes from America’s past that pulled the country into a disaster in Vietnam.

**The Re-presentation of the Case of Intervention in Bosnia as the Domino Theory**

A cursory examination of the reemergence of the domino theory in the U.S. media coverage of geopolitical issues from 1993 to 1995 shows a correlation between the use of the phrase and the discussion in American news reports about the crisis in Bosnia and a possibility of a U.S. military intervention in the region. On the surface, it appears that the metaphor may have been invoked in the rhetoric of those advocating a stronger U.S. involvement in the crisis because the majority of the articles draw a connection between the reappearance of the phrase with the views of those making the case for a military intervention in the region - typically members of the Clinton Administration. In fact, 66 percent (42/64) of the articles appearing in these U.S. newspapers and wires from the period using the phrase “domino theory” in their discussion of Bosnia also mentioned President Clinton somewhere in the title or body of their reports. The first reports began to surface making the association between Clinton and the domino theory even before the President assumed office in January 1993 (Cohen, 1993). Many commentators in the media explicitly attributed the revival of the metaphor to various members of the White House, including President Clinton himself or officials such as Anthony Lake or Warren Christopher. Despite this apparent association between the President and the use of the domino theory in the news, a closer qualitative examination of the specific content of the articles available in *Lexus-Nexus* U.S. newspapers and wires reveals a pattern in which none of the journalists decided, or were actually able, to quote Clinton or any other White House official using the metaphor. It was also uncommon for other advocates of a greater U.S. intervention in the Balkans to rely upon the metaphor in their rhetoric in the news media supporting policies of
increased activism in the civil war. Only four articles between 1993 and 1995 could reasonably be interpreted as favoring increased American military involvement in the region. Figure 5.2 (see below) illustrates this finding by demonstrating the percentage of articles in *Lexus-Nexus* newspapers and wires during the study period that associated the case for intervention in Bosnia with the domino theory (66 percent or 42/64) and the number that actually quoted any Clinton Administration official invoking the phrase (0/64). This figure also depicts the number of writers that used the term themselves in articles advocating a greater U.S. military involvement in the Bosnian crisis (6 percent or 4/64).

![Source of Domino Reference](image)

*Figure 5.2*: Percentage of articles associating Bosnia crisis with the domino theory, either via direct quote from White House official (in red), without a direct quote (in blue), by journalist advocating intervention (in green), or other (in purple)

The quantitative and qualitative evidence from these media sources indicate that the most common use of the domino theory in the discussion over U.S. policy in the Balkans does not appear to have been done by Clinton himself or largely by those advocating the use of force in the region. Instead, the phrase appeared to have originated among media sources as a way in which opponents of greater U.S. involvement in the former Yugoslavia chose to negatively reinterpret the case for intervention or the situation on the ground in Bosnia. This pattern is shown in Figure 5.3 (see below). Whether intentional or not – which is impossible to determine with certainty from the available data – representations of the crisis relying on the metaphor worked rhetorically to re-frame the discussion about American policy toward Bosnia negatively by claiming that they were based on, or similar to, the discredited domino theory used to rationalize past U.S. involvement in Vietnam. This evidence demonstrates that the conventional
assumption that the term “domino theory” is used to advocate the use of American military power is not supported by the actual content of the news.

Some news pieces specifically accused Clinton or his foreign policy team of relying on the domino theory in their reasoning or justification for a more active U.S. role in Bosnia. This pattern is readily illustrated by the fact that, even before Clinton assumed office in January 1993, articles promoting a direct connection between his advisors and the metaphor began to appear written by critics in major papers such as *The Washington Post*. “This [Anthony Lake’s] reasoning [toward Bosnia],” claimed columnist Richard Cohen, “… is a variation of the old domino theory – once discredited and now revived for different circumstances” (Cohen, 1993). A later contribution to the *USA Today* pointed out the alleged irony of the debate by arguing, “The situation [in Bosnia], with its unclear objectives, … invited parallels to the Vietnam conflict, which Clinton passionately argued against as a graduate student … It can be eerie to watch Clinton aides invoke the domino theory (the fall of one province can lead to the fall of another and ultimately chaos) their counterparts made about Southeast Asia a generation ago” (Nagourney, 1993). Even a so-called “hard” news account from *The Associated Press* three days later actually forged this connection by juxtaposing the metaphor directly with a quote from Clinton himself. After printing the following quote from the President – “It is in the United States’ national interests to keep this conflict from spilling over into a lot of other countries, which could drag the United States into something … that we don’t want” – The AP’s Ruth Sinai wrote, “According to this domino theory, if the Serbs exercise their historic claim to Macedonia,
then Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece might do so. That would pit two pivotal U.S. NATO allies, Greece and Turkey, against one another and could pull apart the 16-nation alliance” (Sinai, 1993). Although members of the Clinton White House are never quoted actually uttering the phrase “domino theory” over the era examined for this case study, these articles demonstrate the manner in which journalists chose to literally reinterpret their case for intervention as a resurrection of the metaphor.

This explicit link between the White House and the imagery of dominoes continued periodically over the course of the next three years. For example, even after U.S. ground troops were deployed to the region at part of the IFOR peacekeeping force in November 1995 an editorial appeared in *The Washington Times* excoriating Clinton Administration officials for their alleged mistake. “Defense Secretary William Perry, echoing Robert McNamara from the summer of ’65, says the American role [in IFOR] will be complete within a year,” wrote the paper’s Wesley Pruden, while, “Warren Christopher, echoing Dean Rusk, dusts off the infamous domino theory (“the fighting could spread to Europe unless we act now”)” (Pruden, 1995). “… the President wants American troops to defend his Bosnian Domino Theory,” claimed Vietnam veteran James H. Smith’s Opinion-Editorial in *The Washington Times*, but “if Clinton was unwilling to defend the Vietnam Domino Theory, I don’t understand why Americans should die for his Bosnian version” (Smith, 1995). None of these journalists made the decision, or were able, to specifically quote any White House official relying on the phrase “domino theory” in their rhetoric about the crisis in Bosnia. In fact, there are no such direct quotes in any of the articles analyzed over the course of this three year period that were examined in this study. These articles indicate how a number of news pieces presented the association between the President and the domino theory as a matter of fact but then failed to establish any direct quotes or other specific evidence corroborating the truthfulness of this claim within the text of their reports.

**The Media’s Association of the Domino Theory with the Case for Intervention in Bosnia**

One of the alternative strategies evident in this set of news pieces was for critics to avoid blatantly accusing Clinton Administration officials of explicitly uttering the phrase “domino theory” but rather employing an approach in which they pointed out what they claimed were similarities between the rhetoric and reasoning justifying intervention in Bosnia with those who had advocated American involvement in Southeast Asia during the Cold War. They also fostered the association by simply bringing up the Vietnam-era domino theory somewhere in the text of
an article otherwise committed to the discussion of Bosnia. In particular, a number of reports forged a link between interventionists’ claims that instability in the Bosnia could “spill over” and spark greater instability or a wider-war in the Balkans with the arguments using the discredited domino theory to justify past interventions in Vietnam and Central America. They then articulated their own view that such arguments about the need for the U.S. to act preemptively to prevent the spread of instability in Southeastern Europe were reminiscent of (or analogous) to the old domino theory. By doing this, critics conditioned the geopolitical discourse in the American media about the ‘realities’ in Bosnia and America’s actions during the crisis to promote their own policy views against greater involvement.

This tactic by Clinton’s opponents of introducing the domino metaphor to the discussion of controversial political issues has already been demonstrated in other academic studies of debates over other foreign policy crises in the 1990s (e.g., Kosovo). These scholarly works illustrated the tendency of White House critics and non-interventionists to rhetorically replace one metaphor or argument “with another ‘falling dominoes’” in their rhetoric in order to recast the President’s “arguments as new versions of the Vietnam-era domino theory” (Paris, 2002) in an attempt to influence the tone of the foreign policy debate. While it is arguable that there may or may not be similarities in these views (the domino theory and spill-over metaphors) because they are largely about the ways in which the real and imagined diffusion of political instability and issues of connectivity can be represented, there is a clear pattern indicating that the decision about whether or not to specifically employ the phrase “domino theory” in the debate over Bosnia was highly politicized. Supporters of intervention seldom embraced the imagery of dominoes and typically relied on humanitarian and moral considerations or their view that the conflict could spread, spill-over, or explode across the Balkans initiating widespread instability that could threaten vital U.S. interests. Figure 5.3 (see above), depicts the prevalent pattern in which it was overwhelming by critics of interventionist policies that introduced rhetoric about dominoes into the discussion of the Bosnian crisis. Journalists opposing a Balkan intervention seemed to rely on the metaphor as a device to shape the popular geopolitics in the news in their favor by claiming that interventionist rhetoric and geopolitical rationalizations were synonymous with (or similar to) the old domino theory in various ways. Usually this was done through the use of linguistic modifiers to link policy arguments for greater involvement to the domino metaphor although it was sometimes done directly as well. Although it is impossible from the content of
the articles to discern with any degree of certainty if this was a conscious political strategy or if this tendency reflected the genuine beliefs or mental associations or the users, it is nevertheless clear that critics of the White House (or an intervention in general) were the predominant users of the domino theory with regard to the dispute over proper U.S. policy in Bosnia from 1993 to 1995.

One example in the media of infusing the discourse concerning arguments for an increased involvement as a necessity to prevent wider conflict in the Balkans into the domino theory appeared in *The Washington Post* within only days of Clinton’s inauguration in January 1993 in a letter-to-the editor titled “Don’t Intervene in Bosnia” (Don't Intervene in Bosnia, 1993). The letter writer claimed that the “drumbeat for American intervention in Bosnia’s civil war … remind one of the domino theory for intervention in Vietnam in 1965.” Later in the spring, *The Houston Chronicle* news bureau chose to trace a similar connection by including a quote from Arizona Senator and non-interventionist (at least in Bosnia) John McCain following a description of the Clinton Administration’s argument that “if the Bosnian conflict [was] not stemmed, it could spread as far as Turkey and Greece.” According to McCain, wrote journalist Craig Hines, “he was a little bit reminded [by White House rhetoric] of the domino theory when we were talking about Vietnam” (Hines, 1993). “I have listened to the ‘90s version of the domino theory,” wrote a contribution to *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, before imploring the American public “not [to] support the president’s sending our young men and women into a civil war without a clearly defined enemy, defensible positions and a clear objective” (Small, 1995).

Other writers simply created this connection by inserting the topic of dominoes into the overall discussion of the crisis in the former Yugoslavia by broaching the metaphor somewhere in the text of their articles. Cal Thomas’s editorial in *The Times-Picayune* (Thomas, 1993) titled “The Balkan Wars” quoted former Johnson Administration aide Jack Valenti’s assertion that: “Some [Clinton] administration officials are saying we can’t let aggression go on because it will spill over into other parts of Europe. … We heard that a lot 30 years ago …in September 1963 [President Kennedy was asked] whether he believed in the ‘domino theory,’ Kennedy said, ‘Yes.’” That same day this quote also appeared in a slightly edited form in the “National Briefing” section of *The Hotline* under the heading “Bosnia: From “Lift and Strike” to “Sit and Wait” (Bosnia: From "Lift and Strike" to "Sit and Wait", 1993). Other interesting examples come
from two news pieces that appeared in the summer of 1995 from Clinton opponents taking
different sides in the debate over whether or not to enforce the arms embargo in the Balkans. In
June, Lou Cannon of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer brought up the “false analogy known as the
domino theory” while accusing the Administration of “hark[ing] back to the Vietnam War” in its
“stubborn insistence” on maintaining the regional arms embargo and avoiding greater military
involvement in Bosnia” (Cannon, 1995). In contrast, The Hotline printed a brief from The Boston
Globe under the heading “Domino Theory” claiming that the failure of Clinton to veto an
elimination of the arms embargo “would almost certainly trigger a collapse of the Bosnia
operation, and in turn oblige the administration to live up to its promise to provide 25,000 troops
to a NATO force that would be deployed to cover the UN pullout.” (Bosnia: House Margin to
End Embargo is also Veto Proof, 1995). These media accounts illustrate varied examples of the
supposed association between the case for intervention by Clinton and his political allies and the

The Domino Theory as Popular Geopolitics in Opinion-Editorial Articles or Letters-to-the-
Editor

One of the dominant motifs evident in the reappearance of the domino theory in the
media during the debate over a U.S. intervention in Bosnia in the 1990s was that it was
overwhelmingly invoked by opinion-editorial writers who formulated a connection between the
metaphor and the policies of proponents of greater involvement in the Balkan crisis. This
association was then diffused throughout the American media through their syndicated columns.
The prevalence of this finding is demonstrated in Figure 5.4 (below) which illustrates the
percentage of total articles appearing in U.S. newspapers and wires from the Lexus-Nexus
Academic Universe from 1993 – 1995 using both the term “domino theory” as well as “Bosnia,”
“Yugoslavia,” or “Balkans” calculated by type (i.e., editorial, regular news, etc.). The consistent
emergence of the terms in editorial columns demonstrates the potential power of syndication in
promoting certain geopolitical understandings (sometimes of a small cadre of individuals)
repeatedly until the particular representations begin to resonate in the popular geopolitics of the
wider media. As previously noted, almost a month before Clinton’s inauguration in January
1993, the politically conservative columnist Richard Cohen began to use his contributions in
papers across the United States to challenge the President’s calls for greater involvement in
Bosnia as flawed domino theory reasoning that would counterproductively produce the very
instability it was intended to prevent (Cohen, 1993). “[Clinton’s] variation of the old domino theory – once discredited and now revived for different circumstances. The wider war – Kosovo, Macedonia and from there God-knows-where --- that some argue can only be avoided by Western intervention is exactly what the Serbs threaten if intervention materializes.” During the debate over U.S. policy in Bosnia, Cohen used his columns on several occasions to associate what he viewed as mistaken White House policies with the domino theory. In spring 1995, for example, he took the opportunity presented by the appearance of McNamara’s book on the U.S. experience in Vietnam to broach the topic of the domino theory and its relevance to Bosnia (Cohen, Better Late Than Never, 1995). Two months later he claimed in a Washington Post Op-Ed that he had “never been enamored of domino theories” before later moving on to argue that lifting the arms embargo by Clinton could “trigger a wider war and the withdrawal of United Nations peacekeepers, then the United States is going to have to get involved. President Clinton, after all, has pledged U.S. troops to help NATO allies get out of the former Yugoslavia” (Cohen, Greek Fears of a Wider War, 1995). When Oliver Stone’s movie on President Richard Nixon premiered the next December Cohen claimed that, “… arguments [by advocates of intervention at the White House] make [Nixon’s] Domino Theory seem closely reasoned by comparison” (Cohen, Clinton's Vietnam, 1995). Johns Hopkins professor Michael Mandelbaum also fostered the link in an editorial that was reprinted under varying headings in papers such as The Saint Paul Pioneer Press (Mandelbaum, After 50 Years, Cold War Win Regarded WWII Sacrifice, 1995) and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (Mandelbaum, Meet me in Moscow, 1995). “Proponents of American intervention in Bosnia argued that unless the United Stated became involved in [Bosnia’s conflict] it would spread through the Balkans, perhaps to all of Europe, which would injure American interests; or that the failure to defend a largely Muslim state in Europe would inflame the Islamic world,” wrote Mandelbaum, “Both prepositions were versions of the domino theory; neither convinced the American public” (Mandelbaum, Meet me in Moscow, 1995). Popular conservative editorialist Charles Krauthammer infused the popular geopolitics about the circumstances in the Balkans with the domino metaphor by accusing “Bosnia interventionists [of] strain[ing] mightily to produce some American national interest, such as the specter of dominoes falling across East Europe all the way to Baltic states” (Krauthammer, 1993). He also claimed that there was a strong historical analogy between alleged mistakes by Clinton in Bosnia and those made in Beirut in the 1980s and Vietnam in the 1960s. “…think of what a long and
costly NATO ground involvement in the Balkans would do to NATO,” asked Krauthammer, “A long and costly ground involvement in Southeast Asia nearly tore apart America. NATO is a more fragile entity. It may turn out to be the ultimate casualty of the coming Bosnian war.” This op-ed was rerun under various headlines in other newspapers across the United States including The Houston Chronicle (Krauthammer, Another Beirut or Vietnam in Bosnia?, 1993), The Plain Dealer (Krauthammer, What Bosnia and Somalia Have In Common, 1993), and the Pittsburg Post-Gazette (Krauthammer, Bosnia is not merely another Somalia - But it could be another Vietnam, 1993). The majority of editorials appearing in the Lexis-Nexis database during this period using the terms “Bosnia” and “Domino Theory” followed this pattern of criticism toward the notion of an escalated U.S. intervention in the Balkans.

![Article Type](image)

Figure 5.4: Percentages of articles by type (conventional news, opinion-editorial/letter-to-the-editor, or other/unclear)

By the summer of 1995, when the political controversy in the U.S. over greater involvement in the Balkans heated-up after the crisis further deteriorated, this perceived link between White House policy in Bosnia and the domino theory forged by news commentators began to emerge among (or trickle down to) segments of the general public and manifested itself in their popular geopolitics in the form of letters-to-the-editor. Based on the data available for this project, there is no way to establish with certainty if the association of the Clinton Administration’s Bosnia rhetoric and the domino theory were manufactured by the (re)presentations of various editorialists or whether they appeared organically among the general
public. Perhaps the link varied by case or it was some combination of both. It is nevertheless apparent that the phrase had been invoked repeatedly by conservative commentators since early 1993 and it is possible that it began to resonate with a portion of the American people by 1995.

In either case, by June 1995 letters-to-the-editor began to emerge characterizing calls for military action in the former Yugoslavia as the domino theory. “...failure to act now would widen the conflict and engulf other parts of Europe. Isn’t that the Domino Theory revisited? Isn’t that one of Bob McNamara’s Top Ten Stupid Reasons to get American’s killed in Vietnam?,” rhetorically asked a letter in *The Denver Post* (We can't win in Bosnia, so let's just stay out, 1995). After the Dayton Agreement in fall 1995 the volume of letters drawing this comparison surged dramatically throughout the remainder of the year. “Thirty years ago I bought into the Vietnam “domino theory ... Now one-term Willie [Clinton] is trying to convince us with the same rhetoric that if Bosnia falls all of Europe could be in peril,” claimed a letter in *Press Enterprise* (CA) (No troops, 1995). During this debate, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* (Trewitt, 1995) published a letter asserting that, “The reasons given for involvement in Bosnia are characteristically identical to those given for Vietnam: reinvented domino theory,” while the *News and Record* (Clinton Repeating Earlier Mistakes, 1995) called White House arguments “a new domino theory: if the fighting in Bosnia does not stop it will spill into Macedonia, Hungary, Greece and Turkey.” Few of the letters-to-the-editor analyzed in this study were supportive of an intervention in Bosnia. It must always be kept in mind, however, that letters-to-the-editor as a form of popular geopolitics are subject to the editorial process in the newsroom and that these particular letters were selected by certain editors to appear in these papers to represent the opinions of the public at this time. News editors wield the power to shape the geopolitical re-representation of public “views” and “commentary” as seen in their papers through their choice of certain letters that are sent in by members of the public.

**Re-presentations of the Domino Theory in the Regular News**

Over the course of the period examined in this study there were very few specific allusions to the domino theory in the content of so-called “hard” news articles contained in the *Lexus-Nexus* database. In fact, there were only approximately nine news reports discussing events in, or debates over, the conflict in the former Yugoslavia that invoked a reference to the domino theory during the entire three year span that could reasonable be interpreted as regular news. Although most of these articles directly attributed the domino metaphor to events in
Bosnia or the thinking of White House officials none provided a quote from a Clinton Administration official using the phrase. Interestingly, the media association did not originate in the news contributions in this study directed toward Clinton’s foreign policy cadre. Instead, The Associated Press’s international news writer George Gedda, articulated the connection in his discussion of President George H.W. Bush Administration Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger’s calls in August 1992 for collective international efforts to defuse the Bosnian to prevent a wider war. In an article titled “Envoy Warns of Domino Effect Unless Yugoslav Conflict Contained” Gedda wrote that, “The U.S. diplomat [Eagleburger] … outlin[ed] his Balkan domino theory” but then failed to cite the official using the metaphor (Gedda, 1992). The following month, however, the United Press International did capture the French economist and then President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Jacques Attali, relying on the domino theory to rationalize action in Bosnia. At a European Community Conference the European official heralded the need for a more robust response to deteriorating events in Southeastern Europe by saying, “Without action to stop wholesale disintegration, a new variant of the domino theory may soon be upon us, one in which the dominoes will not fall this time in the direction of communism, not even in the direction of nationalism, but rather in the direction of tribalism” (Basken, 1992). This was the only instance quoted in the entire three-year dataset utilized for this study in which a public official uttered the phrase “domino theory” to advocate intervention in the Balkans.

A few of the conventional journalists linked the circumstances in the Balkans to falling regional dominoes by mentioning the metaphor in overall discussions of Bosnia (as well as Haiti and Liberia) without quoting an advocate of action using the phrase. David Ottaway of The Washington Post (Ottaway, 1993) decided to rely on the term in a regular news piece on the conflict and the views of various Balkan “experts,” analysts, and U.S. officials when he wrote, “Still, after the refusal of the European Community and the United States to intervene militarily to preserve Bosnia, a kind of Balkans “domino theory” is developing that argues that the cost of this passivity is bound to be more Bosnias down the road.” The Hotline (Bosnia: House Margin to End Embargo is also Veto Proof, 1995) simply subtitled a section of its National Briefing reviewing various views of the wisdom of lifting the arms embargo in the Balkans with the heading “Domino Theory.” In another article largely dedicated to Liberia’s civil war, a Washington Post writer suggested that, “Observers described the situation as an African version
of the domino theory espoused more than a quarter-century ago by the United States’ Vietnam War policymakers: weak neighboring states succumbing to creeping disorder as the consequences of a nearby conflict” (Randal, 1995). “Adherents to the theory,” he went on to say, “also draw parallels with Yugoslavia and its former republics, complete with an ineffectual U.N. presence here reflecting unresolved big-power policy differences and frustrating distribution of humanitarian relief to civilians battered by repeated massacres.”

The few remaining conventional news contributions sometimes relied on a strategy that injected the domino theory into the content of the news through the judicious use of quotes from opponents of intervention. The Houston Chronicle, for example, juxtaposed a review of the political debate in the U.S. over Bosnia and various Clinton quotes with a statement from Republican Arizona Senator John McCain claiming that Clinton’s arguments “reminded” him of the Vietnam-era domino theory (Hines, 1993). Another paper, The Virginian-Pilot, outlined an intriguing debate among “three local experts and a visiting Sarajevan journalist [over] …the stubborn Bosnian war” in which an opponent of increased activism claimed that another member of the panel’s reasoning was similar to the Vietnam-era domino theory (Hampton Roads Roundtable; Bosnia: No Peace To Keep; Persistant Warfare In Region Puts U.N. Peacekeepers To Severe Test, 1995). In an interesting exchange over the supposed applicability of various metaphors and analogies to the Bosnian conflict the non-interventionist said, “Your comments reminded me somewhat of the domino theory. Let me bring up the Vietnam analogy here. …What’s to stop something like that from happening again were we to ratchet up our involvement in the former Yugoslavia.” In response, the other panelist retorted, “It’s not a domino that’s one leading to the next. That would be far too simplistic, and it certainly is not what I’m suggesting. What I’m suggesting is more of an infection. I don’t know if it’s the Ebola virus, but it’s certainly something akin to it” (Hampton Roads Roundtable; Bosnia: No Peace To Keep; Persistant Warfare In Region Puts U.N. Peacekeepers To Severe Test, 1995). These few examples show how conventional news can, intentionally or unintentionally, serve as a vehicle that (re)introduces metaphors and analogies to the overall geopolitical discourse regarding foreign policy issues. It also illustrates the discretion that members of the regular media possess in framing the representations of geopolitical issues n the news through the selective use of quotes from various individuals within the text of their articles that condition the popular geopolitics conveyed to their readership while maintaining a pretense of objectivity (Sharpe,
Such a finding in this study merely reinforces existing insights that have been seen in other studies of popular geopolitics (Dittmer, 2003; Dodds and Atkinson, 2000; Sharp, 1993). This case further reveals the manner in which metaphorical reasoning can infuse media representations of controversial geopolitical issues. The inclusion of the domino theory in these few news sources illustrates the role of conventional journalists in choosing to promote a questionable association between the domino metaphor, the Bosnian war, and advocates of intervention in the conflict.

**The Domino Theory and Proponents of Intervention in Bosnia**

Proponents of a U.S. intervention in the conflict in Bosnia largely avoided the use of the domino theory in their rhetoric used to rationalize their preferred Balkan policies in the articles available in the *Lexus-Nexus* database. In fact, this was only readily apparent in four reports that appeared during the several year-long crisis, none of which provided a quote from a U.S. official relying on the phrase despite the fact that the metaphor was commonly attributed to the White House. The only public official who was cited uttering the term in the available news sources came in the form of European Bank for Reconstruction and Development President, Jacques Attali’s, previously mentioned comments about the “new variant of the domino theory” threatened by the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia (Basken, 1992). Particularly interestingly, at least for the subject of this dissertation, was an article in which *New York Times* editorialist William Safire pointed out that the domino metaphor was being invoked as a rhetorical strategy by those who opposed U.S. military action in Southeast Europe. Safire claimed that “defeatists” sought to “justify nonintervention by deriding the domino theory” as an excuse to prevent the U.S. from involving itself in the region (Safire, 1993). Similarly, in an article with the headline “Isolationism Born Again In Debate of Balkans,” staff-writer Harry Levins, noted that mention of the domino theory appeared in the sentiments of “today’s isolationists” who opposed virtually any American involvement around the world based on their interpretation of historical mistakes in World War I, Vietnam, and Lebanon (Levins, 1993). Only Ruth Sinai of *The Associated Press* used the domino theory herself in an effort to affirmatively answer the question of “Why Should Americans Care About Getting Involved In Bosnia?” (Sinai, 1993). In the article, the journalist associated the White House with the metaphor through the juxtaposition of a Clinton quote about the potential spill-over effects to U.S. national interests from the war with a follow-up line claiming that, “According to this [Clinton’s] domino theory,
if the Serbs exercise their historic claim to Macedonia, then Bulgaria, Turkey and Greece might too. That would pit two pivotal U.S. NATO allies, Greece and Turkey, against each other and could pull apart the 16-nation alliance.” One very different example comes from a Washington Post editorial with the headline “An Anti-Interventionist no More; America’s credibility now at stake.” This piece advocated military intervention but criticized “the Clinton Administration [because it had foolishly] managed to create a serious national interest in Bosnia when none existed: an interest, that is, in the preservation of this country’s [America’s] prestige and credibility” based on “under-argued and dubious domino theories” (Harries, 1994). Relying on a colorful movie reference from the film My Darling Clementine to reinforce a point about what he referred to as the so-called “Clanton Doctrine” of prudent threat-making in international relations, the author then admonished the White House because: “Unfortunately, President Clinton [has] made it clear … that this [decisive military action in America’s interests] is not how he intends to act” because “a firm sense of American interests eludes him. He has still not grasped the Clanton Doctrine.” Despite the few cases portrayed here, most of those who advocated a more robust policy toward the crisis in the former Yugoslavia simply avoided the domino theory in their public rhetoric about the conflict.

The Domino Theory as a Geopolitical Discourse of Opposition

Although the historical use of the domino metaphor during the Vietnam-era or in Central American by U.S. officials in the past might lead us to believe that the reemergence of the phrase in the American media discussion of a the crisis in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s was as geopolitical discourse to promote a military intervention, this is not indicated by the data in this study. Actually, an overwhelming majority (63 percent or 40/64) of all articles containing the term to discuss instability in the Balkans during the period were critical of the concept of a U.S. military intervention in the Bosnian conflict while only 6 percent (or 4/64) could be interpreted as supportive. Figure 5.3 (see above) illustrates this finding by displaying the percentage of total articles examined for this study whose general tone or content was either positive/supportive, negative/critical, or neutral toward the interventionist policies in the Bosnian civil in between 1993 -1995. In 1995, the year with the highest number of articles on the topic using the phrase domino theory appearing in the Lexus-Nexus database, not a single article clearly expressed a positive view toward U.S. activism in the region. As previously noted, the
The overwhelming majority of columns were opinion-editorial pieces or letters that opposed the military intervention in the Balkans on various grounds. Most of the writers injected the domino theory into the text of their articles themselves but then attributed the use of the term to advocates of increased involvement and/or members of the Clinton White House, even though none of the latter were quoted using the phrase. Various writers utilized a number of strategies to challenge the wisdom of armed U.S. involvement in Southeastern Europe, many of which drew upon the historical analogies apparently evoked by the phrase domino theory. A majority of news contributions that mentioned the metaphor in their discussion of the Bosnian war (over 66 percent or 42/64) and an overwhelming number of negative media pieces made a pronounced connection between the metaphor and a variety of past U.S. mistakes in Vietnam (see Figure 5.5 below). The following section of this chapter will explore the predominant opposition strategies that appeared in these news accounts in order to illuminate how the domino theory was employed by opponents of intervention (and mostly Clinton critics) to (re)shape the popular image of the debate over the Bosnian crisis in the media by associating it with various mistakes from Vietnam. It must be kept in mind that a number of the critiques and representational strategies appeared within the same article and were so interrelated and mutually reinforcing that only a few of the most prominent emergent themes can be discussed within the scope of this dissertation. Some of the articles will be discussed more than once to because they relied on more than one of these representations within the text of the same article.

**Using the Domino Theory to Promote a Vietnam Analogy**

The most overarching theme in the articles discussing the Bosnian crisis using the domino theory in the news-based sources for this dissertation was the tendency of the journalists to argue that there were substantial commonalities between the historical mistakes that mired the U.S. in Vietnam and the policies of those who advocated increased American involvement in the Bosnian civil war. Such an attempt to use the domino metaphor as a device to link past errors in Southeast Asia to Bosnia appeared again and again in the content of the news contributions analyzed from the period. The Vietnam discourse permeated the entire dialogue appearing in these news pieces, appearing in 66 percent (or 42/64) of articles from the period. The writers often suggested that Vietnam was relevant to the context of the debate over greater involvement in Bosnia for various reasons and many issued warnings that the supposed lessons of Vietnam were not being heeded by interventionists in the Clinton White House. Figure 5.5 (see below)
shows this pattern by illustrating the frequency of the appearance of the word “Vietnam” in articles discussing events in Bosnia from 1993-1995 also invoking the phrase “domino theory.” The charted evidence reveals an overwhelming association between the invocation of the domino theory in news pieces of the study period and the topic of Vietnam in the same article. The majority of articles where the term Vietnam was detected also expressed a negative tone toward the idea of a direct U.S. intervention in the crisis. Such a policy was also typically attributed to the Clinton Administration, particularly after the White House began to increase its diplomatic and military involvement in the region over the course of 1995.

These findings mirror the existing scholarly literature on the role of the Vietnam discourse in the resistance to military actions found in a number of other studies (Barthe, 2007; Kaplan, 2007; Paris, 2002; Robinson, 2004). All of these scholars explore aspects of how the Vietnam analogy has operated in the context of various foreign policy crises facing U.S. leaders to justify arguments, not for military conflict, but instead for inaction. This dissertation fits into this literature by demonstrating how the domino theory was used in the news by opponents of American involvement in Bosnia as a discursive vehicle to link White House policies to supposed failures in Vietnam. Although most of the articles that injected Vietnam into the Bosnia debate represented the direct U.S. military involvement in a negative light, they displayed considerable variation in the specifics of how they viewed the domino theory and Vietnam as
relevant to their criticism of those advocating such policies. A previously mentioned editorial in the *Pittsburg Post-Gazette* titled “Bosnia is not merely another Somalia – But it could be another Vietnam,” for example, suggested that White House interventionists such as Clinton’s Communications Director George Stephanopoulos were relying on a “domino theory … not just implausible [but] it is irrelevant” that threatened to pull the country into “a long and costly ground involvement in the Balkans” (Krauthammer, Bosnia is not merely another Somalia - But it could be another Vietnam, 1993). After drawing comparisons between the Balkans and not only Vietnam, but also the disastrous insertion of U.S. forces into Beirut in the 1980s, the author warned: “A long and costly ground involvement in Southeast Asia nearly tore apart America. NATO is a far more fragile entity. It may turn out to be the ultimate casualty of the coming Bosnia war.” This article also appeared in a slightly edited format in the *Houston Chronicle* under the headline “Another Beirut or Vietnam in Bosnia?” (Krauthammer, Another Beirut or Vietnam in Bosnia?, 1993). Several commentators in 1993 chose to use Vietnam and Lebanon analogies to admonish those supporting greater U.S. action in the Balkans. Conservative columnist Cal Thomas relied on a series of quotes from John F. Kennedy, Ho Chi Minh, and others, mixed with his own analysis, to establish the historical analogy in the *Times-Picayune* by claiming that, “like Vietnam, the terrain in Bosnia-Herzegovina is inhospitable and it would not be easy for our planes to successfully bomb and neutralize Serbian artillery positions.” “This situation,” he went on to claim, “will not be easily resolved – and it could be made worse by American bombing. President Clinton should not bomb any targets. Ho Chi Minh would have advised against it” (Thomas, 1993).

**Opposition Sub-Representation One: Clinton’s Past as an Anti-War Protester During the Vietnam War**

The theme of Clinton’s past anti-Vietnam activism or alleged “draft-dodging” appeared repeatedly in articles opposing efforts to garner support for a U.S. troop deployment or air strikes in the former Yugoslavia. One interesting representation printed in the *USA Today* argued, “The situation [in Bosnia], with its unclear objectives, also invites parallels to the Vietnam conflict, which Clinton passionately argued against as a graduate student in England. It can be eerie to watch Clinton aides invoke the domino theory …their counterparts made about southeast Asia a generation ago” (Nagourney, 1993). Another scathing piece made this assertion overtly clear by saying: “Bill Clinton, who did everything but defect to Hanoi to avoid his duty to defend his
country 30 years ago, tried yesterday to make a case for sending young men to do their duty in Bosnia. …Besides, if Mr. Clinton truly “loathes” the military, as he has said he does, there’s no better way to show it than to send upwards of 25,000 of our “loathsome” sons to a wintery holiday in the mountainous wilds of Bosnia, where sniping at Americans, or planting mines under their feet, will be the season’s sport” (Pruden, 1995). A letter-to-the-editor printed in the *Palm Beach Post* echoed the same point writing, “In case any reader who thinks I am just a loony anti-war protester (as President Clinton once was), I served in Vietnam proudly and voluntarily. I am 80 percent disabled as a result of that service” before imploring other readers to, “Please, tell congress to “just say no!”” (Magee, 1995). Another scathing letter in *The State Journal Register* (Springfield Judge U.S. Bosnian role on its own merits, 1995) rhetorically asked, “domino theory, anyone?” before going on to assert:

I don’t mind having a president who didn’t go to Vietnam, but to have one who actively avoided the draft in order not to serve in a war between ethnic factions now decide to send other peoples’ sons and daughters into the same mess is ludicrous.

This view was also reflected in the regular so-called “hard” news as well. Craig Hines of *The Houston Chronicle* (1993), for example, wrote, “The conflict in Bosnia poses a severe test for President Clinton’s past, present, and future. The new Democratic chief executive’s current interventionist bent contrasts with his outspoken opposition to U.S. involvement in Vietnam 25 years ago …after once going to extraordinary lengths to avoid military service.” Even the Sunday Arts section of *The Washington Post* decided to print a colorful article claiming that “nobody knows what to do about Bosnia” that also referred to Clinton (and Newt Gingrich) as “an overweight, gray-haired, pot-smoking, draft-dodger” (Martin, 1995).

**Oppositional Sub-Representation Two: President Clinton’s Lack of Strategic and Military Competence**

Another image that appeared in the rhetoric used by opponents to an intervention in the Balkans who also brought up the domino theory and Vietnam in the print media was to claim that President Clinton (and other advocates on intervention in Bosnia) lacked competence, experience, or clear/rational thinking on strategic and military issues. One Vietnam Veteran’s commentary printed by *The Washington Times* (Smith, 1995) under the title “Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia – why?” claimed that, “The President’s reasons for placing American troops in harm’s way sound like the urgent pleas of a man who has made a decision in a vacuum and doesn’t
understand the consequences.” “Because of his lack of military experience,” asserted the contributor:

the president truly does not understand the consequences he is asking our troops to risk. Unfortunately, the larger tragedy is that he has failed to surround himself with advisers on the White House staff who have such experience. Further, there is a history of failing to heed the advice of senior military officers or support the requests of field commanders.

A later Op-Ed from the same paper titled “Clinton’s Vietnam” pushed the argument yet again writing, “Clinton is even more politically exposed than [President Johnson who] went into Vietnam with his mind muddled by the Domino Theory” and, unfortunately, the former’s “arguments make the domino theory seem closely reasoned by comparison” (Cohen, Clinton’s Vietnam, 1995). Later, an editorial was published in which the Presidents rationality and competence were again challenged, “What’s plain to me and you [but obviously not to Clinton’s White House] has to be plain to enemies of the Bosnian peace accords as well. If the peace is really predicated on the presence of U.S. troops and America is only in Bosnia to do good, then it would be rather simple to test American resolve by inflicting casualties.” A similar view was published a few weeks later when proponents of limited air strikes to break Serbian sieges in the former Yugoslavia were criticized for “wishful thinking in the extreme. Air power could not defend South Vietnam in the 1960s, and it certainly would not work in Bosnia in the 1990s. Large ground forces would be required to police that country” (Don’t Intervene in Bosnia, 1993).

Another tendency expressed by some Clinton opponents was to critique the White House for ignoring the expertise of military officials. These articles also exemplify the general belief in some news reports that Clinton, in particular, was incompetent on military matters or lacked the resolve or character to fight a tough war. This view often implied that specific decisions should be left to military experts rather than civilian leaders and harkened back to the diplomatic and/or military mismanagement of the Vietnam War by various presidential administrations (e.g., President Johnson’s supposed excessive control over America’s armed forces in Vietnam). The ineptitude or perceived over-politicization of past U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia was a theme that punctuated many articles between 1993 and 1995 discussing White House actions toward the Balkans. One article with the title “Better Listen to Colin Powell” admonished Clinton for his alleged failure to develop a clear strategy and policy in the Balkans “before sending young American’s in harm’s way.” In contrast to Powell’s “rigorous thinking” the
author claimed that Clinton’s policy decision to enforce the no-fly zone in Bosnia “might have the opposite effect.” “… a little more thought and a little less breast-beating,” the editorial went on to say, “could, in the long run, avert disaster in the Balkans” (Cohen, Better Listen to Colin Powell, 1993).

The repetition of this analogy between greater involvement in the Balkan crisis and Vietnam appear in varying forms throughout the discussion of the Bosnian intervention in these articles. The most prevalent themes in this subset, however, were articles that interpreted White House efforts as analogous to Vietnam-era blunders in interrelated ways, all of which were used to argue against the intervention. These included: the need for U.S. policymakers to be conscious of the various historical “lessons” of Vietnam argument; the caution against foreign entanglements/quagmires argument; and the national interest argument. These foreign policy views, sometimes associated with “isolationists” (or non-interventionist) by some and “Jacksonians” by others (Kissinger, 2001), have a long history in America’s foreign policy tradition, and became particularly prevalent among U.S. conservatives in the 1990s. They allegedly date back to President George Washington’s warning in his farewell address cautioning against permanent foreign alliances or President John Quincy Adams 1821 admonition that the country should not “go abroad, seeking monsters to destroy.” The trauma of failed U.S. interventions in Vietnam only reinforced the views of those who long argued against the country’s entanglement in foreign “quagmires” where there were no fundamental national “interests.”

In the book The Reluctant Superpower: United States’ Policy in Bosnia, 1991-1995 (1997) Wayne Bert pointed out how this understanding – sometimes labeled the (Colin) Powell Doctrine - permeated the Washington, DC foreign policy establishment during the early 1990s. The received wisdom among many Clinton opponents was that the historical experience from Vietnam had taught (those wise enough to heed the lessons in) America’s foreign policy elite that the country should only involve itself overseas when three criteria were fulfilled - the country’s national interests were at stake; when it could apply overwhelming force in order to guarantee the success of its aims; and when it had a clear “exit strategy” for eventually extricating American forces from the intervention. Bert pointed out how these related schools of thought about the causes of America’s entanglement in Vietnam operated “symbiotically” because [they] are typically used as arguments against military interventions. The findings of this
dissertation show a similar pattern but instead focus on how the resurrection of the domino theory in the context of the debate over Bosnia in the U.S. media served to link Clinton’s decisions to the negative images of Vietnam that many who promoted these schools of thought allegedly sought to avoid. Widely-held associations between the domino metaphor and Vietnam seemingly helped to discursively bridge the views because the domino theory is commonly seen as a reason for America’s disastrous entanglement in Southeast Asia. They commonly argued that the Clinton Administration was failing to heed the many so-called “lessons” of the Vietnam War by pushing the United States into a quagmire where the country had few strategic interests. The reminder of this chapter will explore how these Vietnam-related sub-representations were harnessed by those invoked the domino theory in the news by those opposed to a U.S. interventional in Bosnia between 1993 and 1995.

**Opposition Sub-Representation Three: The Lessons of Vietnam**

One news theme that reappeared repeatedly in articles invoking the domino metaphor over the course of the debate over Bosnia’s civil war, particularly in 1995, was the notion that the various “lessons” of Vietnam (as well as other conflicts) were not being respected by the Clinton White House and, as a result, that history was being “repeated.” *The Christian Science Monitor* (Johns, 1994) published an essay from President George H.W. Bush speechwriter Michael Johns who claimed that the failure of Clinton’s White House to accept the “lessons” and “doctrines” of Vietnam and President Bush’s success in Panama and Kuwait. These largely conformed to the so-called Powell Doctrine and included the needs to: apply unrestrained force once hostilities begin, to clearly define the purpose of military action to the American people and prepare them for U.S. casualties, to launch a diplomatic offensive to garner international support, and, of course, to prevail in the end. “For the Clinton Administration to enjoy popular support for military attacks against Serb aggressors,” wrote Johns, “the same lesson applies: American must prevail. If there is too much doubt about that, the first shot should not be fired.” “This year ends,” claimed another writer, “as American troops once again make for some foreign land, and history devilishly hints at repeating itself” (Cohen, Clinton’s Vietnam, 1995).

The frequency of the wisdom learned from Vietnam/repeating history narrative increased dramatically in 1995 after the publication of Robert McNamara’s book (1995). This may be because the former Secretary of Defense, who is commonly associated with the domino theory, personally injected the association into the debate over U.S. involvement in the Balkans by
writing the following in his chapter titled “The Lessons of Vietnam” that overviewed his “eleven major causes for our disaster in Vietnam” (McNamara, 1995):

Similarly [had the U.S. demonstrated a commitment of collective security], had the United Nations or NATO taken action when conflict erupted in former Yugoslavia erupted in the early 1990s, the ensuing slaughter of tens of thousands may have been prevented. But today I fear Bosnia falls in the category of problems for which there is no recognizable solution – or at least no military solution.

In the aftermath of the arrival of McNamara’s memoir a flurry of over a dozen articles appeared using the term “domino theory” that also referred to his book in their criticism of Clinton’s increasing interventionism in order to draw an analogy between Bosnia and Vietnam. One commentator (Had he only listened, McNamara's memoir would be far different, 1995) mentioned McNamara’s “first lesson of Vietnam,”

… that outside military force cannot bring peace or stability to a country incapable of sustaining it. Those are words to be accorded great weight in the modern world. America has had to relearn that harsh lesson many times over. …Today, Clinton is poised to send troops to the bloodiest and most hopeless killing field of them all, the former Yugoslavia. What can American troops possibly expect to accomplish there? Clinton should heed McNamara’s words so he isn’t doomed to repeat them in his own.

Other writers chose to quote McNamara in interviews related to his book where he made comments about whether or not similar Vietnam-era mistakes were being repeated in Bosnia. “Absolutely, not only can [the mistakes] be [repeated],” claimed one writer, “but are being repeated.” (Apple, 1995); (Ex-defense chief McNamara reverses stance of Vietnam, 1995). An Op-Ed in The Washington Post (Mcnamara: Better Late Than Never, 1995) echoed this view by cautioning, “Of course, McNamara’s book is about yesterday. …But the hawks of today ought to read it. …As for the Bosnia hawks, they ought to read this book too. Here, once again, is a treatise about unintended consequences – about what happens when you underestimated an enemy and the ideology that animates him.” “[McNamara] would like Americans to learn from the mistakes of his generation,” asserted a piece in the Plain Dealer (Cohen, Better Late Than Never, 1995), “…He sees Bosnia as a situation that could snare U.S. troops in the same way Vietnam did. …that he was wrong on Vietnam does not mean he can’t be right about Bosnia.”
By June, the McNamara’s lessons argument against involvement in the Balkans began to surface in a series of letters-to-the-editor as well. “America is only damned if she does,” asserted a contribution to The Denver Post titled “We can’t win in Bosnia, so let’s just stay out” before going on to write that arguments about the potential spread of instability in the Balkans were like “the Domino Theory revisited.” “Isn’t that one of Bob McNamara’s Top Ten Stupid Reasons to get American’s killed in Vietnam?,” asked the author (We can't win in Bosnia, so let's just stay out, 1995). Another letter said that “If people would read ex-Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s book ‘In Retrospect’ about the Vietnam War policy mistakes instead of blaming him, we might learn and apply his valuable hindsight to foresight in Bosnia. …There are many more lessons in his book for all of us today” (Sottong, 1995). The mention of the former American official in articles also referring to the domino theory continued right up until the end of 1995 to criticize Clinton’s escalation of U.S. involvement in the Balkans.

**Opposition Sub-Representation Four: The Vietnam-style Quagmire in Bosnia**

Some of the journalists who associated interventionists in the White House with the domino theory adopted a more specific lessons-based critique that accused Clinton of plunging the United States into a Vietnam-style “quagmire,” “morass,” or “quicksand” without an “exit strategy” for a successful outcome and/or timely withdrawal. It must be remembered that Clinton was partially responsible for re-introducing this imagery into the discussion of the topic because he used the same rhetoric to oppose the insertion of ground troops into the former-Yugoslavia during his presidential debate against President Bush in 1992. During the debate Clinton said, “I agree we cannot commit ground forces to become involved in the quagmire of Bosnia or in the tribal wars of Somalia,” before later going on to suggest that, “We can't get involved in the quagmire but we must do what we can.” This view was printed in a major paper relatively early in the political debate over Bosnia by the USA Today in spring 1993 where a columnist claimed that, “European allies fear getting sucked into a Balkan quagmire … The situation, with its unclear objectives, also invites parallels to the Vietnam conflict …” (Nagourney, 1993). Charles Krauthammer’s previously mentioned article in The Washington Post and other papers made a similar comparison without using one of these trigger phrases, “Then we have a simple choice. More men, more dead, until the job is done, as in – another analogy – Vietnam. Or withdrawal, as in Beirut (and, in the end, Vietnam too.)” (Krauthammer, Bosnian Analogies; Pick your history, pick your policy, 1993). “the new Democratic [Clinton] administration run[s] the risk of
repeating the mistakes of the Kennedy-Johnson years,” wrote Cal Thomas, “which lead to a
deepening commitment to South Vietnam and a quicksand war . . .” (Thomas, 1993). Other
writers pursued a similar line of reasoning throughout the debate by referring to Bosnia as, for
example, “the bloodiest and most hopeless killing field of them all” (Had he only listened,
McNamara’s memoir would be far different, 1995), a “snare [for] U.S. troops” (McNamara's
War, as he sees it, 1995), an “Old-World blood feud” (Frezza, 1995), and “a no-win situation, in
an area whose centuries-old biases we don’t understand” (Sottong, 1995).

**Opposition Sub-Representation Five: The Lack of Vital U.S. Strategic Interests in Bosnia**

By far the most common argument against direct U.S. military action in the Bosnian
catastrophe depicted in the articles mentioning the domino theory used for this study was the
view that the country should avoid a Vietnam-style escalation because there were no vital
strategic interests at stake in the conflict. This view appeared again and again in the rhetoric of
commentators opposed to American involvement, often alongside of comments about the
similarity to a lack of overwhelming interests in Vietnam decades before. Although most of the
articles promoting this argument have already been quoted in other sections of this chapter a few
examples will convey the general pattern. Adam Nagourney of the *USA Today* chose to quote
former Nixon and Eisenhower advisor Stephen Hess saying, ‘It’s going to be hard to convince
the American people that they have a vested interest in what goes on [in the former Yugoslavia]’
before going on to quote Clinton asserting that the country had ‘fundamental interests’ in the
area (Nagourney, 1993). “Mr. Clinton has not yet answered the most fundamental questions
[about Bosnia]” wrote an editorial in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, “What is the U.S. national
interest in the Balkans, and how would military intervention serve those interests? The reason for
this evasion, perhaps, is that the United States has no traditional geopolitical interests there” (Are
the Serbs Serious About Peace?, 1993). Similarly, Charles Krauthammer wrote that, “Bosnia
interventionists strain mightily to produce some American national interest, such as the specter
of dominoes falling across East Europe all the way to the Baltic states” (Krauthammer, Another
Beirut or Vietnam in Bosnia?, 1993). Johns Hopkins Professor Michael Mandelbaum
contribution to the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* (Mandelbaum, After 50 Years, Cold War Win
Regarded WWII Sacrifice, 1995) promoted this view by asserting:

> With the Cold War’s end, the domino theory is no longer persuasive. Proponents of
> American intervention in Bosnia argued that unless the United States became involved in
that conflict it would spread through the Balkans, perhaps to all of Europe, which would inevitably injure American interests; or that failure to defend a largely Muslim state in Europe would inflame the Islamic world. Both prepositions were versions of the domino theory; neither convinced the American public.

Another example appeared in *The Washington Times* (Smith, 1995) claiming that “American has absolutely no vital national interest in Bosnia while another writer for *Internetweek* asked, “What are the direct U.S. interests here [in the Balkans]?” (Frezza, 1995). The editorialist Richard Cohen remarked that “The situation [in Bosnia] is almost totally unconnected to our vital interests. Only morality … justifies this troop deployment. …Some of those arguments make the [Vietnam-era] Domino Theory seem closely reasoned by comparison” (Cohen, Clinton's Vietnam, 1995). Other contributors went even further, claiming that there were actually more interests in Vietnam than the Balkans. “At the very least,” wrote a letter to the *Palm Beach Post,* “there was more of a U.S. vital interest in Vietnam than there is in Bosnia” (Magee, 1995). These examples illustrate the way in which opponents of intervention in Bosnia (and President Clinton in general) invoked the domino theory in articles that (re)presented escalated involvement in the war as a possible repeat of various mistakes made by the United States during the Vietnam War.

**Conclusions**

This chapter has examined the manner in which the domino theory was harnessed as part of a larger geopolitical discourse by non-interventionists during the debate in the media over American policy toward Bosnia between 1993 and 1995. During that period, there was a reemergence of the metaphor in American print news sources appearing in the *Lexus-Nexus* U.S. News and Wires database. Although much of the reemergence of the term can be attributed to the publication of Robert McNamara’s book in 1995, the remainder of the increase largely focused on a discussion of the political controversy in the U.S. over a possible intervention in the civil war devastating the former-Yugoslavia. This study has surveyed the background to the crisis and then investigated many of the overall patterns that were prevalent in the content of these articles. The findings of this analysis reveal a strong tendency for opponents of direct U.S. involvement to be the ones who chose to introduce the metaphor into the debate over Bosnia in the popular geopolitics of the media. This appears to have reflected the assumptions of critics of American activism and/or was a strategy seeking to re-frame the public discussion by associating
(mostly) White House policy arguments toward the Balkans with the discredited domino theory from Vietnam. Most of the articles were opinion-editorial pieces claiming that interventionist rhetoric about the need for U.S. involvement to prevent a wider war in the region (or “spill over”) was analogous to the old domino theory. Some chose to explicitly accuse Clinton or members of his foreign policy team of relying on the term in their rhetoric, although there is no evidence for this claim provided in any of the articles despite the fact that it was sometimes presented as fact to readers of the news. The term was also used by conventional journalists who often relied on quotes from various official or “experts’ to insert the metaphor into their articles. Only a small number of those pushing for increased activism used the phrase to promote their preferred policies toward the Balkans.

In general, most of the reports that decided to invoke the metaphor to re-define President Clinton’s (or other interventionists’) rhetoric or decisions or the situation in Bosnia expressed a negative tone toward the concept of direct U.S. involvement in the Bosnian civil war. This form of oppositional geopolitics was presented to readers through the use of several representational strategies that challenged the White House view of the situation in the Balkans in various ways. The most common representational strategy was to use references to the domino theory to draw a historical analogy between potential action in the Balkans and past mistakes in Vietnam. A majority of the articles in this study somehow found a way to refer to Vietnam in the text of news reports otherwise dedicated to coverage of Bosnia. This suggested that the two situations were related in one way or another. A number of sub-themes related to this Vietnam representation appeared in the articles comparing Vietnam and Bosnia. Typically, these writers stated (or implied) that President Clinton, a man with little military experience who had avoided service in Vietnam was guilty of ignoring the lessons of American involvement in Southeast Asia and, like the Vietnam-era presidents he once criticized, entangling the country in another Vietnam-style “quagmire” were the country had few vital national interests.

The findings from this chapter show how popular geopolitics can be (re)produced by a small number of opposition journalists with the resulting discourse reverberating throughout other types of news and shaping the discussion of a foreign policy crisis. In this case, however, the oppositional strategy failed to alter the course of American foreign policy in the long run and President Clinton ultimately decided to attack the Serbs using air power and deployed U.S. ground troops to the country. This chapter has established that the injection of the domino
metaphor into the U.S. debate over Bosnia does not appear to have been done by White House officials. Nor does it appear that the term domino theory was commonly used in the print media to rationalize American military involvement. Rather, it reflected the assumptions or political views of certain journalists who then used it in their news reports on the controversy. The study has also illustrated that - at least in the case of the political debate in the U.S. over Bosnia between 1993 and 1995 - there has been a dramatic transformation in how the term domino theory is used as a form of geopolitical discourse. Unlike in Vietnam, where the metaphor was used to rationalize and justify an American military intervention, the term is often invoked to oppose interventionist policies. The following chapter will investigate if this pattern was also evident in the news coverage of the heated political debate in 1999 over President Clinton’s decision to launch military airstrikes against Serbia over the country’s mistreatment of its Albanian population in Kosovo.
CHAPTER SIX

THE DOMINO THEORY AND THE KOSOVO DEBATE

Chapter Introduction

This chapter explores the case surrounding the second major surge in the appearance of the domino theory in U.S. newspapers and wires in the post-Cold War era – 1999. The material evidence for the reappearance of the geopolitical catchphrase in America’s news media utilized for this research comes from a search of the *Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe* database for transcripts from U.S. newspapers and wires utilizing the term “domino theory” in the title or body of the article. The resulting findings illustrate that during the three-year period preceding 1999, the metaphor was seldom used in the U.S. popular news media in its coverage of issues in foreign affairs. In fact, the data indicates that domino theory was not typically invoked in any way except in reference to a wide array of issues in American local politics or popular culture such as sports references, pizza restaurant chains, and fashion. In the spring of 1999, however, there was a sudden and brief eruption in the use of the term in U.S. papers and it was utilized over 170 times throughout the course of the year. During that year there was an 89 percent increase in the number of occasions in which the term “domino theory” appeared in *Lexus-Nexus* news sources over the previous year, a 113 percent expansion over 1997, and a 121 percent escalation over all of 1996. Figure 6.1 (see below) illustrates this pattern by showing that 1999 was one of the three periods since 1985 in which there was a dramatic increase in the use of the domino metaphor in the U.S. news media.

A careful qualitative examination of this reappearance indicates that the brief and intense spike in the usage of the phrase was overwhelmingly concentrated in early 1999 and focused almost entirely on the heated political debate in the popular media over one particular foreign-policy crisis confronted by U.S. policy makers – the conflict and humanitarian crisis in Kosovo. Although the situation between Slobodan Milosevic’s Yugoslav government and Albanian Kosovar nationalists and civilians had been deteriorating for several years, it was only in early 1999 that the domino theory was commonly associated with events in Kosovo in U.S. news reports. In fact, between 1996 and 1999, the domino metaphor only appeared a total of three times in newspaper articles discussing Kosovo. In early 1999 alone, the two terms (Kosovo and
domino theory) appeared together in 103 separate articles. This surge represents more than a 3,300 fold increase over the combined total of the previous three years and accounts for virtually the entire increase in the appearance of the phrase “domino theory” in that year’s news reports. In fact, the crisis in Kosovo was the primary topic in over 57 percent of all articles in which the term domino theory appeared in 1999.

\[ \text{Figure 6.1: Total articles containing term “domino theory” and references to “Kosovo” therein} \]

This chapter explores how the reemergence of the domino theory in 1999 was related to the domestic political debate in the U.S. over how America should respond to events in Kosovo. It demonstrates the manner in which the metaphor was used as a geopolitical discourse in the news to influence the course of this debate and possibly affect policy by shaping the perception of Americans toward the crisis. Although the past usage of the phrase domino theory by American politicians and journalists in Vietnam and Central America has shown how it has been manipulated to rationalize and justify military interventionism in the past and might lead us to expect that this also occurred in the debate over Kosovo in 1999, this chapter will show qualitative and quantitative evidence that this was not the case. Although the opposition commonly claimed they were relying on the domino theory as the basis of their policies toward the region, the Clinton Administration and its supporters largely avoided utilizing the term and instead relied on other rhetorical devices to define the situation and promote their views in popular geopolitics of the media. During the Kosovo debate, it was primarily news commentators opposed to Clinton who chose to invoke the phrase domino theory for their own
political purposes in opinion-editorial pieces aimed at critiquing and delegitimizing the president’s military intervention in the region. This chapter illustrates the way in which the so-called domino theory was harnessed to shape the discussion of the crisis in America’s popular print media through a number of discursive strategies, most notably by directly associating Clinton’s policies with the discredited military adventures and rationalizations of past presidential administrations in Vietnam.

Background to the Kosovo Crisis

The political controversy in the media in the spring of 1999 over American policy toward Kosovo was a manifestation of an intense debate about the Clinton Administration’s decision to initiate a campaign of air strikes to punish the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FYR). This action was a response to Serb brutality toward the ethnic Albanian population living in the country’s Kosovo region. The military campaign (labeled Operation Allied Force) was launched after the Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic proved unwilling to sign a peace agreement at Rambouillet, France in March 1999, making a peaceful settlement to the escalating violence and humanitarian crises unlikely. This action by the Clinton Administration and its NATO allies was the culmination of a deteriorating relationship with Milosevic’s government that dated back several years to not only his government’s recent actions, but also because of his behavior during the previous conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina until 1995. It was believed that he would prove no more cooperative in his attitudes about relaxing his grip on Kosovo than he had in the mid-1990s. Such a view was reinforced by the knowledge that the Serb leader had originally risen to prominence in the 1980’s by manipulating Serb discontent toward Kosovar Albanians and stripping the region of the provincial autonomy it had been granted by Yugoslav President Tito in 1974 (U.S. Department of State, 2010). High-level members of the U.S. government, including Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, were convinced that Milosevic was a “genuinely evil” thug who “only understands force” and “didn’t see the light in Bosnia until the NATO bombing” (Albright, 1999). In the months leading up to the decision to attack Yugoslavia, Albright was instrumental in articulating a hard-line in negotiations toward the Serbs and advocating the use of force to push Milosevic into capitulation (A Kosovo Chronology, 1999; Crampton, 2002).
The tensions on the ground in Kosovo had started to intensify and spiral into bloodshed several years before when Serb authorities began to violently repress Albanian nationalists and dissidents who had initiated a series of protests throughout the region (Crampton, 2002, pp. 272-273). The following year, a new organization of armed Albanian separatists linked to organized crime – the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) – appeared and began a campaign of sporadic attacks against the Serb authorities. The earliest major incident occurred in February 1998 when the KLA launched a raid in which 4 Serbian policemen were killed. Reprisals by Serb security forces against alleged KLA members in March resulted in the death of 24 Albanians and the subsequent massacre of over 50 members of the Albanian Jashari clan, including women, the elderly and children. The brutality caused Albanian support for the KLA to soar, increasing its membership and enabling the fledgling organization to seize an estimated 40 percent of Kosovo (Crampton, 2002, pp. 272-273). The violence resulted in increasing demonstrations in the province and focused outside attention on the deteriorating situation. For her part, Albright issued a warning to Milosevic: “We are not going to stand by and watch the Serbian authorities do in Kosovo what they can no longer get away with doing in Bosnia” (A Kosovo Chronology, 1999). A “Contact Group” composed of the U.S., France, Germany, Italy, Russia and Britain, specifically formed to deal with the crisis, announced that it would impose sanctions on Yugoslavia unless the government withdrew its security forces and opened a dialogue over the future political status of Kosovo. The United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1160 (UNSCR 1160) condemning Yugoslavia’s excessive use of force and imposed economic and military sanctions against the country (A Kosovo Chronology, 1999; Crampton, 2002).

Milosevic refused to relent and instead put the Kosovo issue to a national (i.e., Serb) referendum in which 95 percent of Serbs rejected foreign involvement in what was viewed as a domestic security issue (A Kosovo Chronology, 1999). The Yugoslav government then sealed Kosovo’s borders with neighboring countries and then launched a major military offensive intended to annihilate the KLA and its supporters. The escalating Serbian attacks throughout the summer involved the burning of Albanian villages and attacks against civilians. This action drove several hundred thousand Albanians from their homes and into the hills of Kosovo (U.S. Department of State, 1999). In June, NATO, urged by U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen, responded with an aerial “show of force” including 85 aircraft flying over nearby Albania and
Macedonia intended to intimidate Milosevic (A Kosovo Chronology, 1999). Despite the NATO warning, the Yugoslav authorities intensified their Kosovo assault until September when the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1199 (UNSCR 1199) demanding an immediate ceasefire, negotiations, and the withdrawal of “security units used for civilian repression” (Crampton, 2002, p. 273). The threat implied by the resolution to force compliance was made more explicit to the Serbs by the decision of the NATO commanders to issue an “activation warning” to prepare for possible airstrikes of Yugoslavia. Milosevic remained defiant and Serb security forces continued to kill Kosovar Albanian villagers until October when UN Secretary General Kofi Annan issued a report about FRY’s violations of UNSCR 1199 and NATO approved an “activation order” to plan for an air bombardment of Yugoslavia. In the late fall 1998, veteran U.S. diplomat Richard Holbrooke followed by NATO Supreme Commander General Wesley Clark made a series of last ditch efforts to convince Milosevic to comply with the resolution or face an imminent NATO assault (Clark, 1999; Holbrooke, 1999). The Yugoslav leader finally agreed to reduce Serb security forces to pre-1998 levels and allow 2,000 international monitors into Kosovo. By early winter, the conflict appeared to subside as thousands of Serb forces withdrew and large numbers of Kosovar Albanians begin to return to their former homes from the mountains (A Kosovo Chronology, 1999; Crampton, 2002).

While the so-called “October Agreement” with Milosevic was widely viewed as a diplomatic victory for the international community it was revealed to be hollow within days. The following month Serbia issued an ominous warning to neighboring Macedonia about the possibility of allowing NATO military forces to be stationed in the country (A Kosovo Chronology, 1999). By late December, the KLA and Serb security forces were engaged in open warfare and Albanians villages were once again under assault by Yugoslav forces. The following January Albright began to advocate a U.S. and NATO ultimatum to Milosevic. “The Serbs cheated on everything in the [October] agreement, and the Kosovars [were] radicalized,” she said in a PBS interview (1999), “It was clear to me that we’d have to take stronger action ….” The situation exploded that same week when 45 Albanians were found massacred in the Kosovar Albanian village of Racak in an apparent reprisal for a KLA attack on Serb police. The Serbs initially reported that the incident was the result of a clash between their security forces and a column of KLA but it was clear that many of the villagers were actually murdered because most had died of gunshot wounds to the back of the head or neck (Crampton, 2002, p. 273). The leader
of the Kosovo Verification Mission, Ambassador William Walker, visited the site the following day and interviewed the local villagers who all reported the same account of the incident (A Kosovo Chronology, 1999). Apparently, the village had been surrounded by the army and Serb special police moved in and rounded-up the remaining locals. The women and children were placed in a mosque and the men and boys were marched off to a nearby ravine and executed. Walker returned to Pristina and held a press conference in which he openly condemned Serbia for the attack. This media attention helped to galvanize international pressure against the country. Milosevic defiantly responded by refusing to allow war crimes prosecutors to visit the site and claiming that the massacre had been staged by the KLA (A Kosovo Chronology, 1999).

Back in Washington, Albright’s push for an ultimatum to Yugoslavia carried the day among high-level members of the Clinton Administration (A Kosovo Chronology, 1999). Wesley Clark returned to Southeastern Europe for a seven-hour long meeting with Milosevic to defuse the situation ended, not only in failure, but with the Serb leader denouncing Clark as a “war criminal” (Clark, 1999). By the end of January 1999, the Contact Group representatives demand that both sides assemble for peace talks in Rambouillet, France in early February. Milosevic refused to attend the negotiations and, in the diplomatic meetings that ensued, his delegation rejected two of the major demands that were deemed unacceptable to Serb nationalists. The disputed conditions revolved around the idea of a local referendum in three-years over the future status of Kosovo and the requirement that NATO forces have “free and unrestricted” access to Yugoslav territory (Crampton, 2002, p. 273). On February 13th President Clinton convened a meeting with members of congress to discuss the crisis and the possibility of heavy U.S. involvement in any impending NATO action. That same night Clinton dedicated his weekly radio address to articulating his views on the military and humanitarian crisis to the American people and the announcement of his intention to send U.S. peacekeepers into Kosovo after a negotiated settlement to the conflict (Clinton, 1999). By the end of February Albright was sent to France in hopes of rescuing the foundering negotiations while Holbrooke met with Milosevic pursuing the same goal (Holbrooke, 1999). At the end of the month the peace talks in France paused with apparent failure as the Serbs and Albanians refused to sign the agreement.

When the talks resumed in mid-March the Albanians (including the KLA) finally agreed to the international diplomatic plan for Kosovo but the Yugoslav delegation remained defiant. During the pause in negotiations, the Serbs had actually reinforced their military forces in
Kosovo and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reported that a large Serb offensive into the region was imminent. Only days later the Yugoslav military initiated a “winter live fire” exercise in Kosovo in a flagrant demonstration of force (A Kosovo Chronology, 1999). The peace conference collapsed and the Serbs launched a large scale military offensive on March 20th against the KLA pushing along fronts in northern and northeastern Kosovo as well as along Montenegro’s eastern frontier. NATO members seemed to have associated this assault with a Serb covert plan that they had uncovered labeled “Operation Horseshoe” allegedly intended to ethnically cleanse Kosovo of ethnic Albanians. Later evidence, however, showed that this did not seem to be a military plan, but instead, was a long-term scheme to maintain Serb control of culturally and economically significant zones in Kosovo by seizing control of a u-shaped piece of territory in the province (Crampton, 2002, pp. 270-276). Nevertheless, by this point the attitudes of many international leaders toward to crisis were hardened against Serbia and an ultimatum was finally delivered to Milosevic by U.S. diplomat Richard Holbrooke (Holbrooke, 1999). After this last minute effort to avoid a NATO air bombardment of Yugoslavia failed to force Milosevic’s capitulation, the decision was adopted by NATO and the Clinton Administration to deal with the situation through the use of military force. Two days later the NATO air campaign – Operation Allied Force – began to strike Serb targets throughout Yugoslavia. The assault continued for almost three months until mid-June when Milosevic finally agreed to the terms of a peace plan that required the Serb authorities to withdraw their forces from Kosovo.

The Geopolitics of the Clinton Administration Regarding the Kosovo Crisis

The wisdom of Clinton’s decision to rely on the use of force to deal with the Milosevic government was not universally accepted in the United States and his policies were heavily criticized by his political opponents in congress as well as the media. In order to frame the issue in the arena of public opinion, on March 24th the President made a televised address to the American people announcing the initiation of the NATO airstrikes on the Serbs in order to persuade them about the logic and righteousness of his decisions. During the speech, Clinton made a persuasive use of powerful historical metaphors, analogies, and “trigger words” that compared events in Kosovo to many of the most traumatic events of the 20th century. Roland Paris (2002, pp. 433-438) has shown how this discourse made his perspective on the necessity of
his actions during the crisis understandable to Americans in light of well-known experiences from the past – Munich, World War I, and the Holocaust. The President’s speech suggested that Milosevic was an uncompromising bully responsible for past atrocities who had repeatedly broken his recent promises and was bent on war again in Kosovo. This seemed to allude to the well established belief by some policy-makers, often linked to Hitler and Munich (1937), that dictators must be confronted in order to deter them from further aggression and genocide (Jervis and Snyder, 1991). Explaining his views on the necessity of forceful action against the Serbs, Clinton said: “If we and our allies were to allow this war to continue with no response President Milosevic would read our hesitation as a license to kill. …our firmness is the only hope the people of Kosovo have.” The president asserted that the world must stand-up to the Serb leader by doing “what we said we would do …to deter an even bloodier offensive against innocent civilians” (Clinton, 1999).

In order to further justify the morality of NATO’s use of force, the President also specifically referred to the Holocaust in order to highlight supposed similarities between the treatment of civilians in Kosovo and the genocides of World War II and Bosnia in the 1990s. After pointing out that “the Holocaust engulfed this region” in the 1940s, the president encouraged his listeners to draw similar comparisons explaining, “We learned some of the same lessons in Bosnia just a few years ago. The world did not act early enough to stop that war either.” “And let’s not forget what happened” he went on to point out,

innocent people herded into concentration camps, children gunned down by snipers on their way to school, soccer fields and parks turned into cemeteries, a quarter of a million people killed …this was genocide in the heart of Europe, not in 1945 but in 1995; not in some grainy newsreel from our parents’ and grandparents’ time but in our own time, testing our humanity and resolve. (Clinton, 1999)

Of course, the fact that the geopolitics embedded in the president’s rhetoric seemed to echo months of news footage on American television screens depicting burning of Kosovar Albanian villages, massive flows of refugees, and periodic massacres only reinforced the widespread acceptance of these alleged similarities between the past and the present promoted by the White House. Some commentators at the time argued that it was primarily television images that drove the U.S. emotional and political reaction. Max Frankel of *The New York Times* (Frankel, 1999), for example, wrote:
Those scenes of huddled masses burned out of their homes and driven into exile aroused our sympathy and overrode all obligations to respect Serbia’s sovereignty. Once the cameras went into action, and the President promised only surgical, aerial combat, no U.N. treaties or Russian entreaties could keep us out. …Cameras also drove our choice of military tactics. President Clinton ruled out ground combat in Kosovo because he had seen how the sight of bloody battle scenes on TV forced our retreat from Vietnam. …Images seize our hearts.

Clinton also articulated his view that the instability in Kosovo represented a potential threat, not only to Southeastern Europe, but to the security of the entirety of Europe and even the United States. He tried to reinforce this point by making repeated associations between the contemporary situation and historical conflicts that had erupted and spread across Europe over the previous century to illustrate how lessons from the past were applicable to the present. “We act to prevent a wider war,” he claimed, “to diffuse a powderkeg at the heart of Europe that has exploded twice before in this century with catastrophic results” (Clinton, 1999). “Take a look at this map,” he said in the speech while pointing at a map,

Kosovo is a small place, but it sits on a major fault line between Europe, Asia and the Middle East, at the meeting place of Islam and both the Western and Orthodox branches of Christianity. …All of the ingredients for a major war are there: ancient grievances, struggling democracies, and in the center of it all a dictator in Serbia who has done nothing since the cold war has ended but start new wars and pour gasoline on the flames of ethnic and religious division.

“Sarajevo,” he went on to say, is where World War I began. World War II and the Holocaust engulfed this region. In both wars, Europe was slow to recognize the dangers, and the United States waited even longer to enter the conflicts. Just imagine if leaders back then had acted wisely and early enough, how many lives could have been saved, how many Americans would not have to die. (Clinton, 1999)

Later in the speech Clinton pushed this argument once again: “We must remember that this is a conflict with no natural boundaries. …Let a fire burn here in this area, and the flames will spread. Eventually, key U.S. allies could be drawn into a wider conflict, a war we would be forced to confront later, only at far greater risk and greater cost.”
According to political scientist Roland Paris (2002, p. 436), Clinton’s references to Munich, the Holocaust, and the role of the Balkans in World War I in his televised speech at the beginning of the air war on March 24th were merely the reiteration of similar historical themes that members of his administration had relied upon for several months to refer to the deteriorating situation. “In this speech,” Paris wrote,

which was apparently meant to rally public support behind the NATO bombing campaign, Clinton assembled all of the historical metaphors that he had used to describe Kosovo over the previous months and combined them into a single, concentrated barrage of emotionally charged images from the distant and recent past (p. 437).

Although it is not clear if the President actually believed his rhetoric about the crisis, it is known that he had repeatedly argued over the previous months that the situation in Kosovo could explode and that America had a responsibility to defuse the “powderkeg” or “tinderbox” in the Balkans. During a radio address on February 13th, for example, we know that Clinton explained how various “lessons” from the past made the NATO reaction to the situation understandable. “World War II,” he asserted, “taught us that America could never be secure if Europe’s future was in doubt” while “Bosnia taught us a lesson … [that] In this volatile region, violence we fail to oppose leads to even greater violence we will have to oppose later at greater cost. We must heed that lesson in Kosovo” (Clinton, 1999). The President stated that it was in America’s interests to intervene right away because: “There is a serious risk the hostilities would spread to the neighboring new democracies of Albania and Macedonia, and reignite the conflict in Bosnia we worked so hard to stop. It could even involve our NATO allies Greece and Turkey.” Virtually all of the same themes appeared in a Clinton speech titled “A Just and Necessary War” that was published as an essay in the New York Times on March 1st. Only days before the air bombardment of Serb forces began later that month Clinton made several of his geopolitical analogies even more explicit in a speech where, referring to Kosovo, he claimed: “What if someone had listened to Winston Churchill and stood up to Hitler earlier? How many peoples’ lives might have been saved, and how many American lives might have been saved? What if someone had been working on the powderkeg that exploded World War I?” To make the associations even clearer to his audience he went on to say:

When President Milosevic started the war in Bosnia seven years ago, the world did not act quickly enough to stop him. Let’s not forget what happened. Innocent people were
herded into concentration camps … A quarter of a million people in a country with only six million were killed. …not because of anything they had done, but because of who they were, and because of the thirst of Mr. Milosevic and his allies to dominate, indeed, to crush people … Now, this was genocide in the heart of Europe. It did not happen in 1945. It was going on in 1995. (Clinton, 1999; Paris, 2002, p. 436)

Throughout the air war, members of the Clinton Administration continued to illustrate alleged similarities between the past and present in order to shape the popular geopolitics in the U.S. toward the crisis. He restated these themes again and again over the next few months with trigger words in a series of public speeches and events. On April 12th at a forum called “The Perils of Indifference: Lessons Learned From a Violent Century” attended by Elie Wiesel - a man who had lived through the horrors of the Holocaust first hand - the president and his wife made repeated comments about Kosovars ‘crowded’ or ‘loaded onto trains’ thereby evoking images that related Serb activities in Kosovo to Nazi atrocities. ‘How,’ asked Hillary Clinton, ‘could all this be happening once again at the end of this century’ (Clinton, 1999; Paris, 2002).

Although Wiesel, in a later speech discussing his own experiences during the Holocaust, denied crude comparisons to Kosovo, President Clinton still proceeded to highlight what he claimed were common features among the two situations. ‘When we see [events in Kosovo],’ asserted the President, ‘… it is only natural that we would think of events which Elie has chronicled tonight in his own life’ (Clinton, 1999; Paris, 2002).

In the context of the sometimes passionate and ongoing debate in the US over the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, Clinton’s powerful geopolitical imagery comparing the past to the crisis in Kosovo seemed intended to condition the popular attitude of the American people and defend his policies. “Clinton was in effect,” asserts Paris (2002), “offering Americans a conceptual model for interpreting the complex circumstances of the Kosovo crisis. It invited his listeners to draw upon widely shared understandings off key historical events and to view the Kosovo conflict in light of these historical events” (p. 436). It is difficult to tell if this was merely a form of rhetoric to justify his policies or if the metaphorical and analogical reasoning had infiltrated his thinking. Some scholars, such as Aidan Hehir (2006), argue that members of the Clinton Administration did, in fact, rely heavily on this form of analogical reasoning in the formulation of their reaction to the situation. This “lens,” wrote Hehir, “… steered the negotiations down a necessarily confrontation channel, which made it impossible to achieve an agreement” with the
Either way, repeated studies in political communications have demonstrated the significance of metaphors in geopolitical rhetoric and decision making as far more than elegant jargon. Instead, such reasoning operates as a form of intellectual economics that enable people to understand and react to unfamiliar situations by comparing them to allegedly known events. According to the political scientist Keith Shimko (2004), “When people confront objects or situations which they have not faced before, they search their memories for a script or schema that most closely resembles the new object or event in key respects, and they use this schema or script as a basis for understanding” (p. 665). Such framing enabled U.S. diplomats during the Cold War to develop policies toward the Soviet Union that were actually based on its perceived similarities to Nazi Germany provide an example of such thinking. Paris (2002) points out the policy relevance of this tendency: “policy-makers use historical metaphors as tools of political persuasion in the public rhetoric by drawing parallels between contemporary phenomenon and past events … [and] Because historical references frequently evoke the perceived lessons of the past experience, political actors can use historical metaphors to legitimize certain policy options and delegitimize others” (p. 428-429).

As the political controversy between the White House and its political adversaries over the air war against the Serbs raged throughout spring 1999, Clinton continued to reiterate the same themes in his discourse about America’s role in the Balkans, apparently hoping that the imagery would resonate with the public. Nevertheless, the President’s geopolitical representations about the importance of Kosovo failed to convince his many critics in congress, the media, and the general public about the wisdom of his decision. In fact, The Hotline (Kosovo: Senate Supports NATO Air Strikes, 1999) reported that the “badly divided” U.S. Senate only narrowly approved a resolution in March “to support NATO air strikes against Serbian military targets” by a largely party-line vote while members of the Republican controlled U.S. House rejected a similar public statement of support (A Kosovo Chronology, 1999). Many of Clinton’s political opponents rejected his historical interpretation of the conflict in Kosovo and instead invoked their own set of historical metaphors and analogies to transform the discussion of the crisis in the halls of U.S. Congress and the media (Paris, 2002). The remainder of this chapter will explore how the resurrection of the domino theory in the popular geopolitics of the U.S. news media in 1999 worked as a discourse that re-shaped the debate about the White
House’s intervention in Kosovo by associating it with flawed metaphorical reasoning or policy mistakes from America’s past.

**The Re-presentation of Clinton’s Case for Intervention as the Domino Theory**

An analysis of the reappearance of the domino theory in 1999 shows a pronounced association between the use of the phrase and the discussion in American news reports of the Clinton Administration’s decision to resort to military force against the Serbs in Kosovo. Initially, it appears that the President may have invoked the domino theory in his rhetoric defining the contexts of the situation because virtually all of the articles (over 90 percent) associate the resurrection of the phrase to him or his close advisors. In fact, many media commentators directly attributed the use of the term to various members of his administration, including President Clinton himself or Madeleine Albright. Despite this association, a closer qualitative examination of the specific content of the articles reveals a pattern in which none of the journalists decided, or were actually able, to quote Clinton or any other individuals on his foreign policy team using the metaphor. There is no evidence available in the news reports examined is this study that he ever uttered the term in any of his discussions regarding Kosovo yet the notion is echoed again and again in the media representations during the crisis. Figure 6.2 (see below) illustrates this finding by depicting the percentage of accounts in *Lexus-Nexus* newspapers and wires that somehow associated Clinton with the domino theory (93/103) in 1999 and the number that actually quoted any White House official invoking the phrase (0/103). The quantitative and qualitative evidence from these sources indicate that the introduction of the domino theory to the debate over U.S. policy in the Balkans does not appear to have been done by Clinton himself. Instead, the phrase was one way in which the President’s political opponents chose to reinterpret his comments and frame the discussion about events on the ground in Kosovo and the President’s policy decisions negatively by claiming it was based on, or similar to, the discredited domino theory.

In fact, many journalists specifically accused the White House of relying on the domino theory to justify the use of force against Yugoslavia. A review of some of the headlines and content from reports that appeared in the media at the beginning of the NATO bombing campaign illustrate this point. For example, “Like a proverbial phoenix from the ashes, “The Domino Theory” has once again taken flight,” proclaimed the opening sentence of a contribution
on *The Copley News Service* (1999) while *The Seattle-Post Intelligencer’s* headline two days later was “Clinton Dusts Off ‘Domino Theory’ to Justify Bombings” (1999). “The administration bases its intervention in part,” wrote *The USA Today’s* Barbara Slavin (1999), “on a “domino theory” of spreading instability, but many experts believe this argument is overdone.” “Secretary of State Madeleine Albright,” claimed *The Investor’s Business Daily* (The Lessons of Vietnam, 1999), “trotted out the old domino theory to justify actions in the Balkans.” R Emmett Tyrrell Junior even rhetorically asked in a *Washington Times* piece (Turning to polls for guidance, 1999), “Is it out of ignorance or contempt for the citizenry that the Clinton Administration resorts to the words ‘domino theory?’.” These articles depict how a number of these news pieces presented the President’s use of the words “domino theory” as a matter of fact but then failed to establish any evidence of the truthfulness of this claim within the text of their reports.

*Figure 6.2:* Percentage of articles associating Kosovo crisis with the domino theory, either via direct quote from White House official (in red), without a direct quote (in blue), or other (in green)

**The Media’s Association of the Domino Theory with the Clinton Administration**

Most of the critics did not blatantly accuse the Clinton Administration of explicitly uttering the phrase “domino theory” but rather chose an approach in which they pointed out what they claimed were similarities between the current rhetoric and rationalizations of Clinton about Kosovo and those of past presidents during the Cold War. The majority of the reports drew a strong connection between the Administration’s claims that the instability in Southeastern Europe could explode like a “powderkeg” or “tinderbox” with the resulting conflagration destabilizing the entire region and the use of the discredited domino theory to justify past interventions in Vietnam and Central America. They then articulated their own view that the use
of the two metaphors (powderkeg and the domino theory) were analogous and, by doing so, tried to reframe U.S. geopolitical discussions about the ‘realities’ in Kosovo and America’s actions in the area to promote their own policy views. This conflation of metaphors by critics in the media paralleled similar efforts to redefine the crisis by members of Congress such as Mark Sanford (R-SC). Roland Paris’s study (2002) of the Kosovo debate has already established the tendency of the Clinton Administration’s opponents in the U.S. Congress to “replace one metaphor (the Balkans powderkeg) with another (falling dominoes)” in order to reinterpret the President’s “arguments as new versions of the Vietnam-era domino theory” (p. 440). This dissertation illuminates how such a strategy was pursued in the popular geopolitics of the media as well as the debates of U.S. Congress. “I do not find myself being persuaded that this is a national security interest of the United States,” said Senator Bob Kerrey to an *Omaha World Herald* reporter, “The domino theory that the president has put forward is not persuasive to me” (Clinton's Kosovo Intentions Merit Congressional Concern, 1999). Former Virginia Governor L. Douglas Wilder personally wrote an article for the *Richmond Times Dispatch* (1999) suggesting that “the domino theory first applied to Southeast Asia” may now be “Madeleine Albright’s bête noire.” Congressmen Mark Sanford pursued both the congressional and public relations tracks simultaneously to link the supposed association between Clinton and the domino metaphor in Southeast Asia. On the floor of congress, he claimed:

> The domino theory has long been disproven. Clark Clifford was sent by President Johnson down to Vietnam for the very same reason that is being described as one of the reasons we need to go into Kosovo, and, that was, if we do not do something, this could escalate, this could really grow. That was disproven there. (1999; Paris, 2002)

In a later contribution to *The Post and Courier* (Sanford, 1999) the congressman continued to trace the perceived link by writing: “Originally, we were told it was necessary to be involved in Kosovo because the conflict could spread. The domino theory is the same argument Clark Clifford used with our SEATO allies in SE Asia.”

The claim by critics about the common features of the President’s “powderkeg” metaphor and the domino theory seemed to be one of the dominant patterns in most of the representations examined in this group of news articles. Although it may be reasonable to suggest that there are commonalities in these metaphors because they both represent ways to portray the perceived diffusion of political instability and the connections among events punctuating global politics, it
is apparent the choice to invoke the catchphrase is highly politicized. As seen in previous cases (see Chapter Five), those who supported military intervention in Kosovo generally chose to rely on the same rhetoric that the President had used in his public statements and seldom relied upon the use of the domino metaphor. Rather, as shown in Figure 6.3 (see below), it was those who were critical of Clinton effort toward Kosovo that injected the domino theory into the discussion over Kosovo. A regular motif in the data was for opponents of the Clinton Administration’s Balkan intervention to shift the public discussion by claiming that although its rhetoric or geopolitical thinking might not explicitly rely on the domino metaphor, it was analogous to the domino for various reasons. As also seen is the previous case, the association was sometimes stated explicitly while in other cases opponents utilized linguistic modifiers to forge a connection between Clinton’s policies (or policy positions) toward the Kosovo crisis and the metaphor.

![Figure 6.3: Overall tone of articles toward Clinton Administration’s intervention in Kosovo](image)

One of the earliest media contributions reinterpreting the President’s belief about the need to forestall widespread conflict in the Balkans into the domino theory appeared in *The Times Union* where the journalist referred to the White House’s emphasis on the need for intervention in Yugoslavia as: “the linchpin of the *new* domino theory. This post-Cold War thesis argues that if left unchecked the ethnic divisions that fuel[ed] the break-up of that former communist state will engulf much of southern Europe and possibly ignite an even wider conflict” (Wickham, 1999). A few weeks later, an editorial by Marlene Nadle appearing in *The Record* (NATO Should Consider Kosovo Independence, 1999), *The Times Union* (Nadle, Independent Kosovo is key to Balkans’ stability, 1999), and *The Saint Paul Pioneer Press* (Nadle, Boiling Over in Kosovo, 1999) under different titles attributed the theory to diplomat Richard
Holbrooke. “The belief,” she said, “that granting Kosovo its independence will lead Albanians in other Balkan countries to demand it too echoes the “domino theory …” Ted Galen Carpenter of the Cato Institute claimed in a Bridge News op-ed (1999) that Clinton’s rhetoric was “little more than a refurbished version of the discredited domino theory” while Howard Kurtz’s article in The Washington Post (1999) drew on a quote from a military analyst to promote the notion that it sounded like the metaphor. In the editorial Kurtz wrote: “The administration’s rhetoric “is frankly a bit overdone … [and] sounds like the Vietnam domino theory.” The headline of a Pittsburgh Post-Gazette commentary, “NATO, The Aggressor; Clinton Trots Out A Baroque Version Of The Domino Theory To Justify An Illegal Action” - provides another example of journalists trying to establish a link between the Clinton’s arguments about Kosovo and the domino theory in the American news media in spring 1999 (Kelly, 1999).

**The Domino Theory as Popular Geopolitics in Opinion-Editorial Articles or Letters-to-the-Editor**

One of the other characteristics apparent in the resurrection of the domino theory by the media in 1999 was that it was primarily invoked by opinion-editorial writers whose attribution of the metaphor to Clinton was rapidly diffused throughout the United States through their syndicated columns. This pattern is depicted in Figure 6.4 below which illustrates the percentage of total articles appearing in U.S. newspapers and wires in 1999 using both the term “domino theory” as well as “Kosovo” calculated by type (i.e., editorial, regular news, etc.). The regular reemergence of the term in editorial columns demonstrates the potential power of syndication in promoting certain geopolitical understandings over and over until the representations begin to resonate in the popular geopolitics of the media. Well before the beginning of the air war against the Serbs, popular conservative commentator Charles Krauthammer began to use his national contributions to various papers to criticize Clinton and shape the discourse by binding the President’s policies to the foolishness of the delegitimized domino theory. According to Krauthammer (...We Don't Need to Inflict, 1999):

> The Kosovar Albanians must have this Goldilocks autonomy, says the administration. …its attempt to inflate the states becomes almost comical. Advancing a domino theory more fanciful than any seen since Vietnam it warns that, otherwise, first Macedonia will be destabilized and face possible war, then Albania, then Greece, then Turkey, then the world.
This op-ed was rerun under various headlines in other papers across the United States including the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (Krauthammer, In Kosovo, The U.S. Should Leave The Peacekeeping To Others; For Stability's Sake, 1999), and *The Plain Dealer* (Krauthammer, If There's An Invasion, Let Europe Do It, 1999). Politically conservative editorialists George Will and Krauthammer, in particular, have columns that appear repeatedly relating the domino theory to Clinton’s policies during the Kosovo debate. In another contribution reprinted around the country, Krauthammer accused the President of “veer[ing] into an attempt at domino-theory geopolitics” (Confused on Kosovo, 1999). “This is a “domino theory” dressed up in “globalization” pitter-patter,” wrote Will in *The Washington Post*, “Everything is connected to everything, therefore everything depends on everything, therefore …” (A Rash of Reasons, 1999). This commentary was then re-run in slightly edited versions bearing unique titles all over the country in papers including *The Times Union* (Will, A demonstration of air powers limits?, 1999), *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* (Will, Against Serbs, Clinton Has Right Ladder To Climb Difficult Wall, 1999), and *The Augusta Chronicle* (Will, Americans Follow Clinton Into Wrong Balkan War, 1999).

![Article Type](chart.png)

*Figure 6.4: Percentages of articles by type (conventional news, opinion-editorial/letter-to-the-editor, or other/unclear)*

By the beginning of the NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia in late March, this perception relating the White House and Kosovo to the domino theory had already begun to emerge among (or trickle down to) segments of the general public as well and manifested itself in their popular geopolitics. Based on the data available for this project, there is no way to establish with certainty if the association of the domino theory and the Clinton Administration’s Kosovo policies were manufactured by the (re)presentations of various commentators or
politicians or whether they appeared organically among the general public. Perhaps the links varied by case or it was some combination of both. It is nevertheless apparent that the phrase had been invoked repeatedly by conservative commentators and public officials since as early as January 1999 and it is possible that it began to resonate with a portion of the American people by late March. In either case, within a day of the initiation of the NATO air war against the Serbs letters-to-the-editor appeared characterizing the President’s actions as a version of the domino theory. The San Jose Mercury News published a scathing anti-Clinton letter saying, “I heard this same sort of sophistry 30 years ago whilst wandering around the Mekong Delta. Moving the domino theory to the Balkans does not make it any more valid … That it is being presented by a draft dodger is even more galling” (Floyd, 1999). “Personally, I don’t believe a word our president says,” stated a letter to The St Petersburg Times (Campbell, 1999), “… Now we are to believe the worn out Vietnam-era Domino Theory concept proposed by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright? I am sick and tired of my tax dollars going for meddling in other countries’ affairs.” The most obvious indication of a geopolitical representation from a newspaper directly influencing the comments of the general public among these articles was a contribution sent to The Herald-Sun (Reed, 1999) in Durham, North Carolina. “I found your March 26th editorial, “Clinton’s domino theory,” significant,” wrote local resident Sam Reed in the letter, “As for me, I take my stand as a citizen and a veteran of World War II. I protest against the bombing in Yugoslavia. NATO – or more correctly, the United States – is not and should not act as the world’s policeman. What Clinton is doing to Yugoslavia is wrong and probably illegal.” None of the letters-to-the-editor appearing in the Lexis-Nexus database using the term “Kosovo” and “Domino Theory” in this period were supportive of the President’s decision to intervene in Kosovo. It must always be kept in mind, though, that letters-to-the-editor as a form of popular geopolitics are subject to the editorial process in the newsroom and that these particular letters were selected by certain editors to appear in these papers at this time. News editors wield the power to shape the geopolitical re-presentation of public “views” and “comment” as seen in their papers through their choice of certain letters that are sent in by members of the public.

Re-presentations of the Domino Theory in the Regular News

Even the so-called “hard” news alluded to Clinton’s use of the domino theory in his policy formulation and/or rhetoric about NATO’s military intervention in Kosovo although none of the articles provided a quote of any White House official using the term. Few of the regular
news journalists (non-opinion editorial) whose pieces were examined in this study actually
associated Clinton’s policies with the metaphor explicitly themselves but the phrase did appear
in their writing. Only reporter John Donovan personally used the phrase to refer to the President
when he commented: “Yes, the commander in chief has some explaining to do … Underpinning
everything was a sort of domino theory … In the case of Kosovo, Mr. Clinton, once an anti-war
protester himself, now appears to be a believer” (The Hotline, 1999). Instead, conventional news
writers typically chose to use the quotes of others to insert the domino theory into their articles.
This pattern also mirrors the findings from Chapter Five and other studies in critical geopolitics
by showing the power that conventional journalists enjoy in framing the representations in their
reporting and the tone of their news coverage through the selective use of certain quotes that
promote certain discourses while maintaining a pretense of objectivity (Sharp, 1993, p. 500). The
findings from this case reinforce these insights about so-called “hard” news coverage. In another
contribution reflecting this tendency that appeared in multiple papers such as The Philadelphia
Inquirer, for example, John Donnelly chose to quote former National Security Council member
and Brookings Institute analyst Ivo Daalder’s use of the phrase to refer to White House policy.
“The domino theory,” the writer claims Daalder pointed out, “didn’t work in Vietnam and it’s
unlikely to work here.” Donnelly then went on to write that Daalder had said: “Clinton
…probably should have stayed away from the domino argument” (Donnelly, 1999).

In early April, the domino theory was invoked repeatedly in the news to discuss an
alleged dispute between the Clinton Administration and members of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of
Staff over the efficacy of using air power against the Serbs. These reports claimed that General
Henry H. Shelton, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, had challenged “the “domino theory” being
pressed in interagency discussions by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright” (Graham, 1999).
One interesting tendency in these news sources is that one of the only items in quotation marks
was the term “domino theory” but the pieces are not specific about exactly who used the
metaphor their articles were (re)introducing to the public discussion over Kosovo (UPI Focus:
Clinton downplays Pentagon disagreement, 1999). In another example, The Associated Press and
Local Wire decided to quote Rudolph Bell, professor of history at Rutgers, in a piece covering
discussions over the war at the college: ‘The idea that the current conflict will endanger Turkey
and Greece. That sounds like a domino theory to me’ (Kalita, 1999). This series of examples
from “hard” news accounts demonstrates the significance that reporters possess in framing the
popular image of foreign affairs through their choice of specific quotes, facts, and representations in the content of their articles. The decision to introduce the domino theory in the media’s coverage of these issues demonstrates the power that regular journalists enjoy in promoting a link between the domino metaphor and White House policies toward Kosovo in 1999.

**Clinton Supporters, the Domino Theory, and the Debate Over the Air War Against Yugoslavia**

As early as late February, even a few Clinton supporters started to respond to the insertion of the domino theory in the debate by trying to defend his decisions from this rhetorical strategy of his opponents in the media. Based on available articles used in this study, it appears that very few (approximately 8) Clinton supporters resorted to the use of the metaphor in U.S newspapers during the period. A small number chose to deal with the analogy directly by embracing its plausibility. An editorial in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, for example, reactively claimed: “Critics can call this a Vietnam-style domino theory, but the dominoes would fall in Europe, a continent the United States has regarded as intimately intertwined with this country for more than a century” (Fight For A Fudge?; Why NATO Is Right To Engage Kosovars and Serbs, 1999). *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* op-ed page later wrote: “While the domino theory has been wrong more than it has been right, ethnic cleansing in Kosovo could destabilize the region” (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 1999). “Must we re-visit the domino theory,” columnist Deborah Mathis of *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* implored her readers, “to accept that we have a national interest in the outcome of Kosovo?” (Mathis, 1999). Eventually, *The Washington Post*’s commentator and common promoter of U.S. interventionism around the world Richard Cohen felt compelled to offer-up a defense of Clinton’s arguments against those who compared it to the language of the Cold War domino theory. “One of the lessons of Vietnam,” he argued,

had to do with rhetoric: Don’t oversell. …the domino theory became a parody of itself. It was clear that whatever happened in Vietnam was not going to affect San Francisco. Only once so far has President Clinton taken his rhetoric further than the facts would permit. That is when he referred to “a Europe that is …a good partner with us for trading (Cohen, 1999).

One interesting example comes from a supporter of NATO’s actions against the Serbs who actually embraced the metaphor while also ridiculing the President’s apparent transformation.
from a “dove” into a “hawk” since the 1960s. In a syndicated column that appeared in *The Washington Times* (1999) and the *Chattanooga Times Free Press* (1999), former Johnson Administration speechwriter Ben Wattenberg prodded his new-found hawkish ally in jest by asserting, “The doves [like Clinton] said the “domino theory” in Vietnam was for kooks. Now we are told that if we don’t act in Serbia, then dominoes like Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey may topple. (Is Guatemala next?).” Although a small number of examples are illustrated here, most supporters of the Clinton Administration typically refrained from invoking the domino theory in their public comments about the ongoing air war in the Balkans.

**The Domino Theory as a Geopolitical Discourse of Opposition**

As was the case in the U.S. media’s coverage of the Clinton Administration’s intervention in Bosnia in 1995, the data from this study indicates that proponents of a robust military action in response to the crisis in Kosovo in 1999 seldom relied on the domino theory in their geopolitical discourse. This contrasts with the manner in which the domino theory was invoked by American officials during the Cold War when it was used to advocate military action in Southeast Asia and Central America. In fact, the majority (82 percent or 84/103) of all news sources examined in this study containing the domino metaphor in their discussion of the Balkans during the period were critical of the Clinton Administration’s or the NATO air war against Yugoslavia while only 8 percent (or 8/103) could be interpreted as supportive. Figure 6.3 (see above) shows this pattern by depicting the percentage of total articles examined for this study whose general tone or content was either positive/supportive, negative/critical, or neutral toward the President’s policies in Kosovo during 1999. As indicated previously, most of the articles were opinion-editorial pieces that opposed the military intervention in the Balkans on various grounds (see Figure 6.4 above) but the general pattern of criticism or negativity was seen in the other forms of articles as well. Various writers utilized a number of strategies to challenge the President, many of which drew upon the historical analogies apparently evoked by the phrase domino theory. An overwhelming number of the columns that invoked the so-called domino theory in their representations of policy toward (or events in) Kosovo (over 60 percent or 65/103) and an overwhelming number of negative media pieces (over 80 percent or 53/65) intruded a clear link between the catchphrase and various errors by U.S. officials during the Vietnam-era (see Figure 6.5 below). Other critics of NATO’s military campaign sought to use
the metaphor in novel ways to assail the Clinton Administration’s decision-making and fuel the controversy over U.S. policy toward the region. The remainder of this chapter will explore several of the oppositional discourses that commonly appeared in the media’s coverage of events in Kosovo in order to illustrate the manner in which the domino theory was introduced to the discussion by Clinton’s critics in order to re-frame the geopolitical discourse about the Kosovo crisis in the U.S. news media.

**Opposition Representation One: Clinton’s (Mis)use of the Domino Theory May Lead to Toppling Balkan Dominoes**

One of the more interesting uses of the domino theory evident in the articles was the effort by some editorialists to attack Clinton for allegedly drawing on the metaphor in his decision-making or rhetoric before proceeding to try and reverse his argument and accuse him of potentially causing a domino effect through his own use of force. Krauthammer was one of the earliest to pursue this tactic when he critiqued the President’s argument for the action in the Balkans as “a domino theory more fanciful than any seen since Vietnam” followed by the claim that, “this domino theory is more likely to occur with NATO intervention” (If There's An Invasion, Let Europe Do It, 1999). “It [the military campaign],” he went on to write, “would sever Kosovo from Serbian control and lead inevitably to an irredentist Kosovar state, unstable and unviable and forced to either join or take over pieces of neighboring countries.”

Commentator Jamie Dettmer of *The Washington Times* (1999) made a similar, although not identical, argument claiming:

> The Clinton Administration has entered the Balkans mesmerized by a late 20th century version of the domino theories …But now NATO fuel has been added to Mr. Clinton’s powder keg in Kosovo – and the sparks are falling near and far. …The instability NATO has hastened and worsened with its bombing campaign could prompt the very outcome the western alliance was seeking to avoid: the redrawing of the borders of the Balkans.

Another example comes from an article picked-up by various papers across the U.S. written by Philip Terzian claiming: “… the domino theory propounded by President Clinton – Serb atrocities lead to regional instability- has been turned on its head: Regional instability in the Balkans has been caused by NATO’s action, not through anything done by the Serbs” (What smart bombs don't know, 1999). In these cases, the authors challenged the executive for an apparent (mis)use of the metaphor before suggesting that the use of force against Serbia would
precipitate domino-style chaos in the Balkans. This rhetorical strategy, although not the most commonly seen in the data, demonstrates the apparent flexibility in how the domino metaphor can be used as device to try to (re)fashion the geopolitical imaginations of the public in the popular news.

Opposition Representation Two: President Clinton’s Moral and Policy Inconsistency

Another trend in the rhetoric used by Clinton’s opposition who invoked the phrase domino theory – the accusation of moral and/or policy inconsistency - was noted by some pro-Clinton commentators in the media while the debate was still ongoing in spring 1999. Lucy Russell of Slate.com, for example, pointed out:

In the debate over Kosovo, opponents of American military action (including many of those former enthusiasts) invoke a sort of reverse domino theory: If we save anyone from mass murder or humanitarian disaster, we’ll find our doing it again and again. Moral consistency requires us to do nothing in Kosovo because we can’t intervene every time a thug … decides to start slaughtering his own citizens (Russell, 1999).

This criticism of the White House for apparent inconsistency is not surprising since it was one of the tactics Clinton’s political opponents used to challenge his Administration’s policies throughout its entire term in office. Henry Kissinger, in particular, commonly deployed this argument, which later appeared in his book Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century (2001). “Within months of their proclamation of a new ethnical foreign policy [in Kosovo],” he wrote,

they [the Clinton team] lapsed into embarrassed silence when Russia launched a crackdown in Chechnya that was, structurally, nearly identical to Serbian actions in Kosovo. …Russian actions in Chechnya were, if anything, more sustained and on a much larger scale than those by Serbia in Kosovo and resulted in greater loss of life. Confronted by such as challenge, most of those who had proclaimed the Kosovo operation to be a universal precedent fell silent … (p. 257).

There was some degree of variation in exactly how this type of reasoning was used in the context of the 1999 debate over the NATO war in Kosovo. “Humanitarianism?,” wrote one news critic from the Dayton Daily News employing this strategy, “Why aren’t we bombing to stop the killing in Rwanda, Tibet, Ceylon, etc.? Domino Theory? The left didn’t buy that theory in the ‘70s, but now it does. … No, President Bill Clinton’s main reason for bombing the Serbs now …
just as he did when he bombed Sudan and Iraq, [is that] Clinton is wagging the dog to take the heat off his own personal scandals” (Sedam, 1999). A Ted Galen Carpenter editorial provides another example: “While the loss of life in Kosovo is certainly tragic, the level of casualties would not put the Kosovo struggle even in the top dozen conflicts of this decade alone [including Sudan, Afghanistan, Algeria, Sri Lanka, Liberia, and Sierra Leone] …Yet the alliance does not issue ultimatums in those wars” (Carpenter, 1999). Interestingly, some editorialists at the time agreed the President had possibly fallen under the sway of the domino theory but rejected the inconsistency argument used to oppose White House polices. While accepting the notion that “Domino theories and subtle diplomatic strategies may have guided the White House,” Max Frankel of The New York Times instead placed the responsibility for the military intervention on the American public’s exposure to images produced via television news rather than the domino theory. In the article Frankel asserted:

[The reason for] America[s] willingness to follow the President into this new war. …is obvious --- on every television screen. …A few critics clucked about our inconsistency -- - our failure to get similarly aroused about even worse barbarities in Cambodia, East Timor, Liberia, Sudan, Algeria, Rwanda. Did Asian and African slaughters not qualify for American response? What those challenges fail to grasp is that our responses, or lack of responses, are not based on consistency of policy. They’re based on the tube (Frankel, 1999).

Opposition Representation Three: Using the Domino Theory to Promote a Vietnam Analogy

Perhaps the most significant overall theme in the articles discussing the Kosovo crisis using the term domino theory was the effort of many of the authors to argue that there were considerable similarities between historical errors made by U.S. officials during the conflict in Vietnam and the policies of President Clinton in Kosovo during 1999. Such an attempt to use the domino metaphor as a vehicle to link past errors in Southeast Asia to Kosovo was found again and again in the content of the news contributions analyzed in this study. The Vietnam discourse appeared, not only in the comments of most of those who challenged White House policies, but largely permeated the entire dialogue appearing in these news pieces. The journalists commonly indicated that the subject of Vietnam was relevant for the discussion of the crisis in Kosovo for various reasons and sometimes asserted that the so-called lessons of Vietnam were not being
respected by the Clinton administration. Figure 6.5 (see below) shows this pattern by illustrating the frequency of the appearance of the word “Vietnam” in articles discussing events in Kosovo in 1999 also invoking the phrase “domino theory.” The charted findings show a pronounced connection between the reliance on the term domino theory in these articles and the subject of the Vietnam War in the content or title of the same news story. As previously stated, the majority of articles where the term Vietnam was detected (over 80 percent) also expressed a negative tone toward Clinton and/or the NATO military campaign against the Serbs in Kosovo.

![Articles Containing Vietnam Reference](image)

*Figure 6.5: Percentage of articles referring to the Vietnam War in discussion of Kosovo*

The evidence from this case further substantiates the findings from Chapter Five as well as much of the existing scholarly literature from other studies on the way in which the topic of Vietnam has often been used as a (or part of a) oppositional discourse by those seeking to resist interventionist policies by the U.S. government (Barthe, 2007; Kaplan, 2007; Paris, 2002; Robinson, 2004). This research has shown how this discourse operated in U.S. Congress and the media to rationalize inaction rather than the active use of military force during periods in which policymakers have been confronted by foreign affairs crises. The findings from this chapter also conform to this pattern by illustrating the way in which the domino metaphor was used by critics of the NATO air war as a discursive vehicle to formulate an association between the Clinton administration’s policies toward Kosovo in 1999 to the negative legacies of the Vietnam War. One of the aforementioned studies even made a brief reference to the use of the domino metaphor as a rhetorical device by Clinton’s political opponents on the floor of the U.S. Congress in 1999 to link the Kosovo air war with Vietnam in various unfavorable ways (Paris, 2002, pp. 423-450). The paper provides some evidence that the domino theory was used to link Kosovo and Vietnam in the “metaphor war” between the Clinton Administration (and his
congressional supporters) and congressional opponents in 1999 in order to achieve “interpretative dominance” over the debate. “[The domino theory] is still closely associated with America’s Vietnam policy,” wrote Paris, “The historical association between the domino metaphor and the Vietnam war may provide an explanation for the behavior of congressional critics of the Clinton Administration’s policies toward Kosovo” (2002 pp.439-440). “Recasting these [tinderbox] arguments as new versions of the Vietnam-era domino theory” was done, he went on to say, “… apparently in hopes of discrediting it” (p. 449). The article provides an important precedent for this dissertation because it broached the subject of the potential significance of the domino metaphor in the context of the Kosovo debate, although it provided only a single quote as evidence and did not examine the popular geopolitics produced in the news. This research project seeks to address this gap in the scholarship by investigating how the domino theory was used as a geopolitical discourse in popular media representations of the Kosovo crisis.

Although most of the articles that injected Vietnam into the Kosovo debate represented the NATO military campaign in a negative light, they exhibited wide variation in the specifics of how they viewed the domino theory and Vietnam as relevant to their criticism of White House policies. An editorial in The Herald-Sun titled “Yugoslav Airstrikes; Clinton’s Domino Theory” wrote, for example: “When he was a mere lad facing the prospect of military service in Vietnam, Bill Clinton stretched ethics like a rubber band to avoid a McNamara Fellowship. However, when he justifies U.S. participation in NATO airstrikes against Yugoslavia, Clinton doesn’t hesitate to reach for one of the linchpins of the Vietnam Era – the domino theory” (1999). Wesley Pruden of The Washington Times also echoed the draft-dodger theme, saying, Don’t look now, but the Domino Theory is back …the doves of yesteryear …have grown war feathers and developed beaks. Making them more like, well, hawks. They’re ready to suit up, strike up the band, fire up the bombers, and go to war. Not actually go themselves, of course. Most of them no doubt agree with young Bill Clinton, who told his draft board in 1968; ‘I’m too educated to fight.’ But they’re ready to send somebody else (Pruden, 1999).

“President Clinton has dusted off the Cold War-era “domino theory” – used to rationalize U.S. intervention in Vietnam – to help justify the U.S.-led attack against Yugoslavia,” stated a contribution to the Seattle-Post Intelligencer Op-Ed page before suggesting that, “… The Clinton
administration’s rationale recalls the explanation used by President Lyndon Baines Johnson in the 1960s to explain what became a fruitless 11-year intervention in Vietnam . . .” (Powell, 1999). Theodore L. Gatchel’s colorful article in The Providence Journal-Bulletin (1999) compared the White House’s rationalizations for the Kosovo action to some of the same old “songs from Vietnam.” “During the current fighting over Kosovo,” he said, pointing out perceived commonalities,

I have noted with amazement the number of old songs from Vietnam that have been rearranged by the White House, apparently without any sense of irony. …Today, however, President Clinton is using a “rearranged” domino theory to justify the bombing of Serbia ... [that] brings back memories of one of the left’s favorite targets of scorn during Vietnam, the remark by a U.S. military officer that ‘we have to destroy the village to save it.’

Other writers referred to Vietnam without even using the word. Perhaps the best, and most interesting, example is provided by a San Francisco Chronicle editorial titled “Onward to the Past” in which the entire column is an obvious commentary on how the NATO intervention against the Serbs could escalate into a Vietnam-style fiasco over the next decade. It ends with the fabricated comments of a fictional White House spokesman in 2007 after “a dramatic rescue [in which] American diplomats were lifted from the roof of the U.S. embassy by helicopters.” “While our intervention may have cost us 53,000 American lives and $100 billion,” the spokesman goes on to comment to reporters, “we have at least learned an invaluable lesson: Never again will we be trapped in a foreign civil war” (Hoppe, 1999).

As pointed out in Chapter Five, Wayne Bert’s book The Reluctant Superpower: United States’ Policy in Bosnia, 1991-1995 (1997) illustrated the manner in which the Vietnam discourse operated in the U.S. diplomatic establishments in the 1990s to frustrate calls for a more activist and interventionist American foreign policy. The findings from this chapter show a similar pattern but instead focus on how the resurrection of the domino theory during the debate over Kosovo in 1999 served to link Clinton’s decision to the negative images of Vietnam that many who promoted these schools of thought allegedly sought to avoid. The domino metaphor was commonly viewed as bearing some of the responsibility for miring the United States in a disastrous military adventure in Southeast Asia in which the country had few crucial strategic interests. Many political conservatives in the United States also seem to believe that one of the
country’s major blunders in Vietnam was the failure to exercise a sufficient amount of military force in order to guarantee victory after becoming involved. Some editorialists with these views argued that Clinton failed to respect these lessons from Vietnam in Kosovo (Investor’s Business Daily, 1999; Tyrell, 1999).

**Opposition Sub-Representation One: Clinton’s Vietnam-style Mismanagement of the Kosovo Crisis and the Subsequent Military Intervention**

A few authors accused the White House of botching the successful outcome of his own war in different ways, usually by claiming that he had foolishly meddled in the military prosecution of the conflict as had happened in Vietnam. This view often implied that specific decisions should be left to military experts rather than civilian leaders and harkened back to the diplomatic and/or military mismanagement of the Vietnam War by various presidential administrations (e.g., President Johnson’s supposed excessive control over America’s armed forces in Vietnam). The ineptitude or perceived over-politicization of past U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia was a theme that punctuated many articles in 1999 discussing White House actions toward Kosovo. There was also a general belief in some news reports that Clinton, in particular, was incompetent on military matters or lacked the resolve or character to fight a tough war and that the military should be unleashed once the decision is made by the Commander-In-Chief to go to war. A *Buffalo News* (Slater, 1999) editorial reflecting this view, for example, adopted the title “Clinton’s Grasp of Kosovo Inadequate” while Barbara Saunders of *The San Francisco Chronicle* led with the headline “We Know What We Are Doing, Right?” (Saunders, 1999). In the article, Saunders wrote:

> Maybe Clinton’s domino theory is different from the domino theory scoffed at by anti-Vietnam War critics … Maybe ground forces aren’t necessary to stop the slaughter which the bombing was supposed to prevent … Because this is different than Vietnam. The people who put troops in Yugoslavia really know what they are doing. And they wouldn’t send a soldier into a war they wouldn’t themselves fight.

This line-of-critique often referred to Clinton’s early declaration that he would avoid inserting ground forces into Yugoslavia as a signal that Milosevic could simply wait out the war. “If NATO is invited to do so [insert peacekeepers], our troops should take part in that mission to keep the peace,” the President said in his March 24th radio address announcing the initiation of the Kosovo air war, “But I do not intend to put our troops in Kosovo to fight a war” (Clinton, 24
March, 1999). Many of these pieces discuss the reported dispute between the White House and General Henry H. Shelton about whether or not a military intervention limited to the use of air power would force the Serbs to capitulate (Graham, 1999). “Even more disturbing, ...Clinton’s top military advisers warned him against embarking on an air war in Yugoslavia,” printed The Virginian-Pilot, “By prematurely declaring that ground forces would not be needed, Clinton did the unthinkable: He involved the U.S. in a foreign war while promising the enemy that we would not do everything necessary to win it” (Bloody Balkans; Straight Talk, 1999). “‘We must win!’ Is the new domino theory,” proclaimed widely syndicated columnist Richard Reeves, “We were ignorant or stupid to believe we could saber-rattle Serbia into submission. When threats failed, we were ignorant or stupid to believe that bombs could do whatever it was we were trying to do” (From Vietnam To The Balkans, 1999).

Sometimes this oppositional sub-representation was promoted as one of the supposed lessons of Vietnam. These so-called unheeded lessons were not lost on a writer for the Investor’s Business Daily (1999) who wrote, “the White House has forgotten the chief lesson from Vietnam – entering into armed conflict requires a will to win. The parallels between Kosovo and Vietnam are indeed remarkable.” The Daily then went on to accuse the Clinton Administration of “tr[y]ing to weasel through conduct of this operation with half-measures. It didn’t work in Vietnam, and it won’t work in Kosovo.” The openly anti-Clinton Washington Times editorialist R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr. wrote:

Close students of this former draft dodger [Clinton] expect he will do in Kosovo what his anti-war pals were urging in Vietnam: Declare victory and leave. …It is time for Republicans to overcome their partisanship and stand by their principles. They know that once American military force is committed it must achieve victory. Soon we must mount overwhelming force on the Kosovo border with Albania (Spoils of a reckless, distracted presidency, 1999).

Interestingly, by early June Clinton began to seriously consider mobilizing U.S. ground forces in preparation for an invasion to force Milosevic to sign a peace agreement (Ground Troops Considered, 1999). Once this became widely-known, Milosevic decided to quickly reach an accord with U.S. and NATO negotiators shortly thereafter (A Kosovo Chronology, 1999).

**Opposition Sub-Representation Two: The Vietnam-style Quagmire in Kosovo**
Several journalists associating the Clinton administration’s policies with the domino theory accused the White House of mishandling the crisis and sucking the country into a Vietnam-style “quagmire” or “morass” that would ultimately lead to further escalation with no “exit strategy” in sight. In fact, trigger words like “quagmire,” which are often associated with Vietnam, also appeared in a number of articles examined in this study (Paris, 2002, p. 432). Other journalists used language arguing that the U.S. would be pulled into further involvement in a largely irrelevant conflict in which the country had no vital national interests in Southeastern Europe by the White House’s mistakes. Universal Press Syndicate columnist Richard Reeves wrote:

The next thing we will do … I suspect, will be to send NATO troops into Kosovo or nearby parts. My guess is that the odds on that are 50-50 right now, but trending toward action … There is a natural progression from high-flying bombers to low-flying helicopters to slogging foot soldiers. That is the real domino theory (The selective credibility of NATO and the U.S., 1999).

“We have no discernible interests in this fight,” asserted a letter to The New York Times editor combining many of these critiques into one succinct paragraph, “All we do know is that we have no exit strategy …listening to the same baseless theories (like the domino theory) that entrapped us in Vietnam. Bombing alone will do nothing, but are we really willing to insert ground troops in a fight we have no desire to fight and no plans for exiting” (Fener, 1999). Chris Bailey of Copley News Service also wove together several Vietnam analogy-based arguments against the NATO air campaign into one unambiguous rejection of the President’s decisions. “The Domino Theory has once again taken flight,” he wrote, “Lacking any U.S. strategic or political imperative, the theory that sent more than 50,000 American soldiers to their deaths in Vietnam has now been updated and burnished to justify sending the newest generation into another unwinnable confrontation in another hell-hole thousands of miles from home” (Playing at war until we find one?, 1999). Interestingly, a few journalists during the period picked-up on what they viewed as the irony of some Democrats relying on the domino theory to justify involvement in Kosovo while their Republican opponents warned of a Vietnam-style quagmire. “What a spectacle,” commented R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr, “the Democrats speak of a “domino theory” in the Balkans; Republicans maulder that war against Serbia is unwinnable” (Spoils of a reckless, distracted presidency, 1999). These examples demonstrate the manner in which President
Clinton’s political opponents conjured up the domino theory to (re)present White House actions and events on the ground in Kosovo as a reiteration of the errors that entangled the country in a situation comparable to the Vietnam.

**Conclusions**

This chapter has explored many of the ways in which domino theory was invoked as a (or part of a) geopolitical discourse by Clinton Administration opponents in the American news media during the military and humanitarian crisis in Kosovo (1999). In that year, there was an intense reemergence of the term in America’s news, largely focused on a discussion of the country’s intervention in the Balkan conflict. This study has surveyed the background to the crisis and the White House’s public justifications for military action in the region and then investigated overall patterns that were evident in the content of these articles. The findings of this analysis reveal a trend in the news reports showing that opponents of the NATO air war against the Yugoslav Serbs introduced the metaphor into the political debate over Kosovo in the popular geopolitics of the media. This seems to have been a strategy seeking to re-frame the public discussion by associating White House policies in the Balkans with the discredited domino theory. Most of the articles were opinion-editorial pieces that claiming that the President’s rhetoric about the need to intervene in order to defuse regional tensions (or “powderkeg”) and prevent a wider outbreak of violence was analogous to the old domino theory. A few commentators specifically accused Clinton of invoking the phrase himself. There is no evidence for the latter claim and none of the articles quoted any White House official using the metaphor although this was sometimes presented to readers as fact. The term was also used by conventional journalists and a small number of articles by Clinton supporters who tended to be reacting to the injection of the metaphor by politically conservative writers in order to defend White House policies.

As seen in the earlier case examined in this research, the majority of the news articles in which the domino metaphor was harnessed by journalists to re-define President Clinton’s rhetoric or decisions or the situation in Kosovo also exhibited a critical tone toward the U.S.-led military intervention in Kosovo against the Serbs. The reports relied on a series of oppositional discourses that used the domino theory to challenge the Clinton Administration’s policies and rhetoric on the Kosovo affair in a negative light. One approach in the articles was the adoption of
a representation claiming that the President was using (or misusing) the discredited domino theory. A few suggested that Clinton’s flawed policies could even result in the very “domino effect” he was allegedly trying to prevent through the use of force against the Serbs. Another representation was to accuse the White House of moral and/or policy inconsistency because he wasn’t acting to stop every other “domino effect” around the world. This tactic implied that the U.S. shouldn’t intervene in Kosovo because the President had not done so in other similar crises (e.g., Sudan, Rwanda, Ceylon, etc.) during his term in office. The most prevalent oppositional tactic, however, was to use the domino theory to formulate a historical analogy between the negative legacy of U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the Clinton White House’s military involvement in Kosovo. Most of the reports brought up the topic of Vietnam in the content of news coverage that was supposed intended to discuss the crisis and American policies in the Balkans. This strategy seemed to imply that the experience of Vietnam was relevant to Kosovo in one way or another. A series of sub-representations linked to this Vietnam discourse were common in the new pieces comparing Vietnam and Kosovo. Often, these journalists claimed (or implied) that Clinton, like Vietnam-era presidents, was similarly mismanaging the Kosovo crisis or that the Balkans were a Vietnam-style “quagmire.”

The results from the analysis in this chapter provide another example of the way in which journalists opposed to certain foreign policy agendas can condition the geopolitics of the overall popular news through the strategic use of certain discourses to frame foreign policy issues facing the U.S. that then resonate through the larger American media. As in the previous case of Bosnia, this oppositional geopolitics helped to negatively portray the Clinton Administration’s policies but, nevertheless, failed to substantially change the trajectory of the White House’s policies toward Kosovo. One interesting finding, however, was that this view of the NATO intervention in Kosovo did later appear in the scholarship of prominent geographers such as Saul Bernard Cohen where it was presented as fact. In his 2003 book, Cohen wrote: “The domino theory was an important argument [for Cold War-era US interventions around the world] …The imagery of dominos survives. The threat of the spread of Kosovar Albanian irredentism to Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Greece was one of the factors, along with humanitarian considerations, which precipitated NATO’s air war against Yugoslavia in 199[9]^2” (2003, p. 25). It is unclear whether or not this was Cohen’s view of the domino theory’s role in the crisis based on his own analysis.

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2 Cohen provided an incorrect year (1998) for Operation Allied Force
or if his formal geopolitics were influenced by the popular geopolitics of the U.S. news reports. It seems likely that a scholar who wished to stay “informed” about global politics may have been exposed to the images of the crisis that appeared in the popular news media. Perhaps Cohen drew similar associations in isolation. Either way, the claim that the domino theory was a factor precipitating the NATO bombing of the Serbs was based on his own view that some of the Clinton Administration’s motivations for the war were analogous to the old domino theory and not on Clinton’s specific use of the phrase. This chapter has established that the injection of the domino metaphor into the U.S. debate over Kosovo does not appear to have been done by White House officials and, instead, reflected the assumptions or political views of certain journalists. This research has demonstrated that - at least in the case of the political debate in the U.S. over Kosovo in 1999 – that the so-called domino theory was used in the representations of the U.S. news media in a way that contradicts the conventional perception of the way in which it used as a geopolitical discourse. Unlike the cases of U.S. involvement in Vietnam and Central America where the catchphrase was harnessed as a public rationalization for military interventions by successive U.S. presidential administrations during the Cold War, the findings from this chapter illustrate that the metaphor is now relied upon as an oppositional discourse that negatively portrays interventionist policies. The following chapter will analyze the U.S. media’s news coverage of the next major reemergence of the domino theory in the American media – the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq from 2003-2007 – to investigate if this pattern was also evident in the coverage of that foreign policy crisis facing the country.
CHAPTER SEVEN

THE DOMINO THEORY AND THE IRAQ WAR DEBATE

Chapter Introduction

This chapter examines the case surrounding the largest and most sustained appearance of the phrase domino theory in relation to geopolitical issues in U.S. newspapers and wires in the post-Cold War era – the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq (from 2003-2007). As in the last two chapters, the material evidence for the study of the metaphor in the popular media used for this study is derived from a search of the *Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe* database for transcripts from U.S. newspapers and wires utilizing the term “domino theory” in the title or body of the article. This data illustrates that from the time of the foreign policy debate over American involvement in Kosovo in spring 1999 throughout 2002 there was a steady decline in the appearance of the term in U.S. print media and wires. By 2002, the metaphor was only utilized a mere 76 times over the course of the entire year and it was seldom used in the discussion of any particular foreign policy topic. Rather, it had become a dead metaphor that remained part of America’s popular discourse in the media’s discussions of wide-ranging issues such as power outages, sports, local politics, fashion, pizza chains, etc.. This reflected a 55 percent decrease in the usage of the phrase from 1999 to 2002. In early 2003, however, there was a dramatic surge of 141 percent (over the previous year) in the use of the term in U.S. news coverage in which it would end up being invoked in 183 articles and wires over the course of the year. This reemergence of the phrase domino theory continued (at a somewhat lower level) throughout the next five years until 2008 when it declined back to a pre-2003 level of 72. Figure 7.1 (see below) illustrates this trend by depicting 2003-2007 as the period in which there was the most significant and ongoing use of term domino theory in the U.S. news media since 1985.

A careful qualitative examination of these articles reveals that this dramatic reemergence of the phrase in newspaper and wire coverage was focused almost entirely on the debate in the United States over the decision of President George W. Bush to invade Iraq and the subsequent American-led occupation and resulting efforts to stabilize the country in the face of a deadly insurgency and deteriorating sectarian violence. This pattern is also illustrated in Figure 7.1 (see
above). Although the U.S. diplomatic relationship with Iraq and its dictator Saddam Hussein had been a chronic international issue for over a decade since an American-led coalition had driven Iraqi forces out of Kuwait in 1991 during the first Persian Gulf War (Operation Desert Storm) and sparred repeatedly (diplomatically and militarily) over the resulting terms, sanctions, and U.N. resolutions that followed the end of the war it was only in 2003 that the domino theory was heavily invoked by journalists in their coverage of Iraq in U.S. articles. At this time, however, the Bush Administration began to dramatically increase pressure on Hussein’s government for its alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs, its failure to adequately cooperate with WMD inspection regimes established by the international community to verify its elimination of these programs, its alleged sponsorship of global terrorist organizations, and its crimes against humanity by asserting that the United States would resort to the use of military force to force his compliance and achieve “regime change” if necessary. Bush intended to depose Hussein and his Baath Party and install a democratic government friendly to the U.S. that would coexist peacefully with its neighbors (Bush, 2010). By early 2003, the United States had obtained a United Nations resolution (U.N. Sec. Council Res. 1441) that the White House believed authorized the use of force against Hussein, passed a U.S. Congressional resolution granting the President the official right to do so, assembled a coalition of international partners to assist in the invasion and occupation, and deployed overwhelming military force to Iraq’s borders for the invasion that began in March.

During these events in 2003, the term domino theory suddenly erupted in U.S. news reports discussing Iraq and the term appeared 134 occasions in the *Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe* database that year. This figure represented 73 percent of all articles using the phrase domino theory for the entire year and 36 more appearances of the term in articles discussing Iraq than all years from 1985-2002 combined. In fact, Iraq was the primary topic in 62 percent of all articles from the *Lexus-Nexus* database where the domino theory appeared between 2003 and 2007. Iraq represented the single largest geopolitical issue where the domino theory was invoked in U.S. media coverage since the end of the Cold War (and records of the *Lexus-Nexus* database dating back to 1980).
This chapter will explore how the reemergence of the domino theory in 2003 in American news reports and its sustained use through 2007 was related to the intense political debate in the U.S. over Bush’s decision to invade Iraq to depose Hussein and then occupy the country in an effort to foster a stable and friendly democratic Arab government in the region. As in previous chapters, this discussion will show how the metaphor operated as a (or part of a) largely oppositional discourse in the country’s new coverage of the issue and the associated debates in the United States. The term was used in media coverage in a way that either reflected the geopolitical imaginations of various journalists and the public toward the topic and/or helped to (re)define the Bush Administration’s reasoning in an overwhelmingly negative light. This research will also illustrate qualitative and quantitative evidence that the so-called domino theory was seldom relied on by American policy makers, journalists, or the general public in news accounts in their rhetoric justifying the U.S. invasion and ongoing occupation of Iraq. Unlike U.S. policy and media debates about government policies toward Vietnam and Latin America during the Cold War, the specific term was rarely invoked by advocates of U.S. militarism toward Iraq in the popular geopolitics of the post-Cold War era. Although their policies and rationales for the invasion were regularly associated with the discredited metaphor in the news coverage of political opponents, the Bush White House and its supporters avoided using the domino theory in their rhetoric toward the crisis and instead relied on other rhetoric that critics claimed contained various similar features. During the five year period in which the domino theory’s role in this debate was examined for this study, it was not Bush, his foreign policy team,
or advocates of the war who regularly utilized the domino theory to define the circumstances in Iraq. Rather, it was most commonly editorialists, journalists, and those submitting letters-to-the-editor who were critical of Bush and opposed to the ongoing war and occupation who chose to rely on the domino theory to critique and delegitimize the Administration’s military intervention in Iraq. Similar to the past debates over U.S. intervention in Bosnia and Kosovo, the domino theory primarily appeared in the American news coverage of Iraq in a way that served to paint a negative depiction of Bush’s policy decisions and the situation on the ground in the region. This chapter will examine the way in which the domino theory was introduced to the debate over Iraq in the U.S. news media from 2003-2007 as a (or part of a) general oppositional geopolitical discourse that operated to oppose the intervention in Iraq in various ways. For example, the wisdom of Bush’s desire to spread democracy in the Middle East by fostering a Western-style government in Iraq was commonly rejected as a naïve and foolhardy “democratic domino theory” while the term was also used (as in the Kosovo and Bosnia debates) to associate Bush administration policies with the mistakes that led to the country’s disastrous involvement in Vietnam during the Cold War.

**Background to the U.S. Invasion and Occupation of Iraq**

The appearance of the domino theory in the debate over the invasion and subsequent war in Iraq in the U.S. news media from 2003-2007 was part of the larger political discussion in the United States over the wisdom and legitimacy of the decision to attack Iraq and the difficulty in the ongoing efforts to stabilize the country in the aftermath of the invasion. By late 2002, President Bush had taken a more confrontational posture against Saddam Hussein’s government because he claimed that the dictator posed a threat to the United States as a result of Iraq’s supposed large weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs, refused to submit to international inspections to verify the destruction of those weapons, and Iraq had reported ties to international terrorism. Although Hussein’s alleged threat to the country was not necessarily imminent, the Bush Administration adopted an increasingly aggressive set of “preemptive” policies toward real and imagined security threats after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States by Al-Qaeda. By 2002, (and reportedly by the morning of 9/11/2001 or earlier), Bush and/or other members of the White House such as Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Vice-President Dick Cheney, national security advisor Condoleezza Rice and defense
deputy Paul Wolfowitz had begun to focus on the necessity of dealing with the “threat” posed by 
Iraq to America. Wolfowitz, in particular and, to a lesser degree, Rumsfeld and Cheney, had 
been openly advocating the use of U.S. military power to depose Hussein since the 1990s. After 
the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States members of the Bush White House 
began to perceive Iraq as a greater threat that should be more actively confronted by the 
Administration. By November, President Bush advised Rumsfeld that he had turned his attention 
to Iraq and he wanted the defense secretary “to review the existing battle plans for Iraq” and 
begin formulating a “coercive” way to deal with Saddam Hussein (Bush, 2010, p. 234). In the 
State of the Union Address the following year Iraq was included in Bush’s so-called “Axis of 
Evil” that the United States considered a threat to international peace and security. The following 
June, Bush officially declared his policy of “preemption” at the commencement address at the 
United States Military Academy at West Point, New York and this was later formalized in the 
2002 U.S. National Security Strategy. In March 2003, the U.S.-led coalition invaded Iraq based 
on the “need” to preempt its alleged WMD threat, force its compliance with international 
resolutions, and prevent these materials from being transferred to Hussein’s alleged terrorist 
allies. Of course, in the aftermath of the attack on Iraq, U.S. and international arms inspectors 
such as David Kay scoured the country and discovered that although Iraq was in violation of 
some elements of the inspection regime and UN resolutions, it had largely dismantled its WMD 
programs in the 1990s and posed no serious threat to the national security of the United States. It 
also became clear that Hussein’s links to international terrorism were tenuous or even completely 
exaggerated. The United States and its allies had invaded Iraq and destabilized a country to 
eliminate security threats that were based on faulty intelligence and that did not exist and now 
had to deal with a post-war situation for which they were largely unprepared.

The chronic tension between the United States and Iraq had been a regular challenge for 
the international community dating back to Saddam Hussein’s invasion of its neighbor Kuwait in 
1990 and refusal to withdraw from the country until driven out by a U.S.-led military coalition 
operating under the auspices of a U.N. resolution (Res. 687) in 1991. Although the U.S. had 
allegedly supported Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s in which Hussein had used 
chemical weapons against his Iranian enemy, the two countries had become estranged because of 
the dictator’s aggressive recklessness and the massacres carried out against Iraq’s Kurdish 
minority in the late 1980s. When Hussein launched an invasion of his tiny neighbor Kuwait in
1990 and refused to withdraw despite U.S. and international demands to do so the crisis led to open warfare between the two countries. At the end of first Persian Gulf War, the U.S. coalition expelled the Iraqi military from Kuwait but avoided an invasion and occupation of Iraq itself because top White House advisors (James Baker, Dick Cheney, Brent Snowcroft, Colin Powell) believed it would potentially destabilize the region, increase Iran’s influence, and precipitate a Turkish invasion of the Kurdish regions of northern Iraq. Saddam Hussein was left in power and much of his military power was left intact (especially the Republican Guard forces) to brutally suppress the internal uprisings that the United States had encouraged in speeches made by President George H.W. Bush and via leaflets dropped by the U.S. air force (Ricks T., 2006, p. 5). The U.S. did insert a relief operation in Iraq (Operation Provide Comfort) to assist the Kurdish refugees in northern areas led by then Army Lt. Gen. Jay Garner and protect them by driving Iraqi forces out of the area to create a relative safe-zone. By April 1991, a no-fly zone was established to protect the Kurds (Operation Northern Watch) followed the next year by a similar zone in the south (Operation Southern Watch). This ultimately encompassed over 60 percent of Iraqi airspace. Allied aircraft flew daily missions over the country and were regularly threatened by Iraqi antiaircraft guns and surface-to-air missiles. Over the course of the next few years, the Clinton Administration sought to “contain” Saddam Hussein’s threat to the world by degrading his forces, eliminating his WMD programs, and other efforts to “deter” him from aggressive behavior. The U.S. was involved in some minor military strikes in 1994 and 1996 but otherwise largely continued their patrols and efforts to “contain” Hussein’s regime (Ricks, 2006; Woodward, 2004).

By the late 1990s, Hussein had ejected international arms inspectors and refused to cooperate with the inspection regimes and had his lack of cooperation and honesty revealed to the world after the Iraqi dictator’s son-in-law and WMD program director Hussein Kamel defected in 1995 with evidence that Iraq was attempting to reconstitute its WMD programs (Ricks, 2006, p. 21). This defection prompted the release of thousands of Iraqi documents showing that thousands of tons of chemicals had been imported for ongoing WMD programs and these illicit materials were unaccounted for (Woodward, 2004, pp. 245-246). This reinforced the belief in Washington that Hussein was a liar who flaunted the will of the so-called international community. It was also widely reported that U.S. intelligence officials had uncovered evidence that Hussein had planned to assassinate President H.W. Bush during a visit to the Middle East in
the early 1990s. In the United States, many interventionist (mostly neoconservative) Republicans began to reject the policy of “containment” and openly push for “regime change” and the establishment of a friendly democracy in Iraq. In early 1998, a group calling itself the Project for the New American Century composed of figures such as Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Armitage, John Bolton, and Paul Wolfowitz, sent Clinton an open letter claimed that ‘containment’ and ‘diplomacy’ had failed and that ‘removing Saddam Hussein and his regime from power … needs to become the aim of American foreign policy’ (Ricks, 2006, p. 17). Later in the year, this view became popular enough in the U.S. Congress that a law was passed and signed by Clinton officially calling for “regime change” in Iraq and providing $97 million in funding assistance to anti-Saddam forces in order to “remove” Hussein and “promote the emergence of a democratic government” (Woodward 2004, p. 10). In December of 1998, Hussein’s refusal to cooperate with WMD inspections led to one of the biggest air assaults on Iraq by allied aircraft throughout the entire period from 1991 to 2003. Labeled “Desert Fox,” the 4-day long bombing campaign involved more cruise missile strikes than the 1991 Persian Gulf War and hundreds of conventional bombing sorties directed against almost a hundred suspected WMD production and storage sites. The campaign also targeted the Iraqi military, government and police facilities to punish and weaken the Iraqi regime. Later inspections in 2003 by David Kay’s team and interviews with Iraqi officials and scientists revealed that this operation crushed most of Iraq’s remaining WMD capacity and demoralized those running the programs (Ricks, 2006, pp. 19-21). After these airstrikes, the U.S. resumed its air patrols and the situation returned to the standard low grade war between the two countries until 2001. Only prominent neoconservatives such as Wolfowitz continued to push for an attack on Hussein over the next few years.

Upon President George W. Bush’s inauguration in 2001, Iraq was not highly privileged as an imminent danger to the United States. Vice President Cheney asked to have the President briefed on Iraq and different options for dealing with the situation although Iraq was not seriously targeted for invasion early that year. Rather, it was viewed as a chronic irritant on which the U.S spent large amounts of money and risked the safety of its pilots to enforce the two no-fly zones over the country. Bush was briefed by CIA chief George Tenet that the three most significant threats to the U.S. at the beginning of his presidency were international terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, the continued proliferation of WMD and the increasing military power
of China (Woodward, 2004, p. 12). In February 2001, U.S. intelligence revealed that Iraq was enhancing its communications and antiaircraft infrastructure, prompting a decision to have dozens of U.S. and British aircraft strike Iraqi radar and command sites throughout the country to degrade its ability to threaten allied aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones (Woodward, 2004, p. 14). From that point until September, the United States and Iraq largely resumed the troubled relationship they had maintained for the last decade. By the afternoon of September 11, 2001, the perception of Iraq by top White House and Pentagon officials was altered dramatically and the United States began to reorient itself for a showdown with Hussein.

Only hours after the attack on the Pentagon by al-Qaeda, Rumsfeld and his aides were already discussing an attack on Iraq and the need to speak with Wolfowitz about “connections: with bin Laden.” According to the notes of one staff member, Rumsfeld mentioned the possibility of “hit[ting] S.H. [Saddam Hussein] @ same time – not only UBL [bin Laden]” (Woodward, 2004, p. 25). The topic was addressed at a meeting among top White House officials at Camp David a few days later and was shelved in favor of an invasion of Afghanistan. Within only two months Bush pivoted back toward Iraq and personally told Rumsfeld that he had turned his attention to Iraq and he wanted the defense secretary “to review the existing battle plans for Iraq” and begin formulating a “coercive” way to deal with Saddam Hussein (Bush, 2010, p. 234). According to Bush (2010, p. 229):

Before 9/11, Saddam was a problem America might have been able to manage. Through the lens of the post-9/11 world, my view changed. …I could only imagine the destruction possible if an enemy dictator passed his WMD to terrorists. …The stakes were too high to trust a dictator’s word against the weight of evidence and the consensus of the world. The lesson of 9/11 was that if we waited for a danger to fully materialize, we would have waited too long. I reached a decision: We would confront the threat from Iraq, one way or another.

The existing plan for an attack on Iraq, called Op Plan 1003, required 500,000 U.S. military personnel to be moved to the Middle East. This was unacceptable to Rumsfeld who wanted the President to have a leaner and more flexible option for dealing with the Iraqi dictator. He contacted General Tommy Franks and they initiated planning to alter (or completely rewrite) the invasion plans to trim down the necessary U.S. forces to the minimum necessary to depose Hussein.
Top U.S. official then began to scrutinize the available intelligence on Iraq under the assumption that Hussein was an reckless and aggressive liar who flaunted the “will” of the international community and was determined to (or already had) reconstitute(d) his WMD programs and use his terrorist connections to threaten U.S. interests in the region. The starting assumption was that intelligence typically underestimates threat and it should be interpreted in the worst possible light in the post-September 11, 2001 world. This view was reinforced by a series of (later discredited) New York Times articles by Judith Miller allegedly based on interviews with an Iraqi defector with alleged knowledge about Iraq’s WMD programs. These articles detailed Hussein’s secret biological, chemical, and nuclear programs in the country. By early 2002, the alarmists on the threats of Iraq’s WMD program to the United States had largely carried the day inside the White House and the Pentagon and the administration began to develop detailed plans for the military invasion of Iraq with the smallest force possible. During the 2002 State of the Union Address Iraq was clearly identified in the crosshairs of the United States as part of the so-called “Axis of Evil.” “Iraq,” claimed Bush (CNN Politics, 2002), continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax and nerve gas and nuclear weapons for over a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens, leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children. This is a regime that agreed to international inspections then kicked out the inspectors. This is a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world. States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic. … The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons.

At a commencement speech at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point later in summer 2002, Bush further articulated his policy that has widely become known as the “Bush Doctrine” of preemption. “We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst
threats before they emerge,” he said in his speech at the academy, “… If we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long” (Text of Bush Speech at West Point, 2002).

At this point CIA intelligence on Iraq did not possess definitive proof that Iraq had large stocks of WMD or strong relationships with organizations such as Al-Qaeda. The 2000 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) claimed Iraq probably “retained a small stockpile” of chemical agents (not warheads) and were working on the production of more (Woodward 2004, p. 194). George Tenet rejected claims, allegedly originating with British intelligence, that Hussein had attempted to acquire nuclear materials for his WMD programs. Despite this, the assumptions of American leaders such as Cheney about the danger of Iraq to American national security became received wisdom that were seen as “facts” at the White House over the course of 2002. In the media, this certainty first appeared during a speech to the national convention of the Veterans of Foreign Wars by the Vice-President in summer 2002. ‘Containment,’ asserted Cheney, is not possible when dictators obtain weapons of mass destruction and are prepared to share them with terrorists who intend to inflict catastrophic casualties on the United States …Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction …he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us … time is not on our side. (Ricks, 2006, p. 49).

Later in the year, Rumsfeld began to echo this view, claiming, ‘We know they have active programs. There isn’t any doubt about it.’ (Ricks, 2006, p. 51). This perception was reinforced in fall 2002, by a rushed and heavily flawed NIE that supported the views of alarmists and pushed the likes of Bush, Rumsfeld, and Rice into the camp of those advocating war in Iraq. According to this top secret document, ‘Baghdad has chemical and biological weapons’ including mustard, sarin, cyclosarin, and VX. … ‘Saddam has probably stocked at least 100 metric tons and possibly as much as 500 metric tons of CW agents – much of it added last year’ (Woodward 2004, pp. 197-198) ‘The chances,’ the report went on to say, ‘are even [50%] that smallpox is part of Iraq’s offensive BW program’ … Iraq …is likely to have a [nuclear] weapon by 2007 or 2009’ (Woodward, 2004, p. 199). When asked about his confidence in reliability of intel about Iraq’s WMD programs CIA director Tenet told the President, ‘Don’t worry, it’s a slam dunk!’ (Woodward, 2004, p. 249). Later, a classified document was sent to the White House summarizing the “facts” about Hussein’s WMD programs that made a number of assertions about the WMD programs and the “numerous and strong ties to bin Laden’s Al-Qaeda network”
(Woodward 2004, p. 289). When later reviewed by a Senate Intelligence Committee after the 2003 invasion, the report was found to have been wrong, with major judgments about Iraq’s WMD programs and links to terrorism that were overstated, unsupported, and/or mischaracterized.

It is clear that many White House and Pentagon officials seem to have genuinely succumbed to the alarmism over Iraq and believed that Iraq possessed WMD and that Hussein might decide to use these weapons on the U.S. or an American invading force. The commonality of this perception in Washington is reinforced by various pieces of evidence available on the topic. By fall 2002, for example, Cheney was the leading proponent of an effort to begin preparing 20 million doses of smallpox vaccine and planned to spend $6 billion on “Project Bioshield” to prepare the country to defend itself against biological weapons (Woodward, 2004, p. 239). Top National Security Agency (NSA) officials claimed that the U.S. would probably need to initiate the invasion of Iraq before March 2003 since U.S. forces may have to wear chemical protective gear as it would get too hot in the country thereafter. Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia told U.S. officials that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak had confirmed that Iraq had mobile chemical weapons labs (Woodward, 2004, p. 312). Even the official battle plan for the attack on Iraq (Cobra II) advised commanders: ‘The Iraqi Ministry of Defense will use WMD early but not often. The probability for the use of WMD increases exponentially as Saddam Hussein senses the imminent collapse of his regime’ (Ricks, 2006, p. 146). At one point during the actual invasion in 2003, U.S. commander Gen. Tommy Franks reportedly panicked as allied forces approached Baghdad and appeared to bunch up on a T.V. monitor he was watching, seemingly making themselves vulnerable for a WMD strike. He ordered the forces to disperse and the immediate destruction of all Iraqi air power on ground (Woodward 2004, p. 404). As allied forces moved through Iraq in the spring they avoided striking or destroying weapons depots throughout the country because of a fear of exposing coalition personnel to chemical or biological agents (Ricks, 2006, p. 146). Vast resources were later dedicated to the search for WMD that weapon inspectors such as David Kay later discovered had not existed in Iraq since the 1990s. Despite the ever-presence of this belief among U.S. officials in early 2003, by 2004, a top weapons inspectors sent into Iraq after the attack testified to U.S. Congress that he did not believe that WMD stockpiles would ever be found in Iraq and that an independent review of
intelligence that was used to justify the war should be conducted to prevent similar intelligence failures in the future.

Nevertheless, this was the minority opinion in Washington in late 2002 when Bush received authorization from both houses of U.S. Congress to ‘use the armed forces of the United States as he determines …to defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq’ (Ricks, 2006, p. 63) At a meeting with House members at the Cabinet Room before the congressional vote Bush told legislators,

Saddam Hussein is a terrible guy who is teaming up with al Qaeda … It is clear he has weapons of mass destruction – anthrax, VX; he still needs plutonium and he has not been shy about trying to find it. Time frame would be six months’ after this to produce a nuke. … The Iraqi regime possesses biological and chemical weapons …and according to the British government, [Hussein] could launch a biological or chemical attack in as little as 45 minutes (Woodward, 2004 pp.188-190).

Bush gave a speech at the U.N. in September 2002 where he warned of the threat of Iraq’s regime and asserted, “If Iraq’s regime defies us again, the world must move deliberately and decisively to hold Iraq to account. The purposes of the United States should not be doubted. The Security Council resolutions will be enforced …or action will be unavoidable. And a regime that has lost its legitimacy will also lose its power … we cannot stand by while dangers gather” (CBS News, 2002). “If we fail to act in the face of danger,” he went on to say,

…the regime will have new power to bully, dominate and conquer its neighbors, condemning the Middle East to more years of bloodshed and fear. …With every step the Iraqi regime takes toward gaining and deploying the most terrible weapons, our own options to confront that regime will narrow. And if an emboldened regime were to supply these weapons to terrorist allies, then the attacks of September 11th would be a prelude to far greater horrors. If we meet our responsibilities, if we overcome this danger, we can arrive at a very different future. The people of Iraq can shake off their captivity. They can one day join a democratic Afghanistan and democratic Palestine, inspiring reforms throughout the Muslim world. These nations can show by their example…

After this speech, the United States secured a unanimous U.N. Security Council resolution (1441) requiring Iraq to establish its honesty and cooperation with the world regarding its alleged WMD programs. According to reports, certain official at the White House believed that the
inspections would either discover evidence of illicit WMD or prove Hussein’s obstinacy, providing a justification of an invasion to depose his regime either way. Iraq admitted U.N. inspectors to the country later in the fall (Woodward, 2004). After inspector Hans Blix’s official report following the U.N. investigation, Colin Powell testified at the U.N. about Iraq’s pattern of deception, his uncooperative nature, links to terrorism, and his WMD programs. During his U.N. speech, Powell showed “evidence” that U.S. officials believed proved that Hussein was in material breach of U.N. Security Resolution 1441 and constituted a threat to the world. Before his U.N. speech Colin Powell had personally reviewed the evidence against Hussein, starting with the assumption that Saddam was prone to bad behavior and it didn’t make sense for him to endure years of sanctions unless he was hiding something (Woodward, 2004, p. 298). By this time, of course, the United States had already begun to transfer thousands of military personnel to the Middle East in anticipation of Rumsfeld’s and Frank’s meticulously planned invasion that began the following month.

Unfortunately, the plans for post-war Iraq were not taken as seriously because the Administration believed that efforts to stabilize the country and transfer authority to a friendly new democratic Iraqi government would be relatively easy. Colin Powell warned Bush about the potential difficulties of the aftermath of the war and Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki testified to the Armed Services Committee that it would take several hundred thousand troops to stabilize the country based on historical experience but these warnings were rejected by influential officials. Neoconservative Paul Wolfowitz, for example, publically commented that warnings from ‘people … overly pessimistic about the aftermath’ were overblown and testified to Congress that calls for additional forces were ‘widely off the mark’ (Ricks, 2006, pp. 78, 97). He also advised Pentagon officials that U.S. forces would be drawn down to approximately 30,000 troops by the end of summer 2003. Unfortunately, these predictions were based on the reports of Iraqi exiles such as Ahmad Chalabi who had become influential at the Pentagon and the White House but would be discredited after the invasion. They claimed that the coalition forces would be welcomed as liberators with flowers and that the Iraqi people were eager and ready for an American-style liberal democracy (Woodward, 2004; Packer, 2005).

In fact, the United States did not even begin seriously preparing plans for the aftermath of the war until late 2002. Even then, State Department experts who had been working on a comprehensive study called the “Future of Iraq” for months were excluded from the process
because of disputes between the State and Defense Departments. It is fair to say that the United States meticulously planned the invasion and largely ignored the obvious aftermath until a few months before the attack on Iraq began. As the war loomed in late 2002 and it became clear that the Pentagon may have to deal with the aftermath of the war (known as Phase IV), the military staff members held a conference at the Army War College to look at the likely scenarios for post-war Iraq and ways to handled them. Foreshadowing mistakes made in 2003, the resulting report warned that ‘The possibility of the United States winning the war and losing the peace is real and serious’ and specifically advised against disbanding the Iraqi army or attempting to indiscriminately engage in a “de-Baathification” because both would destabilize the country (Ricks, 2006, pp 27-73). It wasn’t until December 2002 that retired Army Lt. Gen. Jay Gardner was approached about forming an agency tasked with dealing with the stabilization of post-war Iraq and the transfer of power to an Iraq government. The President set up the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) within the Defense Department and brought in Gardner to head up the team in the months before the invasion. Gardner planned to focus on humanitarian assistance and decided to use the remnants of Iraq’s army, police force, and bureaucracy to stabilize the country but was relieved of his duties only a few weeks after the end of the war. By May 2003, Garner was replaced by L. Paul “Jerry” Bremer III, the head of a new entity called the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to oversee the rebuilding of Iraq and transition to democracy. The CPA was unprepared, initially inflexible, and had too few employees and resources to competently achieve its mission. Within months it had little credibility with the Iraqi people or even many U.S. military personnel who regularly claimed the acronym CPA stood for “Can’t Produce Anything.” Throughout its entire existence, the CPA was confronted with a difficult social and security situation that frustrated its efforts to fulfill its core mission. As a result, it was never able to adequately provide basic services (food, water, electricity, waste disposal, medical care, etc.) to the Iraqi people (Packer, 2005; Ricks, 2006).

Bremer began his tenure heading the CPA by proceeding to do exactly what many experts and Garner warned specifically against doing – he officially disbanded the remnants of the Iraqi military and decided to indiscriminately purge all former Baath Party members from Iraq’s police and bureaucracy in a policy called “de-Baathification.” This act destroyed the remnants of the Iraqi police and armed services and alienated several hundred thousand young men and civil servants who could have been used to stabilize the country. Bremer also decided to
announce that the CPA would control Iraq because there would be no Iraqi government in the near future. Instead, the group of potential Iraqi leaders recruited by Gardner to form the core of self-governance were rejected by the new CPA and the political legitimacy of post-war Iraq was put off for months until an undemocratic group of Iraqis called the Iraqi Governing Council was formed later in the year. By late spring 2003, it was apparent that the situation failed to conform with prewar expectations since the WMD had not been recovered and it had become clear that there was widespread resistance to coalition forces by those who were expected to welcome the invaders with open arms. The resulting power vacuum meant that the responsibility for the stabilization of Iraq fell to U.S. military forces unprepared to deal with the deteriorating crisis (Packer, 2005; Ricks, 2006).

The coalition’s lack of military preparedness was the result of General Tommy Franks’ and Rumsfeld’s invasion plan to use an economy of force to defeat the Iraqi military and largely assumed a best case scenario after the conflict that would enable them to quickly reduce their force levels and officially transfer power to a friendly Iraqi government by fall 2003. Initially, this included only 145,000 troops and a few hundred armored vehicles in the entire invading ground force facing a degraded Iraqi military of over 400,000 and several thousand Iraqi tanks as well as Iraqi paramilitary forces. In order to avoid forecasting the attack to Hussein and the world, they slowly moved small forces piecemeal to the region and removed assets (such as military police (MP) companies and army and police trainers) they believed were unnecessary for the initial assault. Franks even changed the plan at the last moment and ordered the coalition ground forces into Iraq before the beginning of the start of the air campaign against the Iraqi forces (Woodward, 2004, p. 402). As the coalition pushed into the country much of the Iraqi military simply disintegrated as its troops deserted and returned to their homes. Unbelievably, despite careful planning for the attack, the troops and commanders were generally not prepared for the stabilization, peacekeeping and policing mission that followed the war. The number, composition, and rules of engagement for the coalition forces were inadequate for this mission in a country with a different language and culture the size of California. There were too few MPs, Arab interpreters, forces to train the Iraqi police and military, and the coalition’s conventional forces were untrained for peacekeeping, too few in number, and largely expected to return to the United States in a few months. U.S. forces continued to be eliminated by the Pentagon right up
until the invasion and even after the attack had began and this contributed to the chaos and bloodshed that erupted in post-war Iraq (Ricks, 2006).

During the war, this small U.S.-led invading force pursued the remaining Iraqi military units into the north of the country and was unable to sufficiently protect Iraq’s people, its infrastructure, its cultural heritage sites, its borders, and the huge caches of weapons and munitions dispersed throughout the country. The fear that the latter sites contained WMD meant that they were largely avoided and remained unguarded, leaving huge supplies of weapons that were looted by insurgents and later used against coalition forces and the Iraqi citizenry (Ricks, 2006, p. 146). The country’s already degraded infrastructure and its museums were destroyed and plundered while the country descended into anarchy for weeks while coalition forces largely watched passively. There were not even sufficient personnel to provide force protection for coalition supply lines and to prevent insurgents from moving at will across the country’s borders. Amazingly, this shortage of coalition forces left centers of Baath Party loyalty such as the city of Fallujah in what later became known as the “Sunni Triangle” largely ignored in the initial invasion and occupation. U.S. commanders resisted altering their original plans for months as the violence began to fester and failed to throttle a nascent insurgency in the cradle. What happened in the aftermath of the invasion bore little resemblance to the best case scenario hoped for by its military, the White House, or the American public. In Iraq, there was a power vacuum in which the insurgency began to develop because of the incompetence of American government and military officials. According to President Bush, his errors during this period included, “not respond[ing] more quickly or aggressively when the security situation started to deteriorate. …In the ten months following the invasion, we cut troop levels from 192,000 to 109,000. …We inadvertently allowed the insurgency to gain momentum. Then al Qaeda fighters flocked to Iraq” (Bush, 2010, p. 268). He also believed that political progress would automatically improve the security situation by endowing the new government with legitimacy but this failed to materialize as expected. Instead, it was security that was necessary to foster political progress in Iraq (Diamond, 2004; Packer, 2005; Ricks, 2006).

As an institution, the U.S. military was materially and psychologically unprepared to occupy Iraq in 2003. As noted, the forces present on the ground were too small and of the wrong composition and inadequately trained for peacekeeping and stabilization duties. There was little prewar planning for the occupation and transition and the forces expected to return home by fall.
In addition, an intimate understanding of counterinsurgency strategies and tactics learned in past conflicts was not widely present among a cadre of U.S. commanders who had sought to avoid becoming mired in irregular warfare since Vietnam. For the first few years of the occupation, there was no clear overarching U.S. military policy toward the pacification of the country, leaving commanders groping for their own best solution on the ground. According to Anthony Zinni, as late as fall 2003, “There [was] no strategy or mechanism for putting the pieces [of post-invasion Iraq] together. … [the United States was] in danger of failing’ (Bush, 2010, p. 240).

While the violence from the insurgency and casualties were increasing, commanders were still committed to the original draw-down plans and failed to impose a consistent occupation policy across the country. Some sought to cultivate close relationships with local Iraqi leaders and win the “hearts and minds” of the populace while others kept their distance, focused on force security, and patrols to demonstrate their presence and strength to the locals. It was common for some commanders to respond to relatively small attacks with massive artillery counterstrikes and massive search and sweep operations in which Iraqi males were detained en masse. Often, detainees were questioned and released by particular commanders while other coalition officers shipped large groups of un-interrogated men to overcrowded prisons such as Abu Ghraib for internment and questioning where they were sometimes mistreated. Since the occupation was originally planned to be easy and short lived there were few plans made for dealing with potential detainees and the situation had to be dealt with as the conflict worsened. Eventually, there were many documented cases of crimes by U.S. troops toward Iraqi citizens and suspected insurgents that did little to help win the “hearts and minds” of the Iraqi people. In April 2004, the Abu Ghraib scandal involving the abuses of prisoners by American troops at the prison was broadcast to the world on 60 Minutes II further delegitimizing the occupation to much of the world. Troops and commanders were rotated in and out of areas as they were redeployed or sent home only to be replaced by military leaders with a differing attitude on how to confront the growing insurgency. There were some successes and literally volumes of blood, sweat and tears but the situation deteriorated for several years while leaders failed to adapt to the situation and send additional troops, proper equipment and adjust their strategic and tactical approaches. Politics intruded on proper military strategy in cities like Fallujah in spring 2004 where U.S. forces were ordered to conduct an immediate and ill-prepared assault after U.S. security contractors were killed, mutilated, and hung from a bridge and then ordered to stand down.
halfway through the operation. The halt in the attack allegedly appeared like a victory for the insurgency. Although many of these actions and the overall inconsistency were in direct violation of basic doctrines of counterinsurgency, this was largely unknown to a military that over the last few decades was developed and saw its institutional role as geared toward conventional warfare rather than dealing with peacekeeping operations and insurgencies (Packer, 2005; Ricks, 2006).

The seeming hopelessness allegedly led to the alienation of the Iraqi people and the increasing isolation and demoralization of coalition forces. The international community was always hesitant to provide massive assistance to the coalition because of the way in which the Bush administration allegedly ignored world opinion in the run up to the war and because of the inherent dangers in the country. As early as summer 2003, the insurgents had staged deadly attacks against the Jordanian embassy, the International Red Cross, and U.N. headquarters in Iraq, killing the chief of the U.N. mission. After other organizations were attacked, many such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, Oxfam, began withdrawing their personnel from the country. Many U.S. allies, such as the Spanish, Hungarians, Dutch, etc., who were promised relatively light peacekeeping duties before the war began to withdraw their forces as the years progressed and the situation failed to improve. The Iraqi military and police force failed to materialize as quickly as expected because of inadequate training and equipment and was prone to desertion (or even defection to the insurgency) for various reasons, including the dangerous nature of their duty. In December 2003 alone, over half of recruits in the new Iraqi army deserted. In other cases, they refused to engage in combat (for example, Fallujah in spring 2004) that they viewed as suicidal. By this point, the insurgency metastasized from its Sunni and foreign fighter base to the Shiite populations as well. When a popular Shiite cleric named Moqtadr al-Sadr who was critical of the occupation was confronted by coalition forces, it further estranged his Shiite sympathizers from the U.S. military and CPA, some of whom began their own insurgency against the coalition and engaged in sectarian combat with Sunnis (Diamond, 2004; Ricks, 2006).

Throughout all of this deteriorating violence, the U.S. and British military had continued their efforts to stabilize the country and the CPA had slowly helped Iraqi representatives produce a constitution for the country. In June 2004, authority was transferred to the new Iraqi Interim Government and its new Prime Minister Ayad Allawi and Bremer departed the country. At
about the same time, the U.S. military finally initiated an official “counterinsurgency” strategy, increased its training of Iraqi army and security forces and tried to wrestle back areas from the control of the various insurgent groups in different areas of the country. The military fought al-Sadr’s Medhi militia for control of Najaf in the summer and launched an enormous 10-day long assault to finally clear and hold Fallujah in November using massive firepower and approximately 10,000 coalition forces, including 2,000 Iraqis (Ricks, 2006, p. 399). One of the shortcomings was the advice by military commanders to Bush that the U.S. minimize its troop presence in the country to avoid making the Iraqis feel occupied, thereby inadvertently increasing their alienation and fueling the insurgency (Bush, 2010, p. 363). Unfortunately, the policy had the opposite outcome because it made the Iraqis feel insecure, suspicious of Americans (who had so easily toppled their dictator), and looking to any group or militia that seemed to offer them protection.

In late 2004, Colin Powell met Bush and Tony Blair at the White House and told them, ‘We don’t have enough troops, we don’t control the terrain. We paid a big price for not stopping it, because it established an atmosphere of lawlessness. We never had enough troops on the ground’ (Ricks 2006, p. 407). About this time an unmodified CIA report reached the White House warning about the viciousness of the insurgency and mounting casualties. Bush was also briefed by Army Col. Derek Harvey, a senior expert on Iraq, and was told that the insurgency was stronger, more diverse, determined, motivated, with better intelligence than believed, and that attacks against the coalition were worsening (Ricks 2006, p. 408). Another military study group was later sent to Iraq to reappraise the situation in early 2005 and found that the conditions were worse than reported, the insurgency was becoming stronger rather than weaker, and U.S. efforts were flawed in various ways (Ricks, 2006, p. 409). Despite this intelligence, Bush did not substantially increase the number of troops in the country over the next 18 months. The new U.S. counterinsurgency strategy was hampered by a dismal shortage of forces in the country which enabled the coalition to clear areas that were subsequently lost again because the Iraqi military and police proved unable to hold them. Political progress continued forward slowly while the military situation continued to deteriorate over the course of 2005 and 2006. By late 2005, there were more U.S. forces in Iraq than when the Iraqi Interim Government was installed the previous year, the number of attacks had spiked to over 34,000 incidents in comparison to 25,000 in 2004, and the attacks became increasingly lethal (Ricks, 2006, p. 414). Despite the danger, Iraqis
risked their lives to exercise their right to vote in parliamentary elections in January, a vote on
the constitution in fall, and assembly elections in December. Others (particularly Sunnis) often
refused to participate and boycotted the elections while the insurgency tried to terrorize the
public and continue their assault on the coalition. By the end of the year, some experts described
the situation as a “civil war” while others called it intense “sectarian violence.” Either way, near
anarchy reigned in Baghdad and other areas of the country. A CIA report claimed that the
country had become the world’s biggest training ground for terrorists and that there were more
violent extremists in the country in 2005 than in early 2003 (Ricks, 2006, p. 431).

In 2006, Bush claims that he realized the “sectarian violence [in Iraq] had exploded”
(Bush 2010, p. 361). He asserts that he met with top experts inside and outside the military and
by the summer of that year had decided that the minimal “footprint” approach was not working
and other strategies should be considered. The American people had turned against the war and
there were increasing demands to withdraw American forces by critics who claimed the ongoing
U.S. presence was causing the insurgency, that the U.S. should pull-out and let the insurgents
fight it out, or the country should be partitioned into three ethnic enclaves. By late 2006, Bush
relieved Donald Rumsfeld and other top commanders of their commands and explored with his
remaining military advisors the idea of increasing troop levels in Iraq to promote a “clear and
hold” strategy, a strategy popularly known as the “surge.” General David Petraeus, a commander
knowledgeable in counterinsurgency, was put in command in Baghdad and five Army brigades
were slated for deployment to the capital and two Marine battalions to combat the insurgency in
Anbar Province. Iraqi leader Malaki agreed to use Iraqi forces to assist in the pacification of
Baghdad. The announcement of the increase in troop levels was made to the American people in
a televised broadcast in January 2007. The policy was not embraced by the newly elected
Democratic majority in both houses of the U.S. Congress which passed a non-binding resolution
“disapproving” of Bush’s decision. As the American troops poured in over the course of 2007,
casualties and violence initially increased, leading to further demands for a withdrawal. Instead,
Bush rejected any hint of withdrawal while the violence continued into the fall. At that point,
Petraeus testified to Congress that violence was declining across the country, possibly as a result
of climbing U.S. forces in Iraq (Bush, 2010).

By 2008, the violence in Iraq finally began to subside as coalition forces maintained a
large presence in the country and the Iraqi army and police force grew to almost one-half million
and began to increase their operations against the insurgency. The Iraqi legislature began to pass legislation on difficult issues (such as oil revenue sharing) as increasing security made political compromise feasible. By late 2008, the violence had declined to its lowest levels since 2003, sectarian violence plummeted, and coalition forces finally began to initiate the drawdown hoped for back in fall 2003. Iraqi forces asserted greater responsibilities for the security of the country. By the end of Bush’s presidency, the Iraqi government and the United States reached an agreement to extract U.S. forces from Iraq by the end of 2011. After President Barack Obama was inaugurated in early 2009, he solidified further deals with Iraqi leaders to pull out U.S. forces from urban areas by mid-2009, reduce troop levels and then remove all U.S. military personnel from the country by December 31, 2011. In summer 2010, Obama announced that all combat brigades would be withdrawn from Iraq and that 50,000 U.S. forces would remain to aid with the transition and as advisors and assistants for the Iraqi military and security forces. By 2009, Iraq was finally approaching the levels of stability and political progress that the Bush White House and top officials at the Pentagon had originally believed would materialize by fall 2003 (Bush, 2010; U.S. Department of State, 2010).

The Geopolitics of the Bush Administration Toward Iraq

In order to make his case for the war in the arena of public opinion in the lead-up to the war and throughout the conflict, Bush relied on a remarkable consistent set of themes in his geopolitical rhetoric on the crisis. In speeches such as the 2002 and 2003 State of the Union addresses and his speech at the U.N. in September 2002, he claimed that Saddam Hussein was a dangerous, dishonest, and aggressive tyrant who possessed WMD that he was willing to use or possibly give to terrorist organizations with whom he had a close relationship. He also claimed that the U.S. had an opportunity to rid Iraq of a repressive and murderous dictator who had tormented his people and promote the universal American values “freedom” and “liberty” in the region by replacing Hussein’s regime with a stable democracy. A stable democracy, he argued could possibly have a transformative effect on the Middle East and foster a more peaceful world and further human progress. Furthermore, the President asserted that dire international threats should be confronted proactively around the world before they struck the United States at home. In early 2003, Bush echoed the same themes in a speech to the conservative American Enterprise Institute in Washington where he pointed out that the September 11, 2001 attacks had changed
the attitude of the U.S. toward “threats that have gathered for years, in secret and far away, [that] led to murder in our country on a massive scale. As a result we must look at security in a new way” (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy, 2003). “We learned a lesson,” he went on to say,

the dangers of our time must be confronted actively and forcefully, before we see them again in our skies and our cities … In Iraq, a dictator is building and hiding weapons that would enable him to dominate the Middle East and intimidate the civilized world. …This same tyrant has close ties to terrorist organizations, and could supply them with the terrible means to strike this country.

Later in the speech Bush claimed,

Acting against the danger [of Iraq] will also contribute greatly to the long-term safety and stability of our world. …A liberated Iraq can show the power of freedom to transform that vital region, by bringing hope and progress into the lives of millions. America’s interests in security, and America’s belief in liberty, both lead in the same direction; to a free and peaceful Iraq.

At the initiation of the war in March 2003 Bush made a televised address to the American public that relied on the same rationalizations for the war (Guardian.co.uk, 2003):

My fellow citizens; At this hour, American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger. … To all the men and women of the United States armed forces now in the Middle East, the peace of a troubled world and the hopes of an oppressed people now depend on you. … My fellow citizens, the dangers to our country and the world will be overcome. We will pass through this time of peril and carry on the work of peace. We will defend our freedom. We will bring freedom to others and we will prevail.

In the so-called “mission accomplished” speech aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln at the end of conventional combat operations, Bush reinforced the notion that the appeal of Western-style “freedom” was universal and that Iraq was part of the overall war against terror necessary to protect the United States (CBS News, 2003):
In the images of celebrating Iraqis, we have also seen the ageless appeal of human freedom. Decades of lies and intimidation could not make the Iraqi people love their oppressors or desire their own enslavement. Men and women in every culture need liberty like they need food, and water, and air. Everywhere that freedom arrives, humanity rejoices. And everywhere that freedom stirs, let tyrants fear. … The liberation of Iraq is a crucial advance in the campaign against terror. We have removed an ally of al-Qaida, and cut off a source of terrorist funding. And this much is certain: No terrorist network will gain weapons of mass destruction from the Iraqi regime, because the regime is no more.

In his 2005 State of the Union Bush wove together these themes by asserting that the country had reduced the threat of terrorist sponsoring regimes seeking to acquire WMD by demonstrating that their actions would have consequences. By this time, he had also begun to emphasize the threat of terrorism festering in Iraq to the safety of the U.S., although his rhetoric emphasized the promotion of eternal principles such as liberal democracy that he argued would automatically make the world a more harmonious place. He pointed out that Iraq was a major front in the war against terrorists who despised liberal democracy who were being confronted in Iraq rather than on the streets of America. One tactic used to bind these themes into a coherent argument by the President was a reference to the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s, declaration of war on the ‘evil principle’ of democracy. “Our generational commitment to the advance of freedom, especially in the Middle East,” he said (CNN Politics, 2005), is now being tested and honored in Iraq. That country is a vital front in the war on terror, which is why the terrorists have chosen to make a stand there. Our men and women in uniform are fighting terrorists in Iraq so we do not have to face them here at home. The victory of freedom in Iraq will strengthen a new ally in the war on terror, inspire democratic reformers from Damascus to Tehran, bring more hope and progress to a troubled region, and thereby lift a terrible threat from the lives of our children and grandchildren.

Even after the failure to discover WMD stockpiles or a significant relationship with al-Qaeda the President and other members of his administration continued to rely on these same representations to justify the invasion and occupation of the country. The emphasis did shift over
time, however, to a greater stress on the significance of creating a friendly democracy in Iraq for the promotion of peace and freedom in the region and efforts to prevent terrorists from obtaining a safe haven in the failed state in Iraq created by the U.S. attack. In the speech announcing the initiation of the “surge” strategy in Iraq the President said (CBSNews.com, 2007),

The consequences of failure [in Iraq] are clear. Radical Islamic extremists would grow in strength and gain new recruits. They would be in a better position to topple moderate governments, create chaos in the region, and use oil revenues to fund their ambitions. Iran would be emboldened in its pursuit of nuclear weapons. Our enemies would have a safe haven from which to plan and launch attacks on the American people. On September the 11th, 2001, we saw what a refuge for extremists on the other side of the world could bring to the streets of our own cities. For the safety of our people, America must succeed in Iraq. … The challenge playing out across the broader Middle East is more than a military conflict. It is the decisive ideological struggle of our time. On one side are those who believe in freedom and moderation. On the other side are extremists who kill the innocent, and have declared their intention to destroy our way of life. In the long run, the most realistic way to protect the American people is to provide a hopeful alternative to the hateful ideology of the enemy — by advancing liberty across a troubled region. It is in the interests of the United States to stand with the brave men and women who are risking their lives to claim their freedom - and help them as they work to raise up just and hopeful societies across the Middle East.

In Bush’s memoir *Decision Points* (2010), he continues to insist that Iraq was a “central front” in the war on terror because; “If these [Al-Qaeda] fanatics had not been trying to kill Americans in Iraq, they would have been trying to do it elsewhere. And if we were to let them drive us out of Iraq, they would have not been satisfied to stop there. They would have followed us home” (Bush, 2010, p. 359). In the book, he later wrote (p. 393),

Because the United States liberated Iraq and then refused to abandon it, the people of that country have a chance to be free. … A free and peaceful Iraq is in our vital strategic interests. It can be a valuable ally at the heart of the Middle East, a source of stability in the region, and a beacon of hope to political reformers in its neighborhood and around the world. ... a free Iraq will make us safer for generations to come.
Remarkably, Bush still makes the contention that Hussein’s WMD would likely have been transferred to terrorist enemies of the U.S. (p. 270):

… with Saddam Hussein ruling Iraq. He would still be threatening his neighbors, sponsoring terror, and piling bodies in mass graves. …The [pre-war] sanctions, already falling apart, almost certainly would have crumbled. Saddam still had the infrastructure and know-how to make WMD. And as the final weapons inspections report …concluded, “Saddam wanted to re-create Iraq’s WMD capability …after sanctions were removed and Iraq’s economy stabilized.” …Saddam would have turned to Sunni terrorist groups like al-Qaeda …The chance of biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists would have increased.

Over the course of the war, Bush reiterated these themes again and again in his geopolitics on Iraq in hopes that it would resonate with the American people. These geopolitical rationalizations were aimed at helping him maintain the political support in the U.S. (the war was never popular abroad) necessary to continue the military occupation of Iraq although the popularity of the war continued to decline steadily throughout the remainder of his time in office. In fact, by fall 2003 over half of American’s polled expressed skepticism over the wisdom of invading Iraq and continuing the war. The President’s geopolitical representations about the importance of Iraq failed to convince his many critics in congress, the media, and the general public and his party was crushed in the 2006 and 2008 elections, losing both houses of Congress and the White House. In fact, Bush’s political critics rejected his interpretation of the significance of Iraq to U.S. national security and the idea of fostering an inspirational democracy in the Middle East. Some of these opponents instead invoked their own set of geopolitical representations and historical analogies to re-frame the popular discourse of the conflict in the news media and the arena of public opinion. The remainder of this chapter will explore how the U.S news media relied on a series of strategies in their popular geopolitics during the war in Iraq that opposed White House policies by re-interpreting Bush’s arguments about the intervention in Iraq as the discredited domino theory. This will show how the domino metaphor helped to shape the popular geopolitics of Iraq by associating the situation or Bush Administration rhetoric with flawed metaphorical reasoning, policy mistakes from America’s past, or as a way of expressing skepticism or criticism toward the prospects for a democratic transformation of the Middle East initiated by the entrenchment of a friendly democratic government in Iraq.
The Re-presentation of Bush’s Case for War in Iraq as the Domino Theory

The surface content of U.S. media coverage of the war in Iraq and the occupation also invoking the domino theory available in the *Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe* database used for this research from 2003-2007 would probably leave readers with little doubt that the Bush Administration relied on the domino theory as a primary geopolitical rationalization for the invasion and occupation of Iraq. The articles consistently link the White House and its supporters with the resurrection of the domino metaphor and repeatedly and often explicitly claim or imply that it was used as the basis of the Bush Administration’s logic and rhetoric toward the intervention. In fact, almost all of the reports during the period (even dating back to Bush’s inauguration in 2001) using the term “domino theory” in their coverage of the Iraq war forge this connection. Despite this consistent trend in the reporting, however, a close qualitative study of the actual content of the articles in this dataset demonstrate a theme in which none of the journalists decided, or were actually able, to quote President Bush or most of those to whom the metaphor was attributed on his foreign policy team, actually uttering the phrase “domino theory.” In fact, a quote of President Bush even using the word “domino” in reference to Iraq could not be located in the *Lexus-Nexus* database used for this study. The only Bush Administration official who was identified personally using the term was CIA Director George Tenet in testimony to Congress on threats to the United States in February 2003. “The desire for nuclear weapons is on the upsurge,” Tenet said, “additional countries may decide to seek nuclear weapons as it becomes clear that their neighbors and regional rivals are already doing so. The ‘domino theory’ of the 21st century may well be nuclear” (U.S. Department of State, 2003). As this research will show, this testimony, which led to a flurry of over a dozen articles mentioning his use of the term and may have helped to entrench the metaphor in the popular geopolitical discourse, appeared after the domino theory had already been used repeatedly by the media in their coverage of the Bush Administration’s policies toward Iraq. This dissertation will also demonstrate that the majority of the accusations about Bush’s use of the domino theory during the period were based on claims that he was using it in ways largely unrelated to WMD proliferation – for example, notions of his belief in fighting terrorism over in Iraq rather than in the USA or in an alleged democratic “domino theory.”
This research will show that it largely the press and/or opponents of the war that repeatedly introduced the domino theory to the popular discourse on Iraq. During a Defense Department press briefing in February 2003, a reporter asked Donald Rumsfeld, “Do you worry, from where you sit now, that without public support, we may be back in a situation like the last years of Vietnam, where the public wasn’t strongly behind you, didn’t believe your reasons for going in. …there was ambivalence about why we were in Vietnam in terms of the domino theory?” The Secretary of Defense refused to engage the mention of the domino theory but commented, “I would repeat what I’ve said. I think any comparisons to that period and that long, long, long conflict with enormous numbers of your people killed is not relevant. It just isn’t on the mark” (U.S Department of State, 2003). At a press briefing in March, another White House official responded to a question about whether or not “bringing democracy to that nation [Iraq] would have a ‘domino effect’ throughout the Middle East” by saying, “I wouldn’t call it a domino theory, which suggests automaticity …There will be difficulty and work, much work, in the spread of democracy in the region. …[but] If Iraq were a democracy … [it] would have a very positive impact” (U.S. Department of State, 2003). During an interview with the Russian television station NTV in May 2003 the reporter asked Secretary of State Colin Powell about “the possibility of a domino effect, in the sense that we can get this chaos spreading around the Arab world.” Later in the interview, Powell directly rejected such simplistic metaphors,

I don’t subscribe to the domino theory, that what we have done in Iraq will necessarily bring down regimes all over the area. What we have done in Iraq is get rid of a terrible dictator. …and now they have an opportunity …to build a better country that will be a democratic country. That’s not the domino theory meaning the United States is going to go somewhere else and do the same thing. Not at all. But what we might have is an example [for the region].

Of course, it was widely-known that there was substantial bureaucratic tension between Powell’s U.S. State Department and influential figures at the Department of Defense (e.g., Rumsfeld) and the White House (e.g., Cheney) and the former was skeptical about the war and the Administration’s case for the invasion and predictions about the likely aftermath and made this know to the press. Some at State chose to express their doubts by reinterpreting Bush’s case for war as the domino theory. In the lead-up the war, the State Department “leaked” a top secret report from its Bureau of Intelligence and Research titled “Iraq, the Middle East and Change: No
Dominoes” to Los Angeles Times Reporter Greg Miller (Miller, 2003). Miller’s article, headlined “Democracy Domino Theory ‘Not Credible’,” claimed that the “so-called democratic domino theory, one of the arguments that underpins the case for invading Iraq” was viewed with “doubt” by the State Department (Miller, 2003). Miller also referred to President Bush’s (aforementioned) speech to the AEI on February 26, 2003 by claiming that “the same day Bush endorsed the domino theory in a speech to the conservative American Enterprise Institute in Washington” (Miller 2003). In the speech, the President did say “A liberated Iraq can show the power of freedom to transform that vital region [the Middle East], by bringing hope and progress into the lives of millions. America’s interests in security, and America’s belief in liberty, both lead in the same direction: to a free and peaceful Iraq” but he never invoked the domino theory (Guardian.co.uk, 2003). It appears that Miller and others viewed Bush’s comments as analogous to the imagery of toppling dominoes. This report led to a series of articles making statements such as the “underlying premise of the domino theory advanced by the [Bush Administration]” (Nir, 2003) was rejected by the State Department experts who “debunk[ed] the [White House] hawks’ domino theory and express[ed] doubt that installing a new regime in Iraq will foster democracy” (Dowd, Mashing Our Monster, 2003). These reports show how Bush’s political opponents in government and the media heard (or claim to have heard) echoes of the domino theory in his rhetoric even though he failed to utter the phrase.

Despite the fact that the President and most of his top officials (except Tenet’s one quote) do not appear to have appeared to use the domino theory (and even explicitly rejected it) to make the case for the initiation of the attack on Saddam Hussein’s government and the resulting occupation, the association of his administration and the metaphor appears again and again in the media coverage of the crisis. In fact, the domino theory was seldom relied upon by those who supported the invasion and/or the White House. Nevertheless, the connection was traced and repeated in hundreds of news reports between 2003 and 2007. This pattern is depicted in Figure 7.2 (see below) which shows the percentage of articles from the Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe, U.S. Newspapers and Wires database from the period used for this study that associated the domino theory with the Bush White House (84 percent or 210/250) compared to the number that quoted any Bush Administration official uttering the term without prompting by journalist questions (5 percent or 13/250). All of the direct quotes were from Tenet’s testimony.
on global WMD threats and appeared during the first year of the war. No articles quoted Bush or officials other than Tenet using the phrase to make their case for U.S. involvement in Iraq.

Despite this, there were a handful of articles using the term domino theory in the dataset used during the entire five-year period of this study that expressed a clearly positive tone toward Bush’s policies or even promoted the domino metaphor themselves. The earliest, written by an Iranian professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies from Portland State University named Masoud Kheirabadi who seemed disturbed by the ethnocentrism and bigotry of the media’s discourse about the possibility of democracy in the Middle East. This article, which appeared long after the introduction of the domino theory to the discussion and the start of the war, was printed on The Oregonian’s editorial page under the headline “Democracy is feasible for Iraqis.” “I am positive that Muslim countries, when given a chance,” wrote Kheirabadi, “would welcome democratization and the domino theory may work after all” (Kheirabadi, 2003). The next article with a positive tone was written by former Clinton political advisor, and current pro-Republican columnist, Dick Morris. Morris’ editorial was titled “And now the dominos begin to fall” and was published by several papers claiming that the Vietnam experience “gave the [falling dominos] chain reaction a bad reputation ... But now, the reverse domino theory is coming true. As a result of President Bush’s war in Iraq, peace and even freedom seem to be breaking out in the most unlikely of places” (Morris, And now the dominos begin to fall, 2003).

Over the course of the next five years, there were only approximately twenty news reports using the domino theory that expressed a clearly positive and/or supportive tone toward the war. During the same period and before, there were literally hundreds that could be interpreted as negative and/or critical of the Bush Administration and the war in Iraq.

As seen in previous chapters, a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data sources used in this research demonstrates that the explicit term domino theory does not appear to have been regularly used by the Bush Administration or even those supporting the war. Rather, the metaphor seems to have been a way in which political opponents of the war re-framed the popular debate over the crisis by transforming Bush’s rationale into the largely discredited domino theory. Figure 7.4 (see below) illustrates this finding by demonstrating how the majority of articles (167/250) in which the metaphor was invoked in the sources used for this study expressed a strongly negative tone toward the American war in Iraq while only a handful could be interpreted as positive (20/250) or even neutral (63/250). It is unclear if this was an intentional
re-presentation or whether it simply reflected reporters’ understandings of White House policies and the circumstances in Iraq. Either way, the evidence from this case (much like Bosnia and Kosovo) establishes strong evidence that the media’s use of the domino theory in its popular geopolitics toward the crisis in Iraq served as part of an oppositional discourse that rhetorically shaped the debate and imagery of the war in a negative fashion. This was often done by associating the situation or Bush’s policies with the Vietnam-era domino theory or by representing White House arguments about the significance of Iraq’s potential democratization in a trivializing and questionable manner. The evidence from the U.S. media’s reporting on Iraq, much like the data from other Post-Cold War-era foreign policy crises facing American policy makers such as Bosnia (see Chapter Five) and Kosovo (see Chapter Six), clearly demonstrates that the widely-held assumption that the phrase “domino theory” is invoked to support aggressive American military policies is not evident in the actual content of the geopolitics found in the news.

![Source of Domino Reference](image)

*Figure 7.2: Percentage of articles associating Iraq war with the domino theory, either via direct quote from White House official (in red), without a direct quote (in blue), or other (in green)*

In fact, scores of media reports went so far as to claim that Bush or other White House officials were utilizing the equivalent of the domino theory in their rhetoric and/or rationalizations for the toppling of Hussein’s regime and their insistence on continuing the occupation after the country descended into chaos. This trend in the highly critical coverage began months before the war and Tenet’s testimony using the term. One early example, written by Professor Tony Judt, was published in *The New York Times* (Judt, 2002) in October 2002, and claimed, “The Bush administration’s goals far exceed the internationally acknowledged need to
dismantle Saddam Hussein’s arsenal. The domino theory is back, this time in reverse. First we remake Iraq in our own image, then others [in the Middle East] will follow.” “Bush’s Domino Theory,” heralded the title of a January 2003 report in the *Christian Science Monitor* before going on to say, “the Bush administrations hawks hope the fall [of Hussein] …would be the first domino to tip other autocratic states in the region toward democracy. …the administration may be soft-pedaling this new domino theory, and simply waiting to showcase a democratic postwar Iraq as a model for its neighbors” (Bush's Domino Theory, 2003). Some authors even provided a quote from Bush to seemingly substantiate their claims of an analogy and reinforce the link.

“The domino theory …is finding new applications in the war on terrorism.” wrote Ron Hutcheson, “‘If we quit Vietnam,’ President Lyndon Johnson warned, ‘tomorrow we’ll be fighting in Hawaii, and next week we’ll have to fight in San Francisco.’ ‘We are fighting that enemy in Iraq and Afghanistan today,’ Bush said in his televised speech …, ‘so that we do not meet him again on our own streets, in our own cities.’” (Hutcheson, Is Iraq Another Vietnam? Some Seeing Parallels; Powell Dismisses Such Comparisons By Bush Opponents As ‘Bizarre’, 2003). Similarly, well-respected Vietnam historian Stanley Karnow (2003) wrote,

> The experiences in Southeast Asia and the Iraq conflict …are analogous in some respects. As they oozed into the region [Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson] each justified his commitment by expounding the “domino theory” …Similarly, Bush – permeated with evangelical fervor – has portrayed himself as a crusader and Saddam Hussein as the evil genius behind international terrorism who influence reached from Indonesia to Algeria (Karnow, 2003).

While Bush and other high-level officials (other than Tenet) are never quoted saying “domino theory” between 2002 and 2007, these pieces illustrated how some commentators perceived and/or decided to reinterpret Bush’s justifications for the war as new applications of the domino metaphor.

The effort to directly attribute the reemergence of the domino theory to the Bush administration continued to punctuate the discourse until he left office in early 2009. In 2005, for example, the title of a contribution in the *Seattle Weekly* was “Today’s Domino Theory.” The article claimed,

> Years ago, as cold warriors went about justifying America’s war in Southeast Asia, A common train of logic was known as the domino theory … It was lunacy, of course. But
that hasn’t stopped neoconservatives, 40 years later, from espousing a similar sort of domino theory. This time, it is democracy, not communism that is spreading. According to the Bush administration and its ideologues, establishing a beachhead of democracy in Iraq will force the rest of the despotic Middle East to mend its authoritarian ways (Parrish, 2005).

“Bush revives the domino theory,” proclaimed the headline to a letter-to-the-editor in the San Francisco Chronicle that same year, before going on to suggest that the President’s rhetoric was a “revived domino theory” that would “convince” “few but the President himself” (Eades, 2005). When Bush attempted to initiate his “surge” strategy in early 2007 in the teeth of intense Congressional, media, and public resistance, an editorial in the Telegram and Gazette even went so far as to assert, “President George W. Bush believes in the Domino Theory” (Baratta, 2007).

These examples demonstrate how critics of the White House’s war in Iraq sometimes explicitly re-framed the official arguments about Iraq as new incarnations of the domino theory in a way that constructed an unfavorable image of the war in the popular geopolitics of the media.

Although it may be debatable that there may be similarities in the two representations because they are essentially about real and imagined processes of diffusion, from the data sources used in this research it is clear that the choice to specifically invoke the “domino theory” was highly politicized. The Bush Administration and its supporters in the media typically avoided the metaphor while political opponents embraced the terms in the critical coverage embedded in their reporting or commentary. These news pieces illustrate how the White House’s use of the domino theory was sometimes presented as “fact” by American journalists during the war in Iraq who then decided (or were unable) to provide any concrete proof or direct quotes in the text of their articles establishing the “truthfulness” of their assertions.

**The Media’s Association of the Domino Theory with the Case for War in Iraq**

As seen during the other two major Post-Cold War crises where the domino theory commonly appeared in relation to U.S. media coverage that were examined in this dissertation, during the Iraq war and occupation the heavily critical reporting tended to avoid directly accusing the White House of uttering the term “domino theory” but instead simply relying on a strategy in which they indicated how the rhetoric, rationalizations, and circumstances were similar to, like, or analogous to, etc. the so-called “theory.” One approach was to use linguistic modifiers to suggest that Bush’s White House arguments for the war were “like,” “similar to,” a
“version of,” or “a sort of,” etc. the old Cold War domino theory in a way that injected the connection into the popular discourse. Several authors used this tactic to point to well-known neoconservatives and advocates of war in Iraq Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle’s as the origin of the alleged belief in domino theories at the White House and Defense Department.

“Wolfowitz’s version of the domino theory,” wrote a New York Times column called “The Brains Behind Bush’s War Policy,” “has “democracy as a contagion spreading through the Middle East after the (effortless) conquering of Iraq. …state after state goes down with democracy, each falling on the next with a gentle click” (Purdham, 2003). The “version of” comparison showed-up in other publications as well like The Hill (Marshall, 2003) and The Wichita Eagle (Davis S., 2003) and The Advocate, with the latter asserting, “[the Bush] line such as we must “defeat them abroad before they attack us at home” had a musty Vietnam-era sound to it. Whether it’s true or not, it is an updated version of the Domino Theory” (Cohen R., 2005). “Whatever the base of Bush’s personal desire to remove Saddam Hussein (Bush’s father’s unfinished business, etc.),” suggested commentator William O’Rourke, “it played into the theories of the administration’s tacticians (Paul Wolfowitz’s principally) of how to reorder the Middle East and eventually, in domino-theory fashion, to reduce terrorism by creating democracies and cowing tyrants” (O’Rourke, 2004).

Other writers preferred to utilize the words “kind of” or “similar to” instead. An editorial in The Herald-Sun (Critical time for Iraq, Bush policy, 2004) wrote, “Bush’s overarching vision is of a world transformed by a kind of reverse domino theory,” while the another in the St. Paul Pioneer Press said, “The message [of Rumsfeld] is similar to the domino theory U.S. officials used 40 years ago to muster support for the Vietnam War …” (Brown, 2005). The title of Ronald Brownstein’s contribution to The Times Union (Brownstein, 2002) was “New domino theory for new era” and began with the line, “Behind concern about Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction, there’s another force propelling American forces toward combat in Iraq: A new domino theory.” The Chicago Sun-Times similarly claimed, “…America …is embarking on its boldest gamble in decades – a new Middle Eastern domino theory …” (Steyn, 2003). Even “hard” news writers used this strategy to infusing their reporting with the domino metaphor. The Associate Press (Hanley, 2006), for example, printed an article claiming that “a mirror image of the old domino theory is at work in Iraq. …The Bush administration now presents Iraq as the first in a series of Arab dominoes that will fall to democracy” while The New York Times wrote
that White House rhetoric was “reminiscent of – updated for a different war, and a different time – President Lyndon B. Johnson’s adoption of the ‘domino theory’ ” (Sanger, 2006). Another trend that manifested itself in the reporting during the period was the tendency of journalists to draw the linkage between President Bush’s arguments regarding Iraq and the imagery of dominoes by simply inserting the metaphor somewhere into the text of articles otherwise dedicated to the discussion of the war in Iraq. These examples demonstrate the wide variation in ways in which the supposed association between the Bush White House and the domino theory was produced by the U.S. popular media’s news coverage over the course of the war in Iraq from 2003 to 2007.

**The Domino Theory as Popular Geopolitics in Opinion-Editorial Articles or Letters-to-the-Editor**

One of the most prevalent features of the American media’s coverage of the war in Iraq in which the phrase domino theory appeared during the period was the tendency for the metaphor to be relied upon by opinion-editorial writers who spread the notion of the “theory’s” connection to the Bush Administration in the popular discourse through their contributions. Figure 7.3 (see below) illustrates this common pattern by depicting the percentage of total articles appearing in U.S. newspapers and wires from the *Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe* from 2003 – 2007 using the term “domino theory” as well as “Iraq” calculated by type (i.e., editorial, regular news, etc.). Clearly, the term domino theory appeared overwhelmingly in opinion-editorial articles on the topic that served to re-present the link between President Bush and the domino metaphor over and over again in their columns. This provides quantitative evidence that in the case of U.S. news coverage on Iraq, editorial pieces played a substantial role in promoting the domino theory/Bush interconnection in the popular geopolitical discourse through their consistent re-interpretation of White House rhetoric and arguments about Iraq into the domino theory. Other than Dick Morris’s previously mentioned article and a handful of other reports over the five year period of this study, virtually all of more than one hundred remaining editorial columns tended to use the domino theory to depict the war on Iraq and the Bush Administration in a negative light. One interesting feature apparent in this data is the absence of articles from many of the conservative columnists (e.g., Charles Krauthammer, Michael Mandelbaum, etc.) who had used the domino theory in articles critical of President Clinton’s handling of Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s and the sudden appearance of so-called “liberal” commentators using it to oppose Bush.
This reinforces the notion that the decision to invoke the metaphor was highly-politicized. Very few of the op-ed articles could even be interpreted as neutral. One relatively neutral editorial was written by well-known syndicated *New York Times* contributor Thomas L. Friedman and appeared in early 1994 but still displayed considerable skepticism about the war. “Those who scoff at the idea of a democratic domino theory in the Arab world don’t know what they are talking about,” he claimed, “But those who think this is a done deal don’t know Iraq.” He then went on to say later in the article,

In short, our most serious long-term enemy may [be] …the Iraqi people … If they can’t [live together peacefully] we will be Iraq’s new, always unhappy, baby sitter, and the old one, Saddam Hussein, will be laughing at us all the way to the gallows (Friedman, 2004).

Figure 7.3: Percentages of articles using terms “domino theory” and “Iraq” by type (conventional news, opinion-editorial/letter-to-the-editor, or other/unclear)

One of the earliest editorialist to conjure-up the domino theory in a discussion of the White House’s Iraq policies was self-described conservative columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times* and Iraq war critic Robert Novak. In summer 2002, an article by Novak surfaced discussing a Defense Department briefing on Saudi Arabia that warned about the increasing influence of neoconservatives such as Richard Perle on the Bush Administration, the riskiness of their ideology, and implications it could have on U.S.-Saudi relations. The “grand design” of Perle and Rand Corporation analyst Laurent Murawiec, he wrote, was a “proposed new strategic concept: forcible removal of Iraq’s Saddam Hussein, which in turn would undermine the Saudi regime – the democratic domino theory in reverse. The proposed American imperium would produce a democratic Middle East, safe for Israel” (Novak, 2002). In the fall of 2002, a
previously noted article by Ronald Brownstein (2002) criticizing the White House case for deposing Hussein was published asserting that “Bush also endorsed the neoconservatives new domino theory,” arguing that democracy in Iraq … would inspire “reforms throughout the Muslim world” and then pointing out “reasons to be skeptical about the domino theorists’ dream of exporting democracy to the desert.” Tony Judt’s commentary in The New York Times (2002) pointing out his view that “the domino theory is back” appeared during the same period and claimed, “The worst thing about Mr. Bush’s pre-announced war with Iraq is that it is not just a substitute for the war against terrorism; it actively impedes it.”

By the initiation of the war in 2003, the domino theory permeated the mediascape of the editorial pages around the United States. The leaked U.S. State Department study in March 2003 provided a particularly ripe opportunity for opponents of the war on the country’s editorial pages (and the regular news pages) to assail the administration rationale for the war. After mentioning the report, one writer for the Albuquerque Journal rhetorically asked, “The Domino Theory, Is this why I see McNamara every time I look at Rumsfeld?” (Belshaw, 2003). Another column in The New York Times used the emergence of the report to promote the argument that “these [Bush administration] planners have revived a staple of cold-war thinking, the domino theory …in its original formulation, the domino theory was invoked fearfully …But in today’s unipolar world, a so-called positive or reverse domino theory has emerged” (Tanenhaus, 2003). The nationally syndicated columnist Maureen Dowd used her New York Times articles, which were published under slightly differing titles around the country in other papers, to promote her own political views by pointing out that the “classified State Department report debunk[ed] the hawks’ domino theory and express[ed] doubt that installing a new regime in Iraq [would] foster democracy” (Dowd, A promise of triumph or tragedy, 2003). A few weeks later another of her editorials appeared in The New York Times (Dowd, Back off, Syria and Iran!, 2003), The Times Union (Dowd, Relearning the lessons of Vietnam, 2003) and The Seattle Post-Intelligencer (Dowd, It's hard to avoid a few acid flashbacks to Vietnam at warp speed, 2003) to associate the White House “hawks” with a Vietnam-style domino theory that along with global events was making it “hard not to have a few acid flashbacks to Vietnam at warp speed.” “All this talk of a domino theory of democracy, of the security we will give to the Iraqi people is nonsense,” wrote a commentator in the Santa Fe New Mexican, “they’re in the Middle East” (Ulibarri, 2003). “Maybe the Domino Theory will work in reverse,” wrote Diane Roberts of the St. Petersburg
Times sarcastically, “…George Bush’s Pax Americana will look like a golden age. As the war-weary hero of Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises says, ‘Wouldn’t it be pretty to think so?’” (Roberts, 2003). Dowd’s criticism of the war using the domino catchphrase reoccurred in another outburst of editorial pieces in The New York Times, The Times Union, and The Seattle Post-Intelligencer in early 2004. “…the Bush hawks …had come into office itching to replay the 1991 war and try out their democratic domino theory in the Middle East,” she wrote, “…They grabbed 9/11 as an opening, yanked power away from Colin Powell and persuaded the popular diplomat to compromise his integrity by touting sketchy evidence at the United Nations, with the puppet Tenet as his wingman” (Dowd, A faulty premise let to Iraq war, 2004). Another example comes from a floor speech by West Virginia Senator Robert C. Byrd published as an editorial by the Charleston Gazette in May under the headline “Bush lies will come out” where the senator accused the Bush administration of a series of deceptions that would eventually be revealed. “We [members of U.S. Congress] cower in the shadows while false [White House] statements proliferate,” he asserted before later going on to say, “When it comes to shedding blood … Nothing is worth that kind of lie – not oil, not revenge, not re-election, not somebody’s grand pipe-dream of a democratic domino theory. Eventually, as it always does, the truth will emerge. And when it does, this house of cards, build of deceit, will fall” (Byrd, 2003).

The heavy use of the domino theory in opinion-editorial articles around the country opposed to the White House did not abate for the remainder of the period of this research. In 2005, for example, The Myrtle Beach Sun-News published a column wrote, “The ‘war on terror’ is turning out to be nothing more than a recycled formulation of the dangerously dumb ‘domino theory.’ Listen to the way President Bush justifies the deepening quagmire of Iraq: …Furthermore, it is not Bush and his band of neocons who are fighting – and dying - for the Iraq domino, but rather [U.S. soldiers and Iraqis]” (Scheer, 2005). As the criticism of Bush intensified during the lead-up to and implementation of the so-called “surge” in 2007, editorial pages around the United States continued to rely on the domino metaphor to oppose the war and continuing occupation. “At this point we must dig ourselves out of the mess the president and his advisers have put us in,” claimed the Akron Beacon Journal (Digging out of the Iraq mess, 2007), “The Vietnam War was fought based on the domino theory and the Iraq war is being fought on it as well: Namely, that terrorists will take over the world if we do not stand up to them.” “What propels this war?” asked William Privett of the Buffalo News (Privett, 2007), “…Leaders with
vague, distant goals who spew threats and fears … [such as Vice President Cheney who] says withdrawing U.S. forces would threaten Afghanistan, other Mideast capitals and countries on other continents, i.e., a resurrected Vietnam “domino theory.” There were well-over one hundred opinion-editorials from 2002 to 2007 using the term “domino theory” to discuss the topic of Iraq analyzed in this study and the majority of them also expressed an openly negative tone toward the Bush Administration and the war in Iraq.

The letters-to-the editor from the entire period of this research exhibited a similar overall pattern of negativity and criticism toward the White House’s decision to depose Saddam Hussein and occupation of Iraq in hopes of fostering a friendly democracy there. These began to appear well before the most of the regular news and editorial began to commonly use the domino theory in the text of their articles. One early, and scathing, contribution to the Sacramento Bee wrote, “Another Texan, almost 40 years ago made a similar media blitz to convince the people of the validity of something called the domino theory. …Now when President Johnson pleaded his case … he didn’t have 47 percent of the people polled already in the doubter’s camp. But today’s Texan does. Bush needs an analyst – and not a military one” (Marquard, 2002). A letter to The Virginian-Pilot the following month claimed, “…the hawks of 1964 and 2002 sound eerily familiar. Name-change our current warriors – Cheney, Rumsfeld and Powell – with McNamara, Rusk, Taylor and Bundy, and we have scary similarities with like rhetoric: “domino theory” vs. today’s “regime change,” before asking, “[and] If we mean business [toward Iraq], why pick the town drunk?” (Overtures of War are Like LBJ and Vietnam, 2002).

As with the other two foreign policy crises explored in this dissertation, it is difficult to assess whether or not the association of Bush’s attack on Iraq with the domino metaphor emerged from the general public or if it was influenced by the popular geopolitics of media reporting. Some of the uses of the phrase appear to have emerged organically from the writers while others seem to have been manufactured by the content of regular news pieces and/or editorial reporting. One clear example of the latter appeared in January 2003 in the form of two letters published by the Christian Science Monitor which mentioned its January 28, 2003 article with the headline “Bush’s domino theory.” Both of these pieces were critical of the notion of a domino theory toward the region with one saying “don’t delude yourself” (Boxx, 2003) to the editor while the other, titled “Holding ‘Bush’s domino theory’ under the light,” suggesting that the war was simply another case of Western imperialism (Anis, 2003). Another example,
referring to a Maureen Dowd column invoking the domino theory, appeared in the *San Antonio Express-News*, wrote, “Our current best and brightest see the Middle Eastern states as dominoes laying face down. President Bush starts the game by placing a strategically selected domino (Iraq) upright, and one by one the others arise … Bush is ready to take the first move, and the rest is up to chance. Do we really want to play this game again [like in Vietnam]? I don’t think so” (McHenry, 2003). In contrast, another letter made it clear that the writer saw the domino theory in Bush’s case for war and showed surprise that a local forum the previous week didn’t bring out the alleged fact. “I’m surprised no one has mentioned the main justification of our Vietnam adventure. The domino theory” mentioned the author, “… The Bush administration has dusted off a domino theory in reverse. …It’s a beautiful vision, even though two democratic governments of long standing in the region – Israel and Turkey – so far have had no such salutary effect” (Caracappa, 2003). In October 2003 the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* printed a letter under the headline “Democracy dominoes” where the contributor wrote,

Good old George W. Bush …is going to establish, over an extended period of time, a “democracy” in Iraq. Yeah. And then [other Middle Eastern countries] …are going to hop on the bandwagon and get one of these democracy things for themselves! Voila, it’s another domino theory! Folks, if it’s pure folly you are looking for, this is it (Boeneker, 2003).

As with the editorials containing a reference to the domino theory in their discussion of Iraq reviewed for this study, the general motif evident in the letters-to-the-editor continued to be critical of the Bush White House for the remainder of the period examined for this research. Only a tiny fraction of the letters that were analyzed in this study could reasonably be interpreted as favorable toward the war in Iraq. In 2005, for example, the *Patriot News* contained a contribution titled “Serving up fear” that criticized pro-Bush writer Cliff May as an alleged “neoconservative propagandist” for reasserting White House “deceits” that were “idols of jingo hysteria … grafted onto that discredited relic of the Vietnam War, the Domino Theory” (Grubbs, 2005). “And let’s consider the consequences of hubris,” he went on to say, “before we are seduced again by the call of the neoconservative cult of global domination.” Similarly in early 2007 an article appeared in the *Staten Island Advance* (O’Leary, 2007) under the headline “Stop the Madness in Iraq” imploring the U.S. Congress to do something to stop the ongoing war in
I really feel sorry for the people who didn’t realize President Bush was up to something prior to the invasion of Iraq,” asserted the writer, before proceeding to claim,

You could just tell from his body language (cowboy/gunslinger) and that stupid (the cat who ate the mouse) smirk on his face. … Now crazy Bush and spooky Vice President Cheney are still trying to convince us that this pre-emptive war can be won. They can’t even fathom that it’s already been lost. They now appear to be trotting out a variation of the old domino theory. Remember that? It was the theory that those war horses promoted during the Vietnam War (O’Leary, 2007).

These articles demonstrate the colorful way in which letter writers to newspapers around the United States continued to invoke the domino theory in their re-presentations of the war in Iraq. It must be pointed out again, however, that I am unable to discern from this evidence whether or not these letters actually reflected common public opinion at the time and that letters-to-the-editor are selected by the staff at newspapers to represent the views of their readership and are thus subjected to the editorial decision making process of the publications in which they appear. As noted in previous chapters, newspaper staff members possess enormous influence in shaping the popular geopolitical “views” of the public in their periodicals because they maintain the ability to select certain letters submitted by the public for actual publication. The editorial staff also commonly picks the headlines that these letters appear under in the papers. Because of this role, it is sometimes unclear if the popular geopolitics promoted in the letters-to-the-editor section of papers is actually representative of general public opinion or of the overall body of letters sent to individual newspapers.

Re-presentations of the Domino Theory in the Regular News

From 2003 to 2007, the so-called “regular” news articles available in the *Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe* database seldom relied on the domino theory in their reporting on Iraq. There were less than fifty articles that were clearly conventional news during the entire period of this study mentioned the terms “Iraq” and the “domino theory.” Between 2004 and 2007, there appeared to be less than ten of these that could be interpreted as regular news reports with certainty. Most of the regular news coverage using the catchphrase occurred during the first few months of the war, with many of the reports focused on CIA Director George Tenet’s previously mentioned congressional testimony where he said “The ‘domino theory’ of the 21st century may well be nuclear” (U.S. Department of State, 2003). Other than this single instance, no Bush
Administration official introduced the domino theory to the discourse surrounding the war in Iraq in any of articles found in this study and no article provided a single quote of a White House official uttering the term. As already pointed out, Rumsfeld and another defense department official were asked by reporters during press briefing about their “domino theory” regarding Iraq and they either refused to engage or rejected the use of the metaphor. Similarly, Colin Powell explicitly dismissed the applicability of the domino theory to White House plans for Iraq when asked by a Russian television NTV interviewer about “the possibility of a domino effect” in the region (U.S. Department of State, 2003). In addition to a number of editorial articles, the previously mentioned leaked State Department study labeled “Iraq, the Middle East and Change: No Dominoes” that surfaced in March 2003, also led to the appearance of several news articles and headlines discussing the Bush administrations hopes to install a friendly democratic government in Iraq after the invasion as the domino theory (Nir, 2003; The Big Picture, 2003). After Senator Robert Byrd’s aforementioned speech on the U.S. Senate floor, The Associated Press (Guggenheim, 2003) and The Washington Times (Dinan, 2003) used his quote about the Bush administration’s “grand pipe dream of a democratic domino theory” in “hard” news articles that were profoundly negative in tone toward the President because they were almost entirely based on Byrd quotes about Bush’s various “lies.”

Most of the articles inject the domino metaphor into the content of their reporting using various (intentional or unintentional) strategies. A writer for the Grand Forks Herald, for example, juxtaposed comments from an Israeli professor, columnist, and political advisor about the “naïve” nature of Bush’s efforts to promote democracy in the Middle East through the use of force with his own commentary describing “how the new domino theory works” (Tran, 2003). Similarly, a journalist from The Forward injected his own view that Richard Perle’s and other neoconservatives’ “mantra that an invasion [of Iraq] would herald the spread of democracy in the Middle East” was “the new domino theory envisioned by his allies in the Pentagon, deputy secretary Paul Wolfowitz and undersecretary Douglas Feith” in a relatively neutral article about the war (Perelman, 2003). An Associated Press Online (Hanley, 2006) correspondent wrote that a “mirror image of the old domino theory [from Vietnam] is at work in Iraq” while a New York Times writer suggested that Bush’s claims about fighting terrorist “in Iraq” rather than “our own cities” was “reminiscent of – updated for a different war, and a different time, President Lyndon B. Johnson’s adoption of the domino theory” (Sanger, 2006). The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

As seen in the (above) example of reporting on Senator Byrd’s floor speech, the most common technique that worked to infuse the popular geopolitics of regular news reporting with the domino theory while maintaining the pretense of objectivity was to choose the quotes of others using the metaphor in order to inject it into the “hard” news. The month after the invasion of Iraq a series of articles in the Voice of America News (Badner, 2003), The Star-Ledger (The Star-Ledger, 2003), and The New York Sun (Avni, 2003) injected the metaphor into the popular discussion on the topic by the head of the Arab League, Amr Moussa calling for “Arab unity” in the face of a possible “domino theory” of instability in the region caused by U.S. action. In late 2003, longtime Washington Post Pentagon correspondent Thomas Ricks relied on statements made by retired Marine Corps General and opponent of the war Anthony Zinni in a news piece that expressed a negative tone toward Bush administration officials and the situation in Iraq. According to Ricks, Zinni said, ‘the goal of transforming the Middle East by imposing democracy by force reminds the general of the “domino theory” in the 1960s … Somehow, the neocons captured the president. They captured the vice president’ (Ricks, For Vietnam Vet Anthony Zinni, Another War on Shaky Territory, 2003). The following month, Ricks wrote another story for The Washington Post on “A scathing new report published by the Army War College broadly [written by Jeffrey Record] criticiz[ing] the Bush administration’s handling of the war on terrorism” (Ricks, Study Published by Army Criticizes War on Terror's Scope, 2004). In the article, Record is quoted as expressing doubts about the war and “scoffing” at Bush’s policies by writing, “The potential policy payoff is a democratic and prosperous Middle East, if there is one, it almost certainly lies in the very distant future.” “… The basis on which this [White House] democratic domino theory rests,” he went on to claim, “has never been explicated.” Later in the report, Record is quoted as recommending “the United States [to] scale back its ambitions in Iraq, and be prepared to settle for a “friendly autocracy” there rather than a genuine democracy.” This piece also appeared in The Star-Ledger that same day in a slightly edited version with a different title (Ricks, Report Calls War on Terror Too Ambitious, 2004). Later in the spring of 2003, the Philadelphia Daily News chose to include quotes from a U.S.
terrorism expert Richard A. Clarke’s lecture using the domino theory in their conventional reporting. According to the article, Clarke mocked the Bush administration’s most-recent rationale for going to war in Iraq …

Calling it a ‘reverse domino theory,’ Clarke said “having installed a democracy in Iraq, it would then ripple out from Baghdad and all of the Middle East would become something like Montgomery County” (Hinkelman, 2004).

Although, there were very few conventional news pieces on Iraq that invoked the domino theory in the title or body of their reports, these articles provide examples of the manner in which regular journalists forged an explicit association between the White House officials and the imagery of dominoes in their coverage of America’s war and occupation of Iraq.

**The Domino Theory as a Geopolitical Discourse of Opposition**

In contrast to the historical use of the domino metaphor to advocate American militarism during the Cold War, the material evidence from this case demonstrates that the resurrection of the domino theory in the American media’s discussion of the war in Iraq did not operate as part of a geopolitical discourse supporting the White House’s case to depose Hussein or occupy the country in an effort to foster a stable, democratic government there. In fact, at least 67 percent (or 167/250) of all articles that were examined in this study using the catchphrase in an article on the crisis displayed an openly critical and/or negative tone toward the Bush administration’s policies Iraq. Only approximately 20 articles (or about 8 percent) total were clearly supportive while the remainder (approx. 13 percent) were unclear or neutral in their tone or content. This pattern is depicted in Figure 7.4 (see below) which shows the percentage of total articles examined in this study that contained a general tone or content that was either positive/supportive, negative/critical, or neutral/unclear toward the Bush’s policies in Iraq and/or the war. As pointed out in the previous sections of this chapter, the term was most commonly invoked by op-ed columnists and, to a lesser degree, letters-to-the-editor in contributions that were critical of the Bush Administration’s policies toward Iraq. It was also used by conventional news reporters who typically inserted the metaphor into the popular discourse through the judicious reliance on quotes from so-called experts, academics, and politicians who had uttered the phrase.
Most of the reporting introduced the domino theory to the discussion of these topics in the content of their articles by choosing to re-interpret White House rhetoric about the war and/or policies as versions of the metaphor. Examples of journalists and letter writers choosing this strategy appeared as early as mid-2002. The association was made repeatedly even though only CIA Director George Tenet actually uttered the phrase in passing in his congressional testimony on the threat of WMD proliferation in early 2003. Not a single U.S newspaper or wire article in the Lexus-Nexus database from 2002-2007 chose (or was actually able) to quote President George W. Bush using the term “domino theory” even though he was accused by the media repeatedly (and often explicitly) of promoting, or relying on, the “theory” to rationalize his case for the attack on Iraq. In this body of overwhelmingly negative re-presentations of Bush’s actions in Iraq, the authors utilized a series of oppositional discourses to assail the Bush White House on various grounds. It was common for media critics to point out what they saw as analogies between the rhetoric and policies of Bush Administration officials toward Iraq and the historical errors of other U.S. presidents in Vietnam while others invoked the term to negatively depict or trivialize what they perceived as the naïve absurdity and/or dangers of what they often referred to as Bush’s “democratic” or “reverse” domino theory for the Middle East. A number of articles were able to intertwine the two critiques into the bodies of their individual news reports on the crisis. The next section of this chapter will examine many of the more common oppositional themes that were manifest in these media contributions in order to expose the way in which the domino theory was utilized by critics and skeptics of the Iraq war and occupation to
frame the discussion of the crisis in the arena of public opinion by presenting them in a negative light.

**Opposition Representation One: Bush’s Policies May Lead to Toppling Middle Eastern Dominoes**

As in the case of the U.S. debate over an intervention in Kosovo, a few journalists sought to assail President Bush for supposedly relying on the domino theory in his policies or rationalizations for the invasion of Iraq before trying to reverse the imagery and claim that his efforts could lead to a domino effect of instability in the region. Others simply claimed that his allegedly misguided efforts would possibly result in a counterproductive domino theory-style diffusion of instability or a bandwagon of resistance to America’s interests in the region. Although this was not a common method of critique, it does demonstrate the flexibility by which the domino metaphor can be harnessed as part of a geopolitical discourse for or against certain polices. Shortly after Bush’s speech to the U.N. about the alleged threat of Iraq’s WMD and links to international terrorism and the need for a resolution to force Saddam Hussein’s regime into compliance to avoid a growing crisis or a unilateral U.S. action to deal with the issue on its own, this argument began to appear in the American news media. The earliest such article in the data used for this study was a letter-to-the-editor in the *San Gabriel Valley Tribune* in October 2002. “Remember the domino theory [one of the arguments used for going into Vietnam]?,” asked the writer before going on to suggest, “In this war we might well have the domino theory in reverse. Other middle-east and/or Muslim countries who may not like Hussein but are angry that the U.S. has taken unilateral military action against a sovereign nation could well join in a war against our aggression one by one perhaps all the way to Pakistan” (Girdner, 2002). The following year Michael Duff’s editorial in the *University Wire* claimed,

I think our intervention in the Middle East is based on some dubious premises, and ultimately, our intervention will fail. The Bush administration thinks we can turn Iraq into a stable democracy, and once we do that, democracy will spread …I call it the Reverse-Domino Theory. [Currently] the ‘Arab world’ is not a monolithic group marching in lockstep against us. With rare exception, these countries hate each other more than they hate us. Ironically, the only thing that could create Arab unity is intervention by the United States. So, based on this reverse domino theory, we are creating the very situation that we are trying to avoid (Duff, 2003).
Some writers went so far as to claim that the domino theory was true. In a contribution to the *Wisconsin State Journal* titled “New ‘Domino’ Destabilizes Iraq” an op-ed claimed,

President Bush and Vice President Cheney have discovered that there really is a domino theory and it goes like this: If you destabilize Iraq, the effect over time will be to destabilize all of the other countries of the Middle East and eventually make the region unstable and insecure. We’re finding out that the Bush and Cheney domino theory is not only a substantive, observable phenomenon, but also one that will touch this country and its people, even though we’re distant from it (Pfrang, 2007).

**Opposition Re-Presentation Two: The Bush Administration’s Geopolitics as the Democratic Domino Theory**

One of the most prevalent rhetorical strategies used by Bush’s opponents was to re-define elements of the so-called “Bush Doctrine” and his rhetoric about transformative potential that the proactive use of U.S. military power could have on the world (particularly the Middle East) by removing despotic and/or terrorism sponsoring regimes that “threatened” the U.S. or their neighbors (particularly with WMD), replacing them with friendly (U.S.-style) liberal democracies conforming with the eternal human values of “freedom” and “liberty,” thereby automatically fostering a more harmonious world that would in-turn make America safer in the long-run. In speech after speech, the President seemed to articulate a belief that America’s strategic interests and values were inseparable, that undemocratic systems are inherently unstable and ready to collapse because people everywhere yearn to be refashioned in the American image, and that the spread of the liberal-democratic American system would likely be contagious to other countries as well. An increase in the number of liberal-democracies was seen as a way to pacify dangerous regions and ultimately secure the United States. He also seemed to believe that the promotion of “freedom” would make Americans secure by draining the swamps from which terrorism emanated. The President expressed a desire to work with international partners and institutions, if possible, but if necessary, he argued the United States would pursue this agenda preemptively and unilaterally because, after the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks, the country’s leadership could no longer wait or engage in endless diplomatic negotiations while “dangers gathered” as the country’s leaders had done in the past. According to John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge (2004, p. 199), “Bush’s response to September 11th was …an exceptionally ambitious, radical response. In particular, it was an exceptionally
neoconservative one.” The Al-Qaeda attacks on the United States were the defining foreign policy event in the Bush presidency because they caused him and the other major figures (Cheney, Rice, and Rumsfeld) at the White House to dramatically realign their world view and foreign policy agenda with that of the neoconservatives bloc within (and outside of) the administration. ‘September 11th [was] the turning point,’ claimed neoconservative academic Robert Kagan, ‘Not anything else. This [perspective] was not what Bush was on September 10th,’ (p. 38). The policy toward Iraq and the democratic transformation of the Middle East that critics in the media (and elsewhere) refer to as the “democratic” or “reverse” domino theory emerged from out of the neoconservative movement that become increasingly influential at the White House after September 11th 2001. Before moving on to address the way in which this discourse was used to oppose the Bush Administration in the U.S. news media, I will provide a brief overview of the general features of neoconservativism and the neoconservative foreign policy agenda that were often referred to as the “democratic” or “reverse” domino theory by White House opponents.

The Rise of a Neoconservative Foreign Policy Agenda within the Bush Administration

The sudden ascendency of neoconservative policies at the White House was somewhat unlikely because upon President Bush’s arrival in office in 2001 his foreign policy bore little resemblance to one that he embraced by the end of that same year. If fact, at that time the highest level members of his administration tended to reflect the more conventional GOP Realist and/or conservative isolationist tendencies that are often referred to as “Jacksonian” by historians such as Walter Russell Mead. Many such as Cheney and Rumsfeld were so-called “assertive nationalists” who advocated the robust use of U.S. power only when necessary to defend relatively narrowly defined strategic interests, distrusted international institutions, and sought to avoid entanglements like nation-building around the world. The Vice-President and Secretary of Defense did share some latent neoconservative tendencies, however, and had both been members of the Project for the New American Century group that advocated for regime change in Iraq dating back to 1997 although they were not full-fledged ideological neocons. The President’s main foreign policy advisor was Condoleezza Rice who had long been associated with the Realist international relations tradition that largely eschewed the moral dimensions of geopolitics. Secretary of State Colin Powell was a former general known for a “doctrine” restricting the use of U.S. military power to occasions when certain rigorous conditions were
met. During the 2000 presidential campaign, members of the Bush team had ridiculed the Clinton Administration and Democrats in general for excessive multilateralism and for ensnaring the country in international institutions and nation-building exercises that they believed did little to promote the country’s fundamental interests. Rice mocked the notion of misusing the ‘Eighty-Second Airborne escorting kids to kindergarten’ for nation-building projects around the world (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2004, p. 201). Bush’s early vision for diplomacy hardly conformed to a neocon foreign policy agenda. In fact, during the 2000 Republican primary most neoconservatives had decided to support John McCain because his worldview was in greater accord with their own. As a result, before September 11th 2001 the neoconservatives were only minor players in the Bush administration overall and were even less significant at the State Department and the Defense Department. Nevertheless, they did enjoy some positions of considerable influence in the Bush government and advocated a view of the world that many American conservatives found instinctually appealing. “After September 11,” however, claim Micklethwait and Wooldridge, “the neocon message …struck a mighty chord with the rest of [the U.S. conservative movement]. A neoconservative foreign policy soon became the conservative one. … – policies that resonated [and] …suddenly coincided with the [conservative] movement as a whole (pp. 203, 209).

Although this sudden (and temporary) confluence of mainstream U.S. conservatism and neoconservativism emerged in September 2001, the neocons had been part of the American foreign policy establishment for decades. Originating from groups steeped in European “continental” philosophy with a genesis in the hawkish left-wing of the Democratic Party, the neoconservative movement largely defected to the GOP because they began to perceive the former as feckless and unwilling to exercise American’s power for the greater good and in the country’s interests in the wake of the Vietnam experience. They moved into the GOP and began to challenge the Jacksonian minimalist (or “isolationist”) and Realist views of international relations that predominated in the party in the 1970s. In general, they started to become more influential in the Republican establishment during the Reagan era when Robert Kagan, Jeane Kirkpatrick and Richard Perle were appointed to prominent roles in the U.S. government and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) think-tank became more influential on the country’s policy agenda. Only Paul Wolfowitz – Bush’s Undersecretary of Defense and the leading advocate of regime change in Iraq - had enjoyed influential government positions in every presidential
administration since Nixon except Clinton’s. William Kristol rose to chief of staff for Vice-President Dan Quayle and later played an instrumental role in promoting neoconservatism in the media and within the Republican Party. Many have been insiders in Washington, at think tanks, or in the media for decades although they were relatively marginal until they ascended to prominence under George W. Bush. The Bush Administration included only a score of neoconservatives when it assumed office in 2001, including figures like Paul Wolfowitz, Douglas Feith, Lewis “Scooter” Libby, John Bolton, and Richard Perle and they were relatively minor presence until Cheney, Bush and Rumsfeld adopted their agenda later in the year (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2004; Packer, 2005; Ricks, 2006).

So what is a neoconservative foreign policy agenda? In general, the neoconservative tradition in international relations has long envisioned the United States as a benevolent force representing progressive and universal human values (e.g., freedom, democracy, peace, etc.) in a world fraught with dangers and evils (e.g., communism, terrorism, WMD, tyranny). Their idealistic interpretation of historical progress is highly nationalistic and optimistically views the United States as a “uniquely powerful” global hegemon that can and should maintain its preeminent military strength and exercise this power unilaterally to pursue a moralistic foreign policy because this simultaneously promotes the country’s interests and the best interests of all humanity (Fukuyama 2006; Kristol, 2003; Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2004; Packer, 2005). This unilateralism is necessary because international organizations, international laws, and the international community are largely unable to achieve these goals without the leadership of a benevolent power. Despite their skepticism toward the international community they are decidedly anti-isolationist in attitude. From this perspective, there is no divergence between the country’s foreign interests in security and stability and its (and all of humanity’s) values. Rather than seeking a balance-of-power, they believe it is necessary for the U.S. to maintain a preponderance of unassailable power and use this to intimidate and/or defeat global threats.

With these factors in mind, dangers (such as fascism, communism, terrorism, etc.) should not be accommodated or contained and the way to attain peace was through strength and the promotion of liberal-democracy and human rights because this may be the final and highest form of human government which will inevitably lead to a more peaceful world. In the latter regard - the notion that a more liberal-democratic world is a more peaceful world – the neocons also appear heavily influenced by principles of “democratic peace theory” – the idea, rooted in a
certain (heavily critiqued) interpretation of history, that liberal democracies are unlikely to go to war with one another for various reasons (Doyle, 1999, pp. 233 – 244). For the last two decades, neocons have commonly forwarded the notion that America “won” the Cold War, that this was no historical accident, and that the events of 1989 provided concrete evidence of America’s role as the world leader in a “unipolar” system. They also generally adopt the attitude that illiberal and undemocratic governments are inherently weak because they repress the eternal human urge for freedom. Francis Fukuyama’s well-known article “The End of History,” which appeared in *The National Interests* in 1989, perhaps epitomizes this aspect of the neoconservative view of history and human progress although he distanced himself from the neoconservative movement around the time of the U.S. war in Iraq. “What we may be witnessing,” he wrote, is the “end of history” - the “unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism” and “…the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (1999, pp. 1-2). Because of this triumphal worldview, for many neoconservatives world liberal democracy “was a kind of default condition to which” societies in the contemporary world evolve once dictatorial regimes were eliminated (Fukuyama, 2006). Believing that history is on the side of the United States and its universal values, neoconservatives have often advocated assertive policies by the United States to maintain enough military superiority to frustrate or preempt potential rivals and for the country to actively use that power to pursue moral goals that push along the historical process through transformative policies fostering democracy and human rights around the world (Fukuyama, 2006; Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2004; Packer, 2005).

According to former neoconservative Francis Fukuyama (2006), “More than any other group, it was the neoconservatives both inside and outside the Bush administration who pushed for democratizing Iraq and the broader Middle East. They are widely credited (or blamed) for being the decisive voices promoting regime change in Iraq.” It is true that this cadre of foreign policy intellectuals were instrumental in focusing the attention of the Bush White House on the threat of alleged nexus between rogue states possessing WMD and international terrorism and the possible transformative impact that the active use of America’s military power could have by enacting regime change that would supposedly lead to the democratization and pacification of entire regions. Neocons such as Wolfowitz had been advocating regime change in Iraq for decades and had even promoted Iraqi nationals such as Ahmed Chalabi and other members of the
Iraqi National Congress (INC) within the U.S. foreign policy establishment as potential replacements for Hussein. This ascendency, however, was not because they hijacked the Bush Administration and drove them to war in Iraq. Rather, the September 11th 2001 attacks seem to have convinced many conservatives, including Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld, into adopting a more neoconservative understanding of the world. Since the latter two had openly advocated regime change in Iraq since the 1990s because they considered Saddam Hussein an unstable and dangerous irritant and challenge to U.S. credibility, neoconservatism wasn’t too far of a move ideologically. Allegedly, regime change in Iraq was discussed in the White House in early 2001 and both Cheney and Rumsfeld set their sights on Iraq within hours of the al-Qaeda attack before refocusing on Afghanistan. These assertive nationalists had long articulated a notion that America should defend itself, unilaterally if necessary, from fundamental threats in a dangerous world and that U.S. power should be utilized proactively to destroy threats and promote the strategic interests of the nation. After 9/11, the neoconservative policies appealed to high-level figures at the White House because their view of potential threats to U.S. national security suddenly seemed more dire and extensive and the neocons advocated the use of American military power to conveniently destroy these threats while promoting a more harmonious world that would also secure the homeland. The United States could use a tool already at its disposal - the military - to annihilate global threats, and possibly even promote eternal human principles thereby draining the swamps for terrorism. In 2001, neoconservatism seemed to be in alignment with the perception that many conservative already had of the world. “The neocons were,” claim Micklethwait and Wooldridge, simply “saying out in the open what so many conservatives privately found themselves thinking. After September 11th, the neocon solution seemed, to conservatives at least, to be the American solution” (2004, pp. 209-210).

By 2002, the neoconservative foreign policy approach had not only been embraced at the highest levels of the White House, it was announced to the world in the State of the Union and the President’s address at West Point in June outlining his so-called “Bush Doctrine” of preemption and then formalized in the official 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS). The 2002 NSS asserted that the U.S. would seek to sustain American global dominance by building-up its military forces “to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military buildup” and, if necessary, use preemptive war and temporary coalitions to destroy threats from unconventional weapons and promote democracy and human rights (Packer, 2005, p. 14). By the fall, the
Administration had turned its attention to regime change in Iraq to eliminate Hussein’s alleged WMD threat and support for terrorist groups and then install a friendly democratic Arab government there that would hopefully inspire a democratization of the region and, in turn make the United States safer. Donald Rumsfeld and General Tommy Franks were well into their planning for a potential war with Iraq and were already quietly deploying U.S. assets to the region by late 2002. Although – much to Cheney’s chagrin - Colin Powell and British Prime Minister Tony Blair convinced Bush to pursue a multilateral strategy through the United Nations, the United States and Iraq were already on a collision course by the end of the year. Top White House officials seemed to believe that they could easily apply America’s overwhelmingly military power to depose Saddam Hussein’s tyranny, destroy his WMD-terrorist nexus, and that U.S. forces would be welcomed as liberators by the Iraqi people who quickly proceed to establish an American-style liberal democracy that would potentially lead to increasing calls for freedom by the peoples of the region. Because of the faith in this ideology at the White House and the Pentagon, the original plans for the invasion and occupation of Iraq (labeled Cobra II) were woefully inadequate and even predicted that the U.S. could transfer power to a new Iraqi government and reduce its forces to around 30,000 troops by fall of 2003. Detractors of the Bush Administration in the media referred to the policy of using U.S. power to in Iraq to foster democratic change throughout the Middle East scornfully as the “democratic” or “reverse” domino theory. The next section of this chapter will explore the way in which the phrase domino theory was used as part of a geopolitical discourse by opponents of the Bush White House to re-present his policies and rhetoric regarding the war in Iraq in a negative way.

The Media’s Re-Presentation of President Bush’s Goals for Iraq as the Democratic Domino Theory

At the initiation of the war in Iraq in 2003 it was already common for the rhetoric of members of the Bush Administration about the wisdom of neoconservative ideas about promoting democracy in the Middle East initiated in Iraq to be re-interpreted by his political opponents as the new, reverse, or democratic domino theory, despite the fact that none of the 250 articles examined for this study provided a quote of any of these individuals using the term in reference to their policies toward the region. Rather, White House officials were quoted rejecting the applicability of the metaphor to their plans for Iraq. Nevertheless, the media firmly affixed the domino theory to President Bush in their reporting on the war. Figure 7.5 (see below)
illustrates this tendency by showing that approximately 47 percent (117/250) of the articles examined for this case study referred to Bush’s claims that regime change in Iraq could potentially inspire the spread of democracy throughout the Middle East as the domino theory. Only a tiny minority of these reporters openly admitted that this was their own perception of the administration’s Iraq policy. In an article titled “Foreign policy not falling like dominoes,” for example, Michael Duff, accepted this as his own view by saying, “The Bush administration thinks we can turn Iraq into a stable democracy, and once we do that, democracy will spread to Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia. I call it the Reverse-Domino Theory. …I think America is still being run by cold warriors, obsessed with domino theories of foreign policy” (Duff, 2003). An editorial in the San Antonio Express-News noted that another journalist “has called it” ‘a reverse domino theory’ (Where is nation headed after Iraq?, 2003) while George Packer acknowledged that the “idea is sometimes referred to as a new domino theory, with tyrannies collapsing on top of one another” (Packer, 2003). “Among the harder heads at the State Department,” he said, “it is also mocked as the Everybody Move Over One Theory: Israel will take the West Bank, the Palestinians will get Jordan and the members of Jordan’s Hashemite ruling family will retain the Iraqi throne once held by the relative King Faisal I.” Others said that the “goal of transforming the Middle East by imposing democracy by force’ “reminded” them of the domino theory from Vietnam (Ricks, For Vietnam Vet Anthony Zinni, Another War on Shaky Territory, 2003). As noted earlier in this chapter, many journalists made no such distinction and simply labeled the neoconservative polices concerning democracy promotion adopted by Bush as the domino theory, used linguistic modifiers (like, similar to, version of, etc.) to trace the link, or used the phase in the overall discussion of Bush’s policies. In January 2003, the Christian Science Monitor simply titled an editorial on Bush’s increasingly neoconservative vision of the world as “Bush’s Domino Theory” (2003). Often a quote was provided to further reinforce the connection such as in the following article excerpt (Rosen, 2003):

In a speech in February, Bush hailed the virtues of spreading democracy in the Middle East. ‘A liberated Iraq can show the power of freedom to transform that vital region by bringing hope and progress to the lives of millions,’ Bush said …Bush’s talk of bringing democracy to the Middle East on a bayonet’s edge …echoed longtime themes of both the Likud Party in Israel and some of its neoconservative supporters [e.g., Richard Perle, Douglas Feith] in the United States. …The neoconservatives sketched out a kind of
domino theory in which the governments of Syria and the other Arab countries might fall or be replaced in the wake of Saddam’s ouster.

This was a similar strategy to a Washington Post article that provided the sub-heading “A reverse domino theory?” sandwiched between a quote from the Bush speech to the AEI in February 2003 and a passage from the 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy document (McCombs, 2003). James Ridgeway re-interpreted this Bush speech the same way. “The administration’s propaganda machine is grasping at implausible theories to gain support for war in Iraq,” he wrote,

The latest invention of Bushspeak is the so-called reverse domino theory, which allows the president to reach well beyond the goal of disarming Iraq toward transforming the entire region. As Bush put it in a speech to the American Enterprise Institute last week, ‘A new regime in Iraq would serve as a dramatic and inspiring example of freedom for other nations in the region’ (Ridgeway, 2003).

The March 2002 State Department report using the phrase “no dominoes” in its title to identify what was seen as the unlikely notion of democratic “change” initiated by an invasion of Iraq, thereby re-injected the imagery of dominoes into the popular discourse when leaked to Greg Miller. Miller used this report along with quotes from Bush’s AEI speech as well (which did not invoke the domino theory) to immediately transform the concept into the “democratic domino theory” under the headline “Democracy Domino Theory ‘Not Credible:’ A State Department report disputes Bush’s claim that ousting Hussein will spur reforms in the Mideast, intelligence officials say” (2003). Later in the article this was taken one step further and Miller asserted that “Bush endorsed the domino theory in a speech to the conservative American Enterprise Institute in Washington.” By March, of course, Bush’s neoconservative vision for democratizing the Middle East had already become firmly transformed into the domino theory in the popular geopolitics of U.S. media reporting on Iraq and variations of the metaphor appeared in the titles and text of scores of articles on the subject over the next five years.
Figure 7.5: Percentage of articles referring to Bush’s efforts to inspire a democratic transformation of the Middle East through the creation of a stable and democratic Iraqi government as the domino theory

As previously pointed-out, the association between the domino theory and Bush’s increasingly neoconservative approach toward Iraq started to become entrenched through editorials that began to appear as early as mid-2002. This was well before the leaked State Department document. Some evidence indicates that the connection between the White House and the term may have originated as part of an internal GOP dispute over the direction of the post-September 11th White House foreign policy agenda and the increasing influence of neoconservatism which disturbed some traditional or so-called “paleoconservatives” (such as Robert Novak and Pat Buchanan). The earliest article making such a reference in the *Lexus-Nexus* dataset used for this study, was a piece by conservative commentator and Iraq war critic Robert Novak (2002) who sought to warn about increasing neocon – particularly Richard Perle’s – sway on White House policy. In the article, he wrote that “a proposed new strategic concept [planning for the] forcible removal of Iraq’s Saddam Hussein, which in turn would undermine the Saudi regime” was becoming popular within the Bush Administration. Novak called this the “the domino theory in reverse” and said that neoconservatives believed that “the proposed American imperium would produce a democratic Middle East, safe for Israel.” Either way, by the fall of 2002, the notion had spread to the journalist community at large and Ronald Brownstein (2002) was heralding the arrival of the “New domino theory for new era,” in the title of an article and warning that the “new domino theory …has become a central – perhaps the central – justification for war in conservative circles, especially among the neoconservative foreign policy intellectuals.” He then went on to claim, “Bush also endorsed the
neoconservatives’ new domino theory [in his 2002 speech to the U.N. about Iraq’s WMD threat] arguing that democracy in Iraq …would inspire ‘reforms throughout the Muslim world’.” After discussing the various weaknesses of the neocon-based agenda for Iraq, he claimed that “These are all reasons to be skeptical about the domino theorists’ dreams of exporting democracy to the desert …Squaring these political riddles with the military imperative of ousting Saddam may prove to be an engineering problem much more complex than toppling dominoes.”

The overall news coverage that chose to associate the Bush Administration policies toward Iraq with the so-called democratic, or reverse, domino theory exhibited a set of overwhelmingly consistent negative themes in its reporting on the topic. Despite the consistency in overt or implicit doubt and criticism, there were variations in the intensity of negativity expressed by different reporters toward the White House goal of establishing a beachhead for liberal-democracy in Iraq. This form of coverage spanned from depictions of the policy as debatable, problematic, or “shaky” and fraught with risk all the way across the spectrum to articles that claimed that members of the White House must be “naive” or “delusional” to accept the “fantasy” that such an insane approach to a transformation of the Middle East was even possible. In general, the concept of initiating potential democratic change in the Middle East through an application of U.S. military power was met with skepticism by reports that depicted it as a questionable idea that was unlikely to be successful for various reasons. Often these reasons had to do with the ethnic and religious diversity of the country and its lack of a democratic tradition but sometimes the writers clearly rejected the White House’s policies but didn’t really provide specific details why. After asking “In Iraq, are we now witnessing the 1960s domino theory in reverse?” a letter printed in the Fresno Bee titled “No domino effect” said “the justification for war has morphed … from weapons of mass destruction, to establishing democracy in that country. This, we are told, will cause democracy to spread throughout the Middle East, thus making us safer from terrorism …Can you blame me for being skeptical?” (Siski, 2005). “This whole idea of a democratic domino theory in which we whip Iraq into a democracy and the rest of the world will follow suit,” wrote a reporter for The Associated Press, ‘I would say the chances of that happening are miniscule” (Warren, 2003). Columnist Erin Solaro of The Seattle Post-Intelligencer simply asserted that “The neoconservative domino theory of democratic regime change is wrong” and we must “face the logic of our invasion of Iraq” (Salaro, 2004). One letter to The New York Times referred to U.S. policy toward Iraq as
rooted in a questionable hypothesis saying, “Neither the American people nor Congress had the chance to consider the wisdom of invading [Iraq] based on a domino theory [of creating a free and democratic Iraq]. The president and his advisers issued dire warnings about weapons and terrorism. The debatable motivation was never presented for debate. Iraq was a grand experiment all along” (Goldinger, 2004). A staff writer for the Grand Forks Herald relied on a quote from Israeli professor Yossi Olmert to portray the rationalization for the war as doubtful and idealistic. ‘I don’t want to use the term naïve,’ said Olmert, ‘It’s just an example of America’s endearing optimism that this country can change the world’ (Tran, 2003).

At the other extreme news coverage depicted President Bush’s justifications about initiating democratic change in the Middle East by fostering a liberal-democracy in Iraq as a dangerous set of policies based on the fairy-tale view of the world by mistaken leaders who may be crazy or delusional. ‘In the service of the neoconservative fantasy,’ wrote Time magazine’s Joe Klein, ‘the Bush administration has been dangerously out of touch in the Middle East …The fantasy involves the domino theory’ (Stephens, 2003). Similarly, a letter the St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Boeneker, 2003) called “Democracy dominoes” referred to the idea as “pure folly” while another to The Wichita Eagle printed under the headline “Domino effect?” claimed, George W. Bush …repeated to the American people his version of the domino theory, which is that if we spend another $87 billion just next year (doubtless more will be required) to rebuild Iraq, a chain reaction will occur so that other Mideast nations will embrace democracy. That seems a little on the wacky side to me (Davis S., 2003).

Senator Robert Byrd’s (W.V.) description of the motivation for the invasion of Iraq as a “lie” based on a “grand pipe dream of a democratic domino theory” appeared in several articles, reinforcing the idea that the one of the secondary justifications for the war was inherently ridiculous (Guggenheim 2003; Dinan 2003).

Much of the reporting exhibiting the democratic domino theory sub-theme fell somewhere in the middle between the more fair-minded criticism and accusations that members of the Bush team were lunatics “who needed to have an analyst … and not a military one” (Marquard, 2002). Another example of the more critical extreme is evident in the sarcastic tone of a contribution to The New York Times from early 2003. “Wolfowitz’s version of the domino theory,” claimed the author Todd Purdham (2003),
has democracy as a contagion spreading through the Middle East after the (effortless)
conquering of Iraq. …state after state goes down with democracy, each falling on the
next with a gentle click. Establish Connecticut-on-the-Tigris, and the rest follows with an
inexorable logic of the kind that operates only in dreams and revelations. It is all, as Bush
would say, ‘faith based’.”

Many journalists merely brought up the so-called reverse or democratic domino theory within a
larger article that depicted the war in Iraq in a critical light. Others simply used a strategy where
by the term domino theory was used to trivialize the neoconservative plans as absurd on their
face without really delving into too much detail or fleshing-out their critiques. Paul Mulshine of
The Star-Ledger provides a case of a journalist conveying his perceptions about the inherent lack
of thoughtfulness and virtual silliness of the Bush Administration’s plans for Iraq. According to
Mulshine (Bush should consider his options, 2004),

A democratic Iraq, they believed, would put into motion a sort of reverse domino theory
in which democracies would rise all over the Mideast. Eventually women in tank tops
would be driving down the boulevards of Riyadh in convertibles. Nice theory, but the
Bush people seem to have made no effort to figure out just how this transition could be
accomplished.

Opposition Representation Three: Using the Domino Theory to Promote a Vietnam
Analogy

As seen in the previous two cases examined in this dissertation, one of the most prevalent
themes detected in the news reports used for this study of the role of the domino theory in the
U.S. news coverage of the war in Iraq was the effort by journalists to point out alleged
associations between the circumstances or Bush’s policies in Iraq and historical errors made by
past U.S. government leaders in Vietnam. The word Vietnam was seen over and over in articles
also mentioning the domino theory to discuss the situation in Iraq and appear to be a strategy that
created a historical analogy between the two foreign policy crises. By bringing up the topic of
Vietnam in reports otherwise dedicated to a discussion of Iraq, these writers either explicitly or
implicitly suggested that the Vietnam experience was somehow relevant to the situation in Iraq
for various reasons. Often these articles either suggested that the two wars were alike in some
way and that the Bush Administration was failing to respect the so-called lessons of the
country’s disastrous past experience in Southeast Asia. These mistakes and alleged Vietnam-
style American government dishonesty were seen as factors dragging the United States further and further into a Middle Eastern version of the Cold War-era quagmire. Much like the debates over American intervention in Kosovo and Bosnia in the U.S. news media, the popular geopolitics of news reporting on Iraq is also laden with the Vietnam discourse. In the 250 articles examined for this case study, the word “Vietnam” was also found in 54 percent (136/250) articles using the term “domino theory” in reports largely dedicated to the war in Iraq. The frequency of this pattern is reflected in Figure 7.6 (see below) which illustrates the strong association between the subject of Vietnam and the domino theory in America’s news coverage of Iraq in the source available in the *Lexus-Nexus* database used for this research.

![Articles Containing Vietnam Reference](image)

*Figure 7.6: Percentage of articles referring to the Vietnam War in discussion of war in Iraq, 2003-2007*

Also, like the other Post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy debates where the domino theory commonly appeared in the media, the reporting on the Iraq war that included a mention of Vietnam also exhibited a profoundly negative tone toward the notion of American involvement in the region. Once again, these findings conform to much of the current academic work on the role of the Vietnam discourse as a form of geopolitics which strongly indicate that the invocation of Vietnam in the context of foreign policy debates typically operate as an oppositional strategy against calls for greater U.S. military involvement in various crises around the world (Barthe, 2007; Kaplan, 2007; Paris, 2002; Robinson, 2004). This is likely because Vietnam was a profoundly traumatic U.S. foreign policy experience and the conflict evokes a number of negative cultural associations for many Americans. The domino theory is historically linked to
America’s involvement in Vietnam for obvious reasons so it makes sense that the catchphrase would appear in articles that exhibit a negative tone toward U.S. military involvement in places such as Iraq. As noted in earlier chapters, Roland Paris (2002, pp. 439-440) has pointed out how the “historical association between the domino theory and the Vietnam war” has been used as part of a rhetorical strategy by opponents of American interventionism in the past to create an analogy between the arguments for military action and Vietnam, thereby seeming to discredit them. The findings from this chapter provide another example of how the domino theory can operate as part of an oppositional discourse that challenges, rather than reinforces, justifications for military conflict.

Many of the authors explicitly used the domino theory as part of a discourse that introduced the association of Vietnam to the discussion of America’s war and occupation of Iraq. In an editorial titled “Domino theory goes into play in Iraq” John Farmer (2004) made this connection clear by writing,

Most comparisons between Iraq and the Vietnam War are pretty thin, even downright wrong. But one is right on the mark, the “domino theory” comparison. …It [Vietnam] was a misbegotten war. We know that now. But on paper, the “domino theory” seemed to make sense then in Vietnam just as it does now in Iraq to the Bush crowd. …The same kind of one-fate-fits-all “domino theory is the justification of the Bush administration in its rush to war in Iraq – especially following the failure to find any weapons of mass destruction (Farmer, 2004).

In the article, the columnist claims that the White House staff’s effort belief in an “Iraq version of the ‘domino theory’” seeking to initiate a democratization of the Middle East through an “unnecessary and ill-fated war” could cause President Bush to “be the “domino” who falls.” “It happened to Lyndon Johnson,” Farmer went on to say, “Could it happen now to George W. Bush?” The Bush Administration’s neoconservative policies about democratically transforming the Middle East were commonly depicted in news accounts as new versions of the Vietnam-era domino theory. This appeared as early as 2002 when a letter-to-the-editor in The Virginian-Pilot (Overtures of War are Like LBJ and Vietnam, 2002) wrote,

President Bush’s obsession with Saddam Hussein seems like the good ol’ days with LBJ and Uncle Ho. …the hawks of 1964 and 2002 sound eerily familiar. Name-change our current warriors – Cheney, Rumsfeld and Powell – with McNamara, Rusk, Taylor and
Bundy, and we have scary similarities with like rhetoric; “domino theory” vs. today’s “regime change.

Some writers simply stated the analogy in their titles before describing the supposed connections in greater detail in the text of the articles. Greg Parrish of the Seattle Weekly (2005) named his commentary “Today’s Domino Theory” and claimed,

Years ago, as cold warriors went about justifying America’s war in Southeast Asia, a common train of logic was known as the domino theory. …It was lunacy, of course. But that has not stopped neoconservatives, 40 years later, from espousing a similar sort of domino theory. This time, its democracy, not communism that is spreading. According to the Bush administration and its ideologues, establishing a beachhead of democracy in Iraq will force the rest of the despotic Middle East to mend its authoritative ways. The world didn’t work that way 40 years ago, and it doesn’t today” (Parrish, 2005).

Similarly, an editorial in The Bradenton Herald appeared under the banner “Bush’s Domino Theory: New Iraq Strategy Has Ring of Vietnam” (The Bradenton Herald, 2003) “Bush’s plan,” asserted the article, is,

...to make Iraq a centerpiece for democracy that will resonate throughout the Middle East, striking fear in the hearts of tyrants …the Soviet Union tried that in the 1960s and ‘70s. We called it the domino theory, and battling it kept us bogged down in Southeast Asian wars for 25 years. Now our role is reversed. We’re the superpower with our finger on the first domino, trying to get it to fall our way. We know what happened to the Soviet Union.

It was not only Bush’s efforts to encourage the spread of democracy that were linked to Vietnam using a mention of the domino theory in the news pieces explored in this research, his efforts to claim that terrorist threats to the American homeland were being confronted through a forward strategy that destroyed them in Iraq were as well. Articles exhibiting this theme began to appear more commonly a few years into the occupation when the White House began to shift its own rationales for war toward a greater emphasis on the need to deal with the festering danger of terrorism emanating from Iraq. By this point in the war, it was clear the there were no WMD in the country, a successful Iraqi democracy seemed nowhere on the horizon and incompetence and lack of planning by the U.S. government and military in the occupation had allowed Iraq to
become a haven for anti-American terrorist groups. In an article called “President’s talk sounds a lot like Vietnam oratory,” for example, the syndicated editorialist Richard Cohen wrote,

Iraq is beginning to look like Vietnam. The similarity is most striking in the language the president used. …Even a line such as we must ‘defeat them abroad before they attack us at home’ had a musty Vietnam-era sound to it. Whether it’s true or not, it is an updated version of the Domino Theory: If not Saigon then San Francisco. …I know Iraq is not Vietnam, but Tuesday night it [Bush’s speech] sure sounded like it (Cohen R., 2005).

Later that same year Drew Brown of the Saint Paul Pioneer Press wrote a piece under the title, “Rumsfeld wars of Islamic Superstate: Talk of ‘caliphate’ reminds some of Cold War ‘domino’ image.” “If U.S. forces leave too soon, Iraq will become a haven for terrorists and the base of a spreading Islamic superstate that would threaten the rest of the world, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said Monday,” wrote Brown before going on to say, “The message is similar to the domino theory U.S. officials used 40 years ago to muster support for the Vietnam War” (Brown, 2005). During the debate over the so-called “surge” in 2007 this comparison continued.

One letter printed in the San Antonio Express-News labeled “It’s Vietnam all over again” claimed “the ‘cut and run’ propaganda …is déjà vu again. The same was said during the Vietnam War – the domino theory – and today we are partners in trade” (Gomez, 2007). Another editorial said, “The Vietnam War was fought based on the domino theory, and the Iraq war is being fought on it as well: Namely, that terrorists will take over the world if we do not stand up to them now” (Digging out of the Iraq mess, 2007).

**Oppositional Sub-Representation One: The Lessons of Vietnam**

As seen in the appearance of the term domino theory in the discussions in America’s news on the crises in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s, the notion that the President was making a series of Vietnam-style mistakes that were dragging the country into another “quagmire” because he was not appropriately respecting the historical “lessons” of the American experience in Southeast Asia reappeared as prevalent themes in the case of Iraq as well. In fact, writers (or editors) regularly chose to make the case about the so-called “lessons” of Vietnam for Iraq clear right in the headlines for their articles and the word appeared again and again in the sources used for this research. Maureen Dowd’s contribution criticizing the war in March 2003 was placed under the title, “Relearning lessons of Vietnam.” In the op-ed she asked rhetorically,
Why is all this [the problems in Iraq] a surprise again? I know our hawks avoided serving in Vietnam, but didn’t’ they, like, read about it?,” before proceeding to claim, “…The hawks want Iraq to be the un-Vietnam. …This time the domino theory works in reverse, as repressive regimes in the Middle East fall in a chain reaction set off by a democratic Baghdad. Yet in just a week we’ve seen peace marches, world opinion painting us as belligerent and draining battlefield images” (Dowd, Relearning lessons of Vietnam, 2003).

The USA Today (USA Today, 2006) chose a similar title, “Vietnam’s lessons for Iraq,” for a 2006 article while Nancy Youssef of The News & Observer had a regular news article placed under the headline, “What’s wrong with U.S. strategy?; A retired general says the fatal flaw in Iraq policy is the failure to heed the lessons of Vietnam” (Youssef, 2007). Other editorials embedded the lessons theme deeper in their article content and/or suggested that lessons were not being respected by the White House because it has forgotten history. “Administration officials sound like idealists who’ve forgotten history when they promote the liberation of Iraq as the first in a series of dominoes that will bring democracy to the Mideast,” wrote Anita Creamer, “Adherence to the last American domino theory led us straight into the disastrous heart of Vietnam” (Creamer, 2003).

The discourse about Vietnam’s “lessons” regularly appeared in letters submitted by the American public to various papers around the country. On the eve of the invasion in 2003 the USA Today printed an article under the heading “On matters of war, let’s learn history” that discussed the divisions in the country in the 1960s over sending troops to Vietnam and the role of the domino theory for the groups supporting the war. “It appears that history is repeating itself in 2003,” claimed the writer, “Our country is again divided between those who feel we must eliminate a leader who has a supply of weapons of mass destruction and those who are opposed to sending troops to die for a cause that is not clear. It seems that once again we are not going to profit from the lessons of history” (Wilhm, 2003). In another example printed in the Sacramento Bee the letter stated, Regardless of what President Bush says, this military force in Iraq is going to be our new Vietnam fiasco. It’s going to cost us all tax dollars, dead Americans and loss of stature in the world arena, all over the alleged domino theory (Vietnam was communism; now it’s terrorism) that if we don’t fight them in the streets of Baghdad we will soon be fighting
battles in the streets of America. The government never learns from history, but the people of this nation will (Phillips, 2003).

Another piece in the *Birmingham News* with a title asserting “We must learn the lessons from history” pointed out alleged commonalities between the wars in Vietnam and Iraq wrote,

Both [wars] had their secretaries of defense who promoted the conflicts and their strategies. Both used the domino theory – if Vietnam fell, then all of Southeast Asia would go communist; and if Iraq was won, then all the Middle East would become democracies. But now you know the rest of the stories. If we fail to heed the lessons of history, we are bound to repeat the mistakes, such as tactics from Vietnam applied to the destruction of Iraq (Paolone, 2004).

Similarly, a letter appearing in the *Contra Costa Times* printed with the title “Forgetting Vietnam Lessons” and mentioning that there were “No domino theory in VN and no WMD in Iraq,” said that the country had once again failed to observe “some of the lessons learned in Vietnam” and “He who doesn’t learn the lessons of history repeat its mistakes.” “Iraq,” he said “will ultimately be lost. In the words of the great philosopher Yogi Berra, it’s ‘déjà vu all over again’” (Forgetting Vietnam Lessons, 2005).

**Oppositional Sub-Representation Two: The Vietnam-style Quagmire in Iraq**

In additions to the “lessons” of history strategy of rhetorical opposition to the war in Iraq, another prominent theme was the suggestion that Iraq had become a Vietnam-style quagmire that the U.S must somehow disentangle itself from. Some articles made this analogy obvious in both their headlines as well as their content. Byron Williams (or the editors) of the *Inside Bay Area* (Williams, 2007) simply named a column on the Iraq war, “The American quagmire known as Iraq” while Walter Pincus of *The Washington Post* editorial (Pincus, 2003) titled “A Quagmire? More Like a Presidential Fixation” suggested that Bush’s had ensnared the county in Iraq because of “ignorance,” “arrogance,” and “a willful disregard of facts” similar to Vietnam-era presidents. Ron Hutcheson of *Knight Ridder* forged an association between the White House rhetoric justifying the Iraq war and the domino theory by saying that the term was “finding new application in the war on terror” and proceeding to juxtapose a set of quotes by Presidents Johnson and Bush. He then quoted Senator Tom Harkin saying, “This may not be Vietnam but, boy, it sure smells like it” and noted that “Critics of President Bush’s Iraq policy say they are becoming concerned that the nation is headed for another quagmire, with equally disastrous
consequences” (Hutcheson, Is Iraq Another Vietnam? Some Seeing Parallels; Powell Dismisses Such Comparisons By Bush Opponents As ’Bizarre’, 2003). An editorial from The New York Times syndicated columnist Paul Krugman titled “The Vietnam Analogy” also promoted this argument against the war, saying,

Iraq isn’t Vietnam …But there are many parallels, and in some ways Iraq looks worse. …Many of the more moderate supporters of the war have already reached the state of quagmire logic: They no longer have high hopes for what we may accomplish, but they fear the consequences if we leave. …It’s a measure of how badly things have gone that now we’re being told we can’t leave because that would be a demonstration of American weakness. Again, the parallels with Vietnam are obvious. Remember the domino theory? (Krugman, 2004).

Oppositional Sub-Representation Three: The Vietnam-style Misrepresentations of the Bush Administration

The one relatively unique Vietnam-related oppositional theme that appeared in the sources of U.S. news coverage on this case was the accusation that the Bush Administration had engaged in Vietnam-style misrepresentations in order to justify the war in Iraq to the American public and the U.S. Congress. Washington Post columnist Richard Cohen was one of the earliest to use this approach in fall 2003 in an article called “Master of Fiction” where he attacked Vice-President Cheney for his role in pushing for war with Iraq at the White House. “Cheney,” wrote Cohen,

was a University of Wisconsin graduate student during the Vietnam era… [and paid little attention to] the incessant fudging, lying and misrepresentations of the Johnson administration – everything from concocted body counts to the discredited domino theory. Now Cheney has become a key player in another dismal effort to mislead the American people …It’s not good that the road to Baghdad was paved with deception (Cohen, Master of Fiction, 2003).

Other editorialists were more colorful in their assertion that the Bush administration had fooled the American people and their elected leaders into the Iraq war. One review of the “DVD of the week” (Errol Morris’ documentary “The Fog of War”) in the Seattle Weekly discussed the role of Robert McNamara and “the flat-out idiocy of the domino theory” before saying that it “prove[d] that sometimes, when a warmongering Texan liar in the grip of ideological delusion threatens
America, a man of wisdom and conscience is obliged to speak the truth and expose the folly. Colin Powell, have you seen The Fog of War?” (Appelo, 2004). Another review of this film in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette made a somewhat less harsh analogy in passing by pointing out the so-called “truths” of Vietnam for other crises. “…‘the domino theory’ and the Gulf of Tonkin incident,” he said, “…were demonstrably false – not unlike a similar pretext re: ‘weapons of mass destruction’ in a place called Iraq” (Paris, 2004). Several of the writers (particularly letter writers) concerned with the alleged dishonesty of the Bush White House also thought it appropriate to mention the Gulf of Tonkin incident and/or the resulting congressional resolution that enabled President Johnson to escalate the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. A letter with the headline “Bush got the U.S. into a new Vietnam” printed by in the Charleston Daily Mail said,

I have serious concerns about the impossible quandary the Bush administration has gotten this government into. … There are similarities to Vietnam, like entering the war based on false allegations – the Johnson administrations falsehood about the attack on an American ship in the Gulf of Tonkin and the Bush administration about weapons of mass destruction and ties to al Qaida. …Thank god for those brave souls who stood up to Johnson and Nixon against the Vietnam War. They have been proven correct. The domino was proven wrong. Past administrations have been wrong and so is this administration... (Myers, 2004).

In a submission to another paper comparing the Iraq and Vietnam experiences that also mentioned the “lessons of history” the author claimed,

We lost [in Vietnam] because we went to war for false reasons (the so-called Gulf of Tonkin incident and the domino theory); we couldn’t tell friend from foe, and the resulting mass atrocities against civilians aroused widespread revulsion. The lessons of history [for Iraq]? Don’t go to war against a billion people on their own turf. Don’t fabricate reasons. Avoid slaughtering civilians” (Scott, 2004).

The quotes from these articles demonstrate several patterns in the way in which critics of the war in Iraq chose to harness the domino theory in their reporting or letters as a (or part of a) oppositional discourse the (re)presented various aspects of the Bush administration’s policies or rationales for the war and occupation in Iraq as analogous to various mistakes or misrepresentations made by past presidential administrations during the war in Vietnam.
Conclusions

The chapter has provided further evidence that during the coverage of many of the major foreign policy debates in the U.S. news media since the end of the Cold War the domino theory was often invoked as a (or part of a) discourse to re-interpret arguments for American military intervention around the world in a negative light. During the war and occupation of Iraq from 2003 to 2007 there was a significant resurgence in the use of the phrase domino theory by journalists in American news sources that appear in the *Lexus-Nexus* U.S. newspapers and wires database, much of it by reporters exhibiting a negative or critical tone toward the Bush administration’s policies in Iraq. This research has provided a detailed overview of the background to the American invasion seeking to depose Saddam Hussein’s regime and install a friendly liberal democratic government in Iraq and a general overview of the war and resulting occupation. The chapter also surveyed the role of neoconservatives and the neoconservative ideology in the Bush administration’s policies toward Iraq and political aspirations for a transformation of the Middle East initiated by the creation of a liberal democracy in Iraq. Furthermore, it briefly reviewed the geopolitics present in President Bush’s public rhetoric justifying the war and occupation and explored patterns that were prevalent in the text of articles covering the war that also utilized the phrase domino theory. The findings from this analysis indicate that the domino theory was seldom used by advocates of the war to rationalize the decision to invade Iraq. Rather, there was an overwhelming trend in which it was political opponents of the war and the Bush White House who chose to introduce the domino theory to the public debate.

As was the case during the American media coverage of the crises in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s, the decision to inject an association between the Iraq war and the domino theory seemed to have either been reflective of the way in which journalists perceived the circumstances in Iraq or, alternatively, their discursive strategy associating the Bush Administration’s policies with the discredited Vietnam-era metaphor. The association was most common in opinion-editorial columns and letters-to-the-editor although it did appear in conventional news sources as well that often used the quotes of White House critics to introduce the term to the content of their reporting. The majority of the journalism reviewed in this study suggested that Bush’s arguments justifying the war in Iraq were analogous to the Vietnam-era domino theory in various ways. Some writers implied or directly accused President Bush or other members of the White House
of relying on, or explicitly invoking, the domino theory in their public rhetoric, although only George Tenet is actually quoted using the term on a single occasion. The CIA director’s comments were made months after the term had already been associated with the White House in the popular geopolitics of the media. The comments appear to be unrelated to many of the news reports that link the domino metaphor to the Bush Administration’s rhetoric about alleged connections to terrorism or a potential democratization of the Middle East. There is no evidence provided in any of the articles substantiating the claim that Bush actually uttered the phrase although it was not uncommon for this notion to be presented to the American public as fact in the news.

As with the other cases examined in this research, most of the news sources in which the domino theory was utilized to re-present the Bush Administration’s policies or rhetoric toward Iraq exhibited a highly critical tone toward the war and occupation of the country. In the popular geopolitics of this U.S. media coverage, a series of representational strategies were harnessed to oppose the official White House geopolitics on the crisis. One of the novel tactics that appeared only in this case study was the tendency of writers to assert that the President Bush’s neoconservative-inspired vision of potentially democratizing the Middle East through his actions in Iraq was a “reverse” or “democratic” version of the domino theory. This term seemed to be utilized by many reporters to simplify, trivialize, or express various levels of skepticism toward the idea of initiating a democratic transformation of the region. Another tactic was to suggest that Bush as causing a domino effect through policies that had destabilized the Middle East. Other journalists included a reference to the Cold War domino theory in articles largely dedicated to a discussion of the Iraq war in order to create an association between Iraq and past American involvement in Vietnam. The strategy of introducing the topic of Vietnam to news coverage of the war in Iraq directly or indirectly fostered a perceived relationship between the two conflicts for newspaper readers. Many of the sub-themes that were utilized within the articles reproducing this Vietnam analogy in their oppositional geopolitics during the debate in America’s popular media during the Kosovo and Bosnia crises reappeared in the reporting on Iraq as well. For example, many writers claimed that President Bush and his foreign policy team were failing to heed the so-called lessons of America’s Vietnam-era experience and, as a result, had mired the country’s armed forces in a similar quagmire in the Middle East. Another new sub-theme was the
accusation that the Bush administration had engaged in Vietnam-style (e.g., Gulf of Tonkin) dishonesty in order justify the war to the American people.

This chapter provides evidence illustrating the manner in which journalist’s opposing certain government policies can influence the popular geopolitics of the American news media through the use of geopolitical rhetoric (e.g., the term domino theory) that then echoes throughout other forms of news and transforms the tone of the popular discourse on foreign policy crises. As in the cases of Kosovo and Bosnia, this oppositional strategy failed to dramatically shift the direction of U.S. policy toward Iraq and President Bush was able to launch his attack on Iraq and then maintain a large American military presence in the country throughout the remainder of his term in office. Nevertheless, this research has illustrated that the domino theory was often linked to certain public officials or their policies by the news media despite the fact that these individuals seldom (or never) actually used the phrase. Rather, the connection to the domino metaphor reflected that assumptions and views of the journalists although this was not always made clear to the public in their reporting. These findings from this chapter indicate that the conventional wisdom about the domino theory’s role as a geopolitical discourse that operates to justify aggressive interventionist policies by the U.S. government is not borne out by the actual content of news reporting on these crises. While there is strong evidence that the so-called domino theory was used by America’s leaders to rationalize and justify the country’s military involvement in Vietnam and Latin America, during the post Cold War-era the metaphor has most commonly been invoked as a (or part of a) oppositional discourse by the news media seemingly aimed at resisting interventionist policies by the country’s political leaders.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation explored how the American news media employed a well known geopolitical metaphor – the so-called domino theory – in its reporting on three major foreign policy crises facing the United States in the post-Cold War era in a way that framed the imaginative geographies in their news coverage for their readers. The three international issues that were most commonly discussed using references to the domino theory since 1989 in the dataset used for this research were: the civil war and humanitarian disaster in Bosnia in the 1990s; the ethnic conflict in Kosovo in 1999; and the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq. This project involved a series of three analytical case studies in order to assess, document, and illustrate themes in the U.S. media’s discussion of these foreign affairs issues that relied on the domino theory in the title or content of their reporting during the following study periods: Bosnia (from 1993-1995); Kosovo (1999); and Iraq (from 2003-2007). In the U.S. news media’s coverage of these three international conflicts that also employed references to the domino theory, there were heated political debates in the country over whether or not the U.S. should engage in (or continue) a military intervention in these regional conflicts. This research project sought to investigate the way in which the media harnessed the domino theory as a geopolitical discourse to frame the coverage produced for their audiences.

To conduct this research, this study relied on U.S. news articles and wires using the term “domino theory” in their title or content derived from a search of the *Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe, U.S. Newspapers and Wires* database as its data source. I contend that this database is representative of the wider U.S. news media because it contains the printed reports and wires from over 650 separate news organizations of varying audience size and type with a broad geographic distribution across the larger U.S. media market. As pointed out in earlier chapters, there is a well-established scholarly precedent in the social sciences for the use of source materials obtained through searches of *Lexus-Nexus* for studies of (geo)political discourse in various academic disciplines, including geography (Dittmer, 2003) and political communications (Paris, 2002). The collection of news pieces employing the term “domino theory” in their title or
content derived from the *Lexus-Nexus* database was then utilized as the material evidence for analytical studies on each of the three case studies conducted in this dissertation using qualitative (and, to a lesser degree quantitative) thematic text analysis employing an approach informed by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Using grounded theory-based thematic text analysis, I systematically reviewed each individual article to compile data for common themes and patterns that were apparent across the data sources for each case study. In the chapters dedicated to each case study, I then presented qualitative (and often quantitative) evidence substantiating the presence and prevalence of each theme and then illustrated each in their specific context with a series of exemplar quotes.

Theoretically, this research project was situated within the larger project in political geography seeking to promote a critical form of geopolitics. As such, it was influenced by a familiarity with the way in which the domino theory was harnessed by U.S. officials as a geopolitical discourse during the Cold War to further certain foreign policy agendas and interventionist policies in Southeast Asia and Central America as well as the existing scholarship in critical geopolitics on the role of the media as an institutional site involved in the active (re)production of geopolitical knowledge about the world (Dittmer, 2003; Dodds, 2000; O’Sullivan, 1982; O’Sullivan, 1996, O’Sullivan, 2001; Sharpe, 1993). As illustrated in Chapter One of this dissertation, the scholarly literature on the domino theory and popular geopolitics led me to anticipate that references to the domino theory in the rhetoric of news articles would likely promote certain political perspectives and that the term may be employed by journalists to shape the presentation of the imaginative geographies constructed for their readers. This research helped to provide a theoretically informed basis for the research methods utilized in this study.

This dissertation assessed the role of the domino theory as a geopolitical discourse used by journalists to paint certain portrayals of world events in the U.S. media’s coverage of these specific foreign policy issues. This involved the investigation, documentation, and illustration of the manner in which the domino theory was injected into the popular geopolitics of American news reporting by journalists who chose to utilize the term in a way that colored their depictions of various foreign policy issues being discussed at the time in the United States media in order to address the research concerns outlined in Chapter One and Chapter Four of this dissertation. These research questions were aimed at investigating a number of important issues on this topic. I sought, for example, to assess how the term “domino theory” was employed in the U.S. news
media’s coverage in the portrayals of the aforementioned crises in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Iraq to explore how the metaphor may have operated to promote certain political policies or perspectives. I was interested in assessing whether or not articles referring to the domino theory in their title or content typically exhibited an overall tone that was negative/critical or positive toward policies advocating potential (or ongoing) involvement of the American military in conflicts around the world. Next, I examined the content of the articles to determine who (e.g., the news writers, U.S. government officials, academics, etc.) typically introduced the domino theory to the discussions contained in the reporting. Furthermore, this research also sought to discern if this conformed with who was portrayed as having invoked the metaphor in the text of the reports and if any evidence (such as a direct quote) was provided to substantiate this association in the news reports or whether or not this seems to have merely reflected the perception or claims of the individual journalists. I also wanted to distinguish patterns or characteristics in the types of articles (e.g., conventional news, opinion-editorial pieces, letters-to-the-editor, etc.) that contained references to the domino theory in their coverage of these international crises. And finally, I tried to detect and document common themes or associations that were prevalent in articles using the domino metaphor in order to illustrate how they operated within the media’s discourse embedded in its news reporting on these three foreign affairs conflicts. The collective results of the three case studies undertaken in this dissertation answer each of these research questions and established the conclusive findings outlined in the next section of this chapter.

**Summary of Findings**

The review and documentation of the U.S. news media’s discourse on the three case studies in this research reveal the following collective findings on the research questions for this dissertation. These conclusions substantiated the original thesis for this dissertation that the so-called domino theory was a way in which American news writers perceived and/or chose to represent world affairs issues as part of an oppositional discourse that most commonly operated to promote certain perspectives or agendas and that it is possible to identify, document, and illustrate patterns in how the term was employed for these purposes. One interesting feature of these findings was their remarkable consistency across all of the cases explored in this dissertation in certain themes although there was also a degree of variability that was exhibited in the media’s coverage on each individual topic. This evidence contained in this project
established that, at least in the context of the U.S. news media’s coverage of Bosnia (from 1993-1995), Kosovo (1999), and Iraq (from 2003-2007) in the *Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe, U.S. Newspapers and Wires database*, the conventional view that the domino theory operates as a geopolitical discourse that serves to rationalize and/or justify policies advocating American military interventions around the world is not borne out by the actual content of U.S. news reporting on these three crises. While it is widely known that the metaphor was employed by America’s leaders during the Cold War-era to promote the country’s military involvement in Vietnam and Central America, in these post-Cold War-era cases, the domino theory was most commonly invoked as an oppositional discourse by U.S. journalists who expressed a critical or negative tone toward the interventionist policies advocated by the country’s political leadership.

In fact, this study demonstrated that American news articles invoking the domino theory in their coverage of these international conflicts used the phrase as a (or part of a) discourse that re-interpreted arguments for military intervention in an overwhelmingly negative light. The majority of these news sources that referred to the domino theory in their title or body examined in this study exhibited a highly critical or negative tone toward the potential (or ongoing) American military involvement in these regional conflicts. These studies found that 63 percent of the articles discussing Bosnia, 82 percent of the articles Kosovo, and 67 percent of the articles on Iraq exhibited an openly negative tone toward policies of military interventionism in these crises while less than 8 percent in each case expressed a positive or supportive tone. In fact, the evidence from these analyses indicates that the domino theory was seldom used by advocates of American military involvement in Bosnia, Kosovo or Iraq. This finding directly contradicts the claims of hundreds of news accounts reviewed in this study that the domino theory was being employed to promote interventionist polices. It also seems to contrast with the conventional view that the domino metaphor is most commonly harnessed to rationalize and legitimize such policies by American officials and their political supporters. These conclusions contribute to a better understanding of the flexibility with which this geopolitical metaphor can be manipulated as a discourse to promote widely varying policy agendas.

Furthermore, this research illustrated that there was little (or, more commonly no) evidence in these news reports documenting that the domino theory was commonly employed by advocates of U.S. involvement in the conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo, or Iraq. Rather, it was found that while the surface content of many articles fostered an impression (or explicitly claimed) that
certain government officials (such as presidents Bill Clinton or George W. Bush) and/or their political supporters were relying on the domino theory in their policy formulation or rhetoric toward these crises, that it was the journalists who seem to have introduced the domino theory into the media’s popular geopolitics on these topics. In fact, there is no evidence provided in any of the articles examined in this dissertation that substantiates the assertion by many of these reporters that either Clinton or Bush uttered the term domino theory to justify their policies despite the fact that this claim was often presented to the American public as fact in the content of news. In hundreds of articles reviewed for this project, only one public official from either of these administrations was directly quoted invoking this term without the topic first being introduced by a journalist’s explicit questioning referring to the domino metaphor and this occurred only on a single occasion. This one instance was in February 2003 when George W. Bush’s CIA Director, George Tenet, issued a warning during a congressional testimony about the danger of WMD proliferation. “The domino theory of the 21st century,” asserted Tenet, “may be nuclear” (U.S. Department of State, 2003). This quote, however, appeared well over six months after news reports surfaced associating Bush White House officials with the domino theory. The testimony also appeared unrelated to the majority of articles invoking the domino theory in their coverage on the war and occupation of Iraq which instead seemed to apply the metaphor to the Bush Administration’s rhetoric about the threats of international terrorism or the possibility of a democratic transformation of the Middle East initiated in Iraq. Rather, references to the so-called domino theory in these reports seemed to be reflective of the way in which the news writers themselves perceived and/or chose to represent their coverage on these topics or reinterpret the policies or rhetoric of others (with whom they typically appeared to disagree) as a (or part of a) discourse opposing interventionist policies in these three regional conflicts. Nevertheless, the authors of these news reports consistently implied, or explicitly claimed, that members of both White Houses were relying on, or invoking, the association between the policy arguments (and policies) of both the Clinton and Bush administrations and the domino theory. Based on the available evidence contained in the data sources for this study, it appears that the domino theory originated in the media rather than the government officials to whom it was commonly attributed. This finding demonstrates that the domino theory was overwhelmingly introduced by journalists in their coverage rather than the government officials to whom the metaphor was often linked to (or associated with) in these reports. It also contradicts the assertions (or
suggestions) made in hundreds of articles analyzed in this study that the metaphor was harnessed by those advocating U.S. military interventionist policies in Bosnia, Kosovo or Iraq.

The oppositional discourse relying on references to the domino theory often relied on a series of representational strategies that operated to challenge the notion of an American military involvement in these regional conflicts by re-presenting the policies or rhetoric of those advocating interventionist policies to their readers in a critical light. The most common tactic was the tendency for articles to invoke the domino theory to inject the topic of America’s past involvement in Vietnam into the discussion contained in articles otherwise dedicated to coverage of Bosnia, Kosovo, or Iraq. In well over half of the reports on each of these foreign crises (66 percent of articles on Bosnia, 63 percent of reports on Kosovo, and 54 percent of the pieces on Iraq), the news authors somehow found a way to make allusions to Vietnam in the title or body of articles on these more recent foreign affairs issues. This representational strategy typically relied on the use of the domino metaphor to help foster a (largely negative) historical analogy between America’s past in Southeast Asia and the situations in these post-Cold War international crises, thereby implying to news readers that the events were somehow similar and that Vietnam was relevant to the discussion of these conflicts in the Balkans or Iraq. This discourse produced a perceived linkage for their audiences between the U.S. military involvement in the Balkans or Iraq and historical errors allegedly committed by past American leaders in Vietnam or suggested that the characteristics of these post-Cold War American interventions were somehow similar to the negative experiences of the country’s past involvement in Southeast Asia.

As revealed in each of the chapters illustrating the findings of the case studies undertaken in this dissertation, this pattern conforms to the existing scholarly literature on the role of the Vietnam discourse in resistance to policies of military intervention found in a number of other studies (Barthe, 2007; Kaplan, 2007; Paris, 2002; Robinson, 2004). The authors’ research on this topic has demonstrated how the Vietnam analogy has operated in the context of various international crises facing U.S. officials to justify arguments, not for military action, but instead for inaction. The collective evidence from all three case studies in this dissertation further substantiates this pattern by illustrating how opponents of these U.S. interventions in each of these cases used the domino theory as a discursive vehicle to link the policies, groups, or individuals they opposed with the supposed failures of America’s past involvement in Vietnam. Various representational sub-themes were prevalent in articles that re-produced the Vietnam
association in their coverage on these foreign crises. The most common of these sub-representations was the assertion that both Clinton and Bush, through their policy decisions during these crises, threatened to (or had) entangle(d) the country in Vietnam-style quagmires in either the Balkans or Iraq. In the coverage on Bosnia, news authors claimed that President Clinton, a man with little military experience who had actively avoided (or “dodged”) the military draft, had ignored the lessons of Vietnam and mired the U.S. in a far away conflict where there were no vital U.S. strategic interests. During the Kosovo crisis in 1999, journalists suggested that Clinton, much like Vietnam-era presidents such as Lyndon B. Johnson, had mismanaged diplomatic and military policies toward the former Yugoslav province and dragged the country into another Balkan quagmire. Many of these themes reappeared in the U.S. news media’s discourse on the Bush Administration’s war and occupation of Iraq. In this case, writers regularly asserted that the Bush White House had failed to heed the so-called lessons of America’s Vietnam-era experience and, as a result, entangled American forces in the Middle East. One novel sub-representation that appeared in the news coverage on Iraq was the accusation that Bush’s Vietnam-style (e.g., Gulf of Tonkin) misrepresentations had plunged the United States into a similar quagmire in Iraq.

Although allusions to Vietnam dominated the oppositional discourse relying on the domino theory in the U.S. media’s news coverage on the conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq, other representations were also invoked to shape the tone of reporting on these topics as well. For example, in the reports on both Bosnia and Iraq, writers suggested that the (supposedly) misguided policies of Clinton or Bush, respectively, could (or already had) produce(d) the very domino effect of instability in these regions that their interventions were aimed at preventing. During the political debate over a Kosovo intervention in the U.S. media in 1999, some journalists tried to employ the metaphor to challenge the Clinton Administration’s decision to use force in Kosovo by accusing the President of moral and/or policy inconsistency since he wasn’t intervening to stop every other “domino effect” around the world. This use of the domino metaphor implied that the U.S. should avoid involvement in Kosovo since Clinton had not also done so in other similar crises (e.g., Ceylon, Rwanda, Sudan, etc.) during his time in office. In the American news coverage on the U.S.-led war and occupation of Iraq, one novel representational strategy appeared that referred to the Bush Administration’s neoconservative inspired efforts to democratically transform the Middle East by fostering a liberal democracy in
Iraq as a “reverse” or “democratic” domino theory. As noted in Chapter Seven, this use of the phrase was largely as a rhetorical vehicle that seemed aimed at trivializing, scorning, or expressing various levels of skepticism toward Bush’s goal of policies toward Iraq and the wider Middle East.

The overwhelming majority of articles reviewed in this study that employed the domino theory in their coverage of the conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq were either opinion-editorial columns or letters-to-the-editor. In fact, at least 75 percent of these articles clearly fit into one of these two categories of article type. Although the data from all three case studies reveals that it was much less common for conventional journalists to utilize references to the domino theory in their reporting on these foreign affairs issues, the metaphor did appear in many traditional news reports as well during the coverage of all three topics. While these conventional journalists sometimes personally utilized the term in their reporting, it was more prevalent for them to employ a strategy that injected the domino theory into the content of their articles through the judicious use of direct quotes from various officials or “experts” who were critical of interventionist policies. Through this selective use of quotes, members of the media (intentionally or unintentionally) reintroduced this geopolitical metaphor into the popular discourse and shaped the presentation of news on foreign issues conveyed to their readership while maintaining a pretense of journalistic objectivity. By exposing this pattern, this dissertation contributes to our understanding of the U.S. news media’s role in conditioning the discourse of geopolitical issues through the selective use of certain quotes, facts, and representations in the content of their articles.

In sum, the collective findings of this project contribute to a better understanding of how the domino theory was used as a geopolitical discourse in the post-Cold War era by those in the American news media whose reporting largely expressed opposition toward interventionist policies by the U.S. government in these three foreign crises. By filling this void in the existing scholarship on the topic, this dissertation shed light on aspects of the media’s role as an institutional site responsible for the production of popular geographical knowledge about the world for the general public and the way in which certain forms of geopolitical rhetoric can play in their presentation of world affairs. Interestingly, the employment of the domino theory in the U.S. news media’s discourse on foreign affairs in this reporting failed to actually prevent Clinton or Bush from implementing and maintaining their policies of military intervention in the Balkans.
or Iraq. Nevertheless, this study deepens our understanding of the role of the domino theory in the discourse on foreign affairs during the period from 1989 through 2009. The conclusions of this research should be of significance to those who are interested in exploring the news media’s importance as an institutional site implicated in the active production and dissemination of popular geopolitical knowledge about international politics.

**Future Research Opportunities**

While this dissertation has addressed each of the questions outlined at the initiation of the study, a number of potential opportunities exist for future research on issues related to aspects of this topic that could build on the conclusions of this project. Later studies could explore, for example, how references to the domino theory were utilized in the discourse on foreign affairs in the wider media (e.g., broadcast news sources, international news organizations, etc.) beyond the sources available in the *Lexus-Nexus Academic Universe, U.S. Newspapers and Wires* database. Such studies could investigate the possibility that the domino metaphor was consistently harnessed differently (or similarly) in the imaginative geographies produced by other types of media or journalistic organizations. Since this study was confined to an analysis of the way the specific phrase “domino theory” was invoked as a (or part of a) geopolitical discourse in U.S. newspaper and wires, another potential research opportunity would be a more expansive study that explores all references to the domino metaphor (i.e., domino effects, dominoes, etc.) in the representations of foreign affairs topics in the popular media. It is possible that journalists’ use of the domino metaphor in these other ways in their reporting will contrast with (or adhere to) the patterns identified in this dissertation.

One of the clearest avenues for future study would be a project that carries this research forward from the date in which the study period for this dissertation concluded (2009) to the present to see if an analysis of the news coverage on more recent events conforms to (or varies with) the findings detected and illustrated in this study. Since the end of 2009, the domino theory has been regularly employed in the U.S. news media’s coverage of various foreign affairs issues and political debates, including, for example, the ongoing war and U.S. occupation of Afghanistan, the regional problem with piracy off the Horn of Africa, and the political demonstrations and instability that erupted across the wider Middle East in early 2011. U.S. President Barack Obama’s decision to escalate American military involvement in Afghanistan by
deploying thousands of additional troops to the country in early 2009, in particular, resulted in a corresponding surge in critical news reports referring somehow to the domino theory (e.g., Cole, 2009). Since each of these international crises has provoked numerous articles in the U.S. news media discussing the wisdom of ongoing or potential American military or diplomatic interventions in these regional crises that have also made allusions to the domino theory, it would be enlightening to see if the patterns revealed in this dissertation also apply in the media’s coverage of these issues. Any of these projects would help to determine if the findings of this study can be generalized to varying international issues, alternative sources or datasets, and other time periods or whether they are confined to the specific cases and data sources in this research project. The pursuit of these potential research opportunities would build on this dissertation’s findings and make a contribution to our understanding of the ongoing role of the domino metaphor as a form of geopolitical rhetoric and the way in which journalists employ these types of metaphors to frame the popular geopolitics presented to the audiences in the content of their reporting. In contemporary U.S. society, the popular media (especially the broadcast and popular media) enjoys a paramount role as perhaps the most significant source of geographical knowledge for most Americans about the world. Because of this, it is important to pursue future research that seeks a better understanding of how the geopolitical representations produced and disseminated from these institutional sites shape the portrayals of the world that are mediated to the American people.
APPENDIX A

LEXUS-NEXUS, U.S. NEWSPAPERS AND WIRES DATABASE

The U.S. Newspapers and Wires group source contains the following list of:

1) newspapers published in the United States and

2) wire services where more than 60% of the stories originate in the United States.

- Accord Fintech
- Advertising Age
- Advertising Age Creativity
- ADWEEK
- afaqs.com
- Agent Sales Journal
- Aircraft Value News
- Airline Business Report
- Airport Security Report
- Air Safety Week
- Alameda Times-Star (Alameda, CA)
- Alootechie.com
- American Agent & Broker & AABBreakingNews
- American Artist
- American Banker
- American Health Line
- American Time
- Amusement Business (VNU)
- Animation Xpress
- An Indian Journey
- Ann Arbor News (Michigan)
- Apparel Online
- Architectural Lighting
- Architecture
- Arizona Capitol Times
- Arkansas Democrat-Gazette
- ASCRIBE Newswire
- Associated Press Financial Wire
- Associated Press Online
- ATM and Debit News
- Auto Monitor
- Automotive News
- Automotive News Europe
- Automotive News German Auto Industry Newsletter
- AutoWeek
• Creators Syndicate
• Credit Union Journal
• Credit Union Times & CUTBreakingNews
• Criticas
• CRNtech
• CT's Pipeline
• CT's Voice Report
• CT Reports
• Custom Builder
• CXOToday.com
• Daily Journal of Commerce (Portland, OR)
• Daily News (New York)
• Daily Outlook Afghanistan
• Daily Variety
• Dallas Observer (Texas)
• Dataquest
• Dayton Daily News
• DCD Business Report
• De Baca County News
• Defense Daily
• Defense Daily International
• Deming Headlight (New Mexico)
• Denver Westword (Colorado)
• Deseret Morning News (Salt Lake City)
• Digital Learning
• Discover America’s Story
• Display & Design Ideas
• Dixie Contractor
• Dodge County Independent-News
• Dolan Publications
• domain-b
• DQ Channels India
• Drug Discovery and Development
• E&E News PM
• East Bay Express (California)
• Eastern Express Times (Pennsylvania)
• ECN
• Economic & Political Weekly
• Economic Challenger
• Editor & Publisher Magazine
• Edmonds Beacon (Washington)
• Education Week
• eGov
• eHealth
• Electronic Business
• Electronic Chemicals News
• Electronic Engineering Times
• Electronic Gaming Business
- Grand Rapids Press (Michigan)
- Graphic Arts Monthly
- Greenwire
- Gulf Shipper
- Haxtun-Fleming Herald (Colorado)
- HD/Studio
- Health Data Management
- Helicopter News
- Herald News (Passaic County, NJ)
- Himalayan Times
- Hollis Brookline Journal
- Holmes County Herald
- Home Equity Wire
- Home Textiles Today
- Hong Kong Government News
- Hospitality Design
- Hotels
- Houston Press (Texas)
- Huntsville Times (Alabama)
- i4d
- Idaho Falls Post Register
- Illinois Legal Times
- Images Retail
- Impact
- Impressions
- Incentive
- India Business Journal
- India Insurance Review
- Indian Express
- Indian Patents News
- Indiantelevision.com
- India Public Sector News
- Indonesia Government News
- Industrial Distribution
- Industrial Maintenance and Plant Operation
- Information Bank Abstracts
- InformationWeek
- InfoWorld
- Inland Valley Daily Bulletin (Ontario, CA)
- Inside Bay Area (California)
- InsideCounsel
- Inside Digital TV
- InstaBlogs
- Insurance & Technology
- Insurance Networking & Data Management
- Insurance Networking News
- Intelligencer Journal/Lancaster New Era (Pennsylvania)
- Intelligencer Journal/New Era (Lancaster, Pennsylvania)
• Interior Design
• InternetWeek
• Investment Advisor & IABreakingNews
• Investment News
• Investor's Business Daily
• Investrend
• IRA Bank Wire
• Islamic Finance News
• ISO&Agent
• Ivanhoe Times (Minnesota)
• Jackson Citizen Patriot
• JCK-Jewelers Circular Keystone
• Jersey Journal (New Jersey)
• Journal of Commerce
• Journal Record Legislative Report (Oklahoma City, OK)
• Kabul Press
• Kalamazoo Gazette (Michigan)
• Kansas City Daily Record (Kansas City, MO)
• Kashmir Observer
• Kirkus Reviews
• Kitchen & Bath Business
• Land Letter
• Las Vegas Review-Journal
• Latah Eagle
• LA Weekly
• Lawyers USA
• Learning Quarterly
• Legally India
• Legal News Line
• Lewiston Morning Tribune
• Library Journal
• Library Journal's Reviews
• Life Insurance Services Selling
• Lincoln Journal Star (Nebraska)
• Liquid
• Logistics Management
• Long Beach Press-Telegram (Long Beach, CA)
• Long Island Business News (Long Island, NY)
• Los Angeles Business Journal
• Los Angeles Times (most recent 6 months)
• Lowell Sun (Lowell, MA)
• Mabel/Harmony News-Record (Minnesota)
• MacReport/eTeligis
• Madison County Record
• Mail Today
• Managed Services Insider
• Management Compass
• Management Next
• Manufacturing Business Technology
• Marin Independent Journal (Marin, CA)
• Marketing Y Medios
• Marketwire
• Marwar
• Maryland Gazette
• Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly
• Massachusetts Newswire
• Mattawa Area News (Washington)
• McClatchy-Tribune Business News
• McClatchy-Tribune News Service
• McKenzie River Reflections (McKenzie Bridge, Oregon)
• Media Business
• Media Industry Newsletter
• MediaWeek
• Medical Buyer
• Men's Health (India)
• Mermigas on Media
• Merrimack Journal (New Hampshire)
• Metropolitan News Enterprise
• MGS Architecture
• Miami New Times (Florida)
• Michigan Contractor and Builder
• Michigan Lawyers Weekly
• Midnight Trader
• Midwest Contractor
• MiMegasite
• Min's Advertising Report
• MIN's B2B
• Mississippi Business Journal (Jackson, MS)
• Mississippi Press
• Missouri Lawyers Media
• Mobile Register (Alabama)
• Modern Healthcare
• Modern Materials Handling
• Modern Physician
• Money Today (Contify.com)
• Monterey County Herald (CA)
• Mortgage Servicing News
• Mortgage Technology
• Mukilteo Beacon (Washington)
• Multichannel News
• Multi-Housing News
• Music Industry Newswire
• Muskegon Chronicle (Michigan)
• National Jeweler
• National Mortgage News
• National Underwriter Life & Health/Financial Services
• National Underwriter Property & Casualty/Risk & Benefits Management Edition
• NBM & CW
• Network World
• New England Construction
• Newhouse News Service
• New Jersey Lawyer
• New Orleans CityBusiness (New Orleans, LA)
• News & Record (Greensboro, NC)
• News Bites US Markets
• Newsday (most recent 6 months)
• New Times, Inc. publications
• New Times Broward-Palm Beach (Florida)
• New York Observer
• New York Sun
• North Carolina Lawyers Weekly
• NRI Achievers
• OC Weekly
• Omaha World Herald
• Origination News
• Oroville Mercury Register (California)
• Outdoor Asia
• Overdrive
• Pacific Builder and Engineer
• Pacific Shipper
• Pasadena Star-News (Pasadena, CA)
• Patent Circle
• Patriot News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania)
• Payments Source
• PC Quest
• Pensions and Investments
• Phoenix New Times (Arizona)
• Photo District News
• Pitch
• Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
• Pittsburgh Tribune Review
• Plant Engineering
• Plastics News (tm)
• Playthings
• Point-of-Purchase
• Portland Press Herald
• Potentials
• Power Politics
• Prepaid Trends
• Presentations
• Prevention (India)
• PR News
• PR Newswire
• Professional Builder
- Professional Remodeler
- PUBID:SDPNWS
- Public Opinion (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania)
- Publisher's Weekly Reviews
- Publishers Weekly
- Purchasing Magazine
- R & D
- Raleigh Extra
- RCR Wireless News
- RDS Business & Industry Selected Documents
- RDS Business and Management Practices - Selected Documents
- Religion News Service
- Republican-Leader (Preston, Minnesota)
- Research & ResearchBreakingNews
- ResourceInvestor
- Resource News International
- Restaurants and Institutions
- Retirement Income Reporter
- Reuters Health Medical News
- Rhode Island Lawyers Weekly
- Richmond Times Dispatch
- Riverfront Times (St. Louis, Missouri)
- Rocky Mountain Construction
- Roll Call
- Rotor & Wing
- Rubber & Plastics News
- Ruidoso News (New Mexico)
- Saginaw News (Michigan)
- Sales & Marketing Management
- San Antonio Express-News
- San Bernardino Sun (San Bernardino, CA)
- San Diego Union-Tribune
- San Gabriel Valley Tribune (San Gabriel Valley, CA)
- San Jose Mercury News (California)
- San Mateo County Times (San Mateo, CA)
- Sarasota Herald-Tribune
- Satellite News
- Satellite Today
- School Library Journal
- School Library Journal's Reviews
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- Securities Industries News
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- Send2Press
- Senior Market Advisor
- Sentinel & Enterprise (Fitchburg, Massachusetts)
- SF Weekly (California)
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• Sioux County Index Reporter (Hull, Iowa)
• SmarTrend
• SourceMedia Pubs
• South Bend Tribune
• South Carolina Lawyers Weekly
• Southeast Texas Record
• Space & Missile Defense Report
• Sporting Goods Business
• Sporting Goods Dealer
• Springfield Republican (Massachusetts)
• Spring Grove Herald (Minnesota) Spring Valley Tribune (Minnesota)
• SqueezeOC
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• St. Louis Daily Record/St. Louis Countian (St. Louis, MO)
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• Technology Decisions
• TechWeb
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• The Advocate (Baton Rouge, Louisiana)
• The Alamogordo Daily News (New Mexico)
• The Albuquerque Journal
• The Argus (Fremont, CA)
• The Associated Press
• The Associated Press Election Results (Historical)
• The Associated Press State & Local Wire
• The Atlanta Journal and Constitution
• The Augusta Chronicle
• The Austin American-Statesman
• The Baltimore Sun (most recent 6 months)
• The Banner (Bernice, Louisiana)
• The Berkshire Eagle (Pittsfield, Massachusetts)
- The Mecklenburg Times (Charlotte, NC)
- The Metropolitan Corporate Counsel
- The Minnesota Lawyer (Minneapolis MN)
- The Morning Call (most recent 6 months)
- The New York Post
- The New York Times
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- The Oakland Tribune (Oakland, CA)
- The Oklahoman
- The Oregonian
- The Original Irregular (Kingfield, Maine)
- The Palm Beach Post
- The Pantagraph
- The Patriot Ledger
- The Philadelphia Daily News (PA)
- The Philadelphia Inquirer
- The Pitch (Kansas City)
- The Plain Dealer
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christopher Whitaker was born at Eglin AFB in Florida in 1975. He graduated with an Associate in Arts from Tallahassee Community College in 1999 before entering The Florida State University where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in History in 2001. In 2001, he began graduate study in the International Affairs Program at The Florida State University where he studied European history with a regional emphasis in southeastern Europe. He graduated with a Master of Arts in International Affairs in 2003. In 2003, Christopher entered the Ph.D. program in the Department of Geography at The Florida State University where his research interests focused on political geography and critical geopolitics.

In fall 2008, Christopher accepted the position of Assistant Professor of Geography in the School of Behavioral and Social Sciences at Daytona State College. He serves as the Lead Professor for Geography and teaches courses in cultural and world geography. This position provides him with the opportunity to pursue his research interests in the critical exploration of the geopolitics crafted by American officials and the international news media.