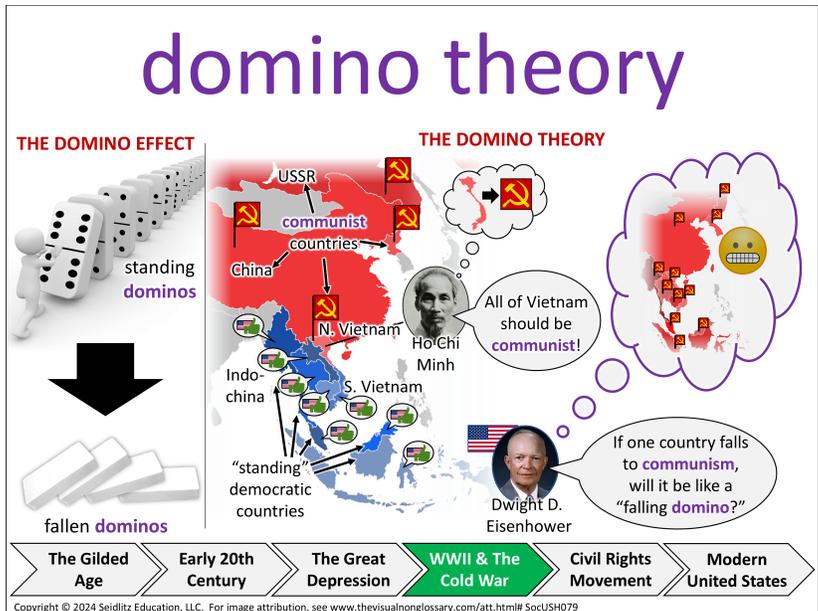


The Domino Theory

The purpose of the reading is to understand how the domino theory influenced U.S. actions during the Vietnam War and its connection to containment.

Pay Attention To:

- The meaning of the domino theory
- How the domino theory is connected to containment
- U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War
- Which countries became communist and which did not
- Why the domino theory only partly came true



During the Cold War, U.S. leaders were worried about the spread of **communist** governments. They believed that if one country became **communist**, the nearby countries might also become **communist**. This idea was called the **domino theory**. The name came from the way **dominoes** fall over when one is pushed down.

The **domino theory** was connected to a U.S. policy called **containment**. **Containment** meant stopping the spread of **communism** to new countries. In Asia, leaders like President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned that if South Vietnam became **communist**, other countries in the region could follow.

The Vietnam War showed how strongly the U.S. believed in the **domino theory**. America sent money, advisors, and later soldiers to help South Vietnam fight against North Vietnam. U.S. leaders thought this would stop **communism** from spreading across Southeast Asia.

In 1976, North Vietnam took over South Vietnam and made the whole country **communist**. The **domino theory** predicted that other nations would quickly follow.

Communism did spread to Laos and Cambodia, but countries like Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia stayed democratic. Strong governments, economic differences, and help from **allies** kept them from falling.

Even though the **domino theory** was not fully correct, it guided U.S. actions for many years. It helps us think about how fears of **communism** shaped the Vietnam War and U.S. foreign policy.

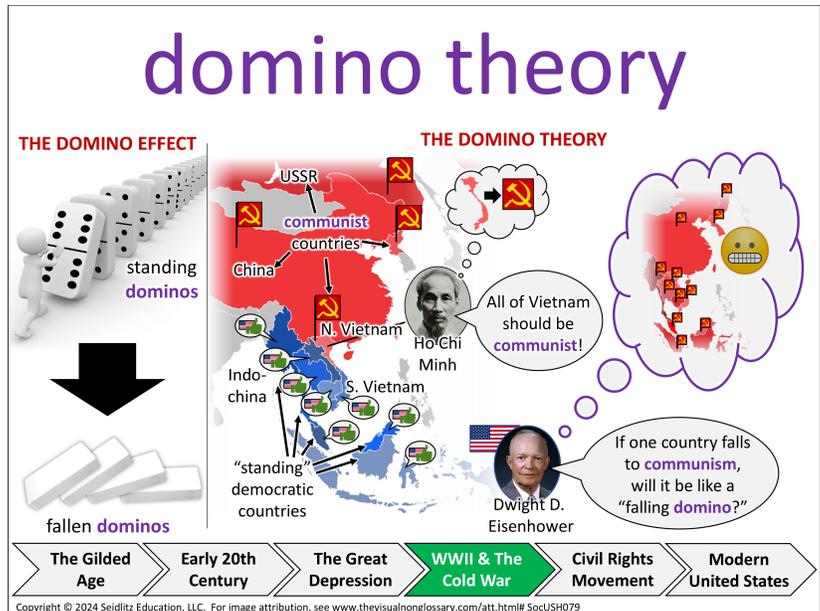


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During the Cold War, American leaders worried about the spread of **communist** governments. The United States believed that if one nation fell under **communism**, nearby countries might soon follow. This idea became known as the **domino theory**. The image of falling **dominoes** captured the belief that political change could trigger a chain reaction across an entire region.

The **domino theory** became closely linked with the policy of **containment**. **Containment** was the U.S. strategy to stop the growth of **communism** by resisting its spread beyond where it already existed. In Europe, this meant supporting **allies** against the influence of the Soviet Union. In Asia, it meant defending democratic governments, such as South Vietnam, from **communist** expansion. Leaders like President Dwight D. Eisenhower explained that if South Vietnam fell, other nations in Southeast Asia could also become **communist**.

The Vietnam War became the clearest example of U.S. action shaped by the **domino theory**. American officials believed that fighting to keep South Vietnam non-

communist would prevent a larger collapse across the region. The United States sent advisors, money, and eventually combat troops to support the South Vietnamese government. This involvement lasted for years and cost many lives.

In 1976, North Vietnam defeated South Vietnam, and the country was unified under **communist** control. According to the **domino theory**, this event should have caused nearby nations to also fall one by one. While **communism** spread to Laos and Cambodia, it did not take hold in other parts of Southeast Asia. Countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia avoided falling under **communist** control. Each of these nations had its own unique conditions, including stronger governments, different economic systems, and outside support from **allies**. These differences help explain why the “**dominoes**” did not all fall in the same way.

Even though the **domino theory** did not fully play out as predicted, it influenced U.S. decisions for decades. It shows how ideas about global threats can shape foreign policy and lead to wars far from home. Students today can still ask: Why did the **domino theory** hold true in some countries but not in others?

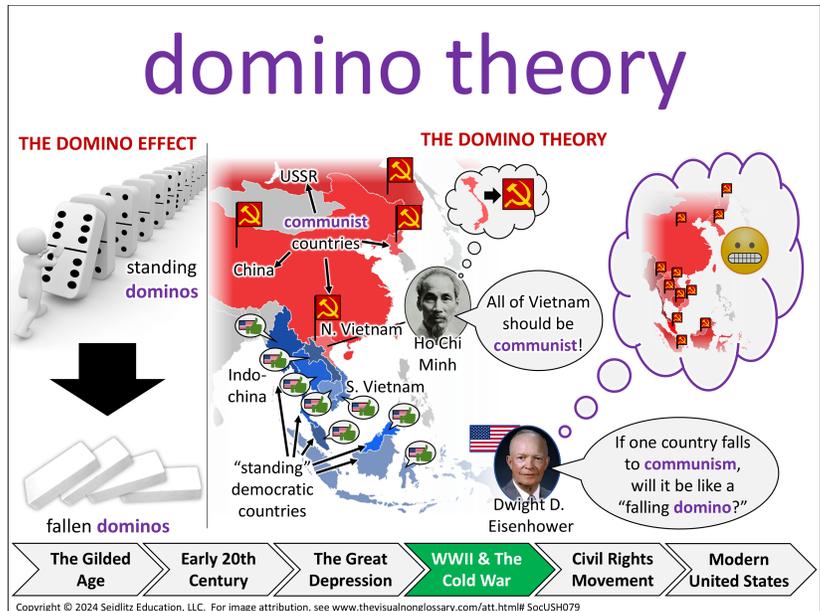


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The Cold War intensified fears that **communist** influence would spread beyond the Soviet Union and China. American officials argued that if one nation embraced **communism**, neighboring states would be pressured or persuaded to follow. This belief became known as the **domino theory**, a metaphor drawn from the toppling of **domino** tiles, where one fall leads to another.

The **domino theory** was closely tied to the broader policy of **containment**. **Containment** aimed to prevent the expansion of **communism** beyond its existing borders. In Asia, U.S. policymakers emphasized that defending South Vietnam was essential. President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned that the fall of South Vietnam might trigger a cascade of **communist** takeovers across Southeast Asia.

The Vietnam War reflected the depth of this concern. The United States committed vast resources, military advisors, economic aid, and eventually hundreds of thousands of combat troops, to ensure South Vietnam’s survival. Officials argued that the cost of involvement was justified by the risk of an entire region falling under

communist control.

Yet history proved more complicated than the **domino theory** predicted. After North Vietnam's victory in 1976, Laos and Cambodia also came under **communist** rule. However, other nations in Southeast Asia resisted. Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia maintained non-**communist** governments. Factors such as internal political stability, distinct national interests, and external support from **allies** limited the spread of **communism**. This outcome revealed the limits of applying a single metaphor to diverse international situations.

Although the **domino theory** did not fully materialize, it profoundly shaped U.S. foreign policy. It reveals how perceptions of global threats can drive intervention, shape **alliances**, and justify costly wars. The debate over the **theory** also highlights the tension between simplified predictions and the complex realities of international politics.

