CHAPTER THREE

The Crisis Context:

Anticipating Domestic Opposition over the Offshore Islands

Tensions in the Formosa Straits in the late summer of 1954 rose against the larger background of America's Cold War fear of Soviet-directed global communist expansion and Communist Chinese regional aggression.[1] After the Communist victory over the Nationalists on the mainland in the Chinese civil war in 1949, the defeated Nationalists, led by Chiang Kai-shek, took refuge on the island of Formosa (now more commonly referred to as Taiwan) and a series of offshore islands in close proximity to the mainland (which can be seen with the naked eye), in hopes of an eventual return. Because American decision makers saw Communist Chinese actions as directed by the Soviet Union, Communist aggression took on a broader global significance as part of the United States' grand strategy of containing Soviet expansion. With the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, the United States took explicit action to protect Formosa with President Harry Truman's order to the Seventh Fleet to interpose itself between Formosa and the mainland. By the time Eisenhower took office, Formosa had become an important bulwark (although not formalized through treaty) in containing communist expansion. Although the American commitment to protect the offshore islands remained intentionally ambiguous, any U.S. response to aggression against them would inevitably have had greater global consequences.

American policy toward Communist China also implied serious domestic implications, given the acrimonious debate over "who lost China" following the Communist victory in 1949. Support in Congress was strong, especially among the more conservative members of the Republican Party—Senator William Knowland (R, Calif.) in particular—for giving the Nationalists political and military assistance in their continuing effort to take back the mainland. So when the Communist Chinese took aggressive action in the late summer of 1954, more was at stake for American decision makers than several tiny islands.

On September 3, 1954, Communist Chinese forces began heavy shelling of the Nationalist-held coastal island of Quemoy, which raised the specter of a move against the whole chain of offshore islands. Given the importance of the Nationalists as an ally and the potential damage to American prestige from the loss of Quemoy or the other offshore islands, the Eisenhower administration decided that Formosa and the offshore islands, which also included the island of Matsu and the Tachen chain, needed to remain in friendly hands. But the United States also equally feared war over the islands, and even though all decision makers agreed that Formosa needed to be defended, a definite policy toward the offshore islands remained elusive. The administration considered a range of options, from publicly refusing to defend them to using nuclear weapons to protect them.

After intense deliberations, Eisenhower attempted to avoid either of these extremes by adopting a two-track policy: the dispute over the offshore islands would be submitted to the United Nations Security Council by a "neutral" third party, and in the meantime, the United States would negotiate a defense treaty with the Nationalists. In early 1955, to show its support for the administration's approach, Congress approved a resolution authorizing the president to use force to protect Formosa, the Pescadores, and "related territories of that area now in friendly hands." Despite these moves, tensions later grew in February, March, and April, with the administration seriously considering the use of nuclear weapons amid growing fears of an imminent Communist invasion of Formosa. War was averted, however, when in April 1955 Communist Chinese leader Chou En-lai offered to negotiate.[2] Although the offshore islands remained the center of intense concern through mid-1955, the case study considers the period when the Eisenhower administration initially debated and formulated a response (September, October, and November 1954—from the outbreak of the shelling to the beginning of negotiations on the mutual defense treaty).

Although the Communist threat to the offshore islands did not startle decision makers (Eisenhower later recalled in his memoirs that it "did not come as a complete surprise"), the administration was surprised by the scale of action and the timing of the assault, since they expected only minor skirmishes. In his August 5 report on the Far East, Dulles stressed that "diversionary" attacks on the offshore islands were possible, but he expected no major moves from the communists in the area, and instead thought that the Communist Chinese would make the offshore islands a diplomatic issue. When the mainland Chinese spoke threateningly about Formosa during the summer, State Department analysts interpreted their statements as propaganda moves to attract international attention. After the Communists engaged in minor artillery shelling of the islands, military analysts described it as merely a "pinprick" of little significance following the previous propaganda. Military observers also dismissed an August buildup across from Quemoy as not an immediate threat to the islands. But the larger scale of the Communist Chinese assault in September defied these expectations, as did the timing of the attack, since on August 18, military officials observed that no invasion of the islands in the area was anticipated in the near future. The end of the "invasion season," which lasted from April to mid-July, may have reinforced these conclusions.[3]

As they confronted these issues, public opinion limited the decision makers in significant ways and at critical junctures. Although concerns with American prestige and the reaction by U.S. allies largely determined choices during problem representation, as policymakers continued to ponder the matter, Dulles eliminated certain options because of potential public opposition as the administration sought to find a viable policy. When faced with the need to choose a policy, Eisenhower rejected the use of force to defend the offshore islands primarily because he feared public opposition. His uncertainty about potential allies' reactions also reinforced his misgivings about domestic politics. However, the administration concluded that the United States could not abandon the islands because of the implications for American prestige and the psychological impact of their loss on important allies. Limited by domestic and international pressure, the administration thus settled on an option they hoped would avoid the choice between fighting to protect the islands or abandoning them altogether. It chose instead to submit the issue to the United Nations. The administration also decided to negotiate a defense treaty with the Nationalists to counteract any possible political and psychological damage the UN resolution might cause.

Once committed to this policy, public opinion affected the timing, but not the substance, of the administration's implementation efforts. Although the public's influence fluctuated somewhat over the course of the case, public opinion served as an important constraint on the direction of policy after the shelling.

These actions have important implications for realist and Wilsonian liberal theories and the beliefs model. As I argued in chapter 1, of all the decision contexts considered, the realist expectation that decision makers will ignore public opinion when formulating policy is most likely to be correct in crises. Decision makers may, however, attempt to influence public opinion while implementing a decision. But Wilsonian liberals expect public opinion to influence policy in crises because decision makers may be held back by their anticipations of public opinion and perceptions of the opinion context. Since realist and Wilsonian liberal theories suggest different predictions in a case in which realist explanations are expected to predominate, this case provides a good opportunity to examine the realist and Wilsonian liberal claims concerning the influence of public opinion.

The beliefs model suggests a different pattern of public opinion's influence. If Eisenhower perceived at some point that public opinion would not support a particular policy option, especially an aggressive one, and could not be persuaded to support it, he would probably be constrained by the public's view. Otherwise, if he saw public support as unproblematic, he would have attempted to lead public opinion. Dulles would have been constrained by public opinion if he perceived public opposition, since crises usually do not allow the time necessary (in his mind) to lead public opinion. If public opposition was not an issue, he would have attempted to lead the public to support his preferred policy alternative.

As indicated after the analysis, public opinion's influence is coded for the entire case as being in the *strong constrain category*. Although the realist view does receive some support during the problem representation (when officials ignored it) and implementation (when they acted mostly to lead it) stages, realist theory cannot account for the significant constraining influence of public opinion found during option generation and policy selection. Since this case is most likely to support the realist view, this result provides significant evidence against the realist perspective. Instead, the profound influence of public opinion during option generation and policy selection implies support for the Wilsonian liberal theory. The pattern of behavior also confirms the influence of

the beliefs variable. Eisenhower's and Dulles's behavior was coded as a *supportive* influence, since their choices were *consistent* with expectations at every decision stage, and process tracing suggested a *causal* influence for Dulles's beliefs during option generation, policy selection, and implementation and for Eisenhower's beliefs during the critical policy selection stage.

Problem Representation: Setting the Agenda

When initially faced with the shelling, security interests dominated the decision makers' deliberations. The initial reports to Eisenhower stressed that the situation "may require basic decisions as a matter of urgency" given the threat of an impending Communist Chinese invasion and American strategic interests in the area.[4] The significance of this region put any overt threat to the offshore islands or Formosa on the administration's discussion agenda. The United States' position on the offshore islands remained decidedly vague, in large part because Eisenhower did not want to commit to defend them, nor did he want to exclude them from protection for fear of the message it would communicate to the Communists, Nationalists, and domestic sectors supportive of the Nationalists. The Communist Chinese attack caught the administration in the midst of a reevaluation of the American defense perimeter in Asia. Although they remained concerned about a Communist miscalculation of American resolve following the Indochina incident (see chapter 4) and troop withdrawals from the region based on the New Look defense strategy (see chapter 6), Dulles noted in a late August letter to the U.S. ambassador to Japan that U.S. policy in the region was still fluid and that the administration had not yet decided which of the islands to defend.[5]

Although the United States had made no public or private commitments to defend the islands, both Eisenhower and Dulles publicly recognized the importance of the offshore islands and their connection to the defense of Formosa. On August 17, Eisenhower stated that any attempt to cross the Formosa Straits to attack the main island of Formosa would have to run over the U.S. Navy, and he even observed that a possible invasion of Formosa would make a good target for atomic weapons. Although Dulles acknowledged that the military needed to make the final determination (the NSC had directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS] in mid-August to consider the viability of defending the offshore islands from a Chinese attack), he explicitly connected the off-

shore islands with U.S. interests on August 25 when he argued the offshore islands might, from a military standpoint, be "so intimately connected with the defense of Formosa that the military would be justified in concluding that the defense of Formosa comprehended a defense of those islands." In this context, the shelling of the offshore islands raised the possibility of a Communist Chinese invasion in the minds of decision makers and necessitated an expeditious decision regarding the administration's position.[6]

Problem Representation: Defining the Situation

The government did not immediately agree on a definition of the problem. Given the speed with which the events occurred and the various locations of key individuals (Dulles was attending an international conference in the Philippines, and Eisenhower was at his "summer White House" in Denver), policymakers reached their own conclusions about the threat confronting the administration.

Eisenhower defined the implications of the threat to the islands as physical and psychological and thought that the security of Formosa was intimately connected with the fate of the offshore islands. In August, he stated that he "had imagined [the offshore islands] were vital outposts for the defense of Formosa."[7] He recalled later that the Communist Chinese shelling posed a threat to both the offshore islands, on the one hand, and Formosa and the Pescadores, on the other, because the Nationalists' possession of them made an amphibious invasion of Formosa more difficult. During later discussions, however, Eisenhower stressed the islands' psychological importance to the Nationalist Chinese rather than their physical value, mentioning later that the islands meant "everything" in terms of morale for the Nationalists.[8]

Since Eisenhower saw allied support for American regional policy as vital, he also worried about how American allies, particularly the British, would perceive and react to the shelling and feared that an aggressive American response might drive a wedge between the United States and its international friends.[9] At the August 18 NSC meeting, he expressed his feeling that unilateral American involvement in a large regional war would be disastrous and speculated that the United States might even lose it if allied opinion turned against the American policy. Nonetheless, he concluded that the United States "should go as far as possible to defend [the offshore islands] without inflaming world opinion against us."[10] The real possibility of war in the area only enhanced

these anxieties.[11] In the end, Eisenhower formed a picture of the threat from the shelling in terms of both a physical and a psychological threat to Formosa's security, with additional implications for allied relations deriving from the possibility of war.

Dulles also fretted about the potential reaction of American allies should the United States become involved in a regional war and feared unwanted complications if it led to conflicts with important allies, Great Britain in particular, or disturbed domestic opinion in these nations. More than even Eisenhower, Dulles viewed the attack on the islands in terms of their psychological value. In addition to speculating that the islands might be "intimately connected" to Formosan defenses from a military standpoint, Dulles told Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson that the loss of the offshore islands would deal a severe psychological and political blow to the Nationalists. But he also thought the situation might contribute to American prestige if handled correctly. On August 31 during a State Department meeting, he emphasized the need for a belligerent military policy regarding the offshore islands, even though this would entail some dangers, in order to recoup the prestige lost from the Indochina situation earlier that year. Although this policy did entail some risks, Dulles maintained that the benefits in terms of American prestige were worth the danger, which in any event, he did not see as considerable. He underscored the need for a flexible policy regarding the offshore islands that would respond to "political and military considerations," because even though it was critical to keep Formosa permanently out of communist hands, the same did not hold true for the offshore islands.[12]

When the shelling occurred, Dulles dramatically outlined his perception of the situation confronting American policymakers in a telegram dated September 4 from the Philippines. He explained that the loss of Quemoy would cause "grave psychological repercussions and lead to mounting Communist action against deteriorating anti-Communist morale so that this would be [the] beginning of [a] chain of events which could gravely jeopardize [the] entire off-shore position [Formosa, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, the Ryukyu Islands, and the Philippines]." He argued that the United States should attempt to hold the islands if they were judged defensible with American assistance, even if the real estate contained no intrinsic value and such a defense necessitated attacking the Chinese mainland. Given the seriousness of the threat, he recommended immediate consultations with at least the leadership of Congress as a matter of "urgency" to ensure congressional

backing.[13] In sum, Dulles's view centered on the psychological threat that would result from the loss of the islands and on the opportunity for the United States to recoup lost prestige.

Option Generation

To remedy this situation, decision makers developed a range of alternatives, from doing nothing to responding aggressively. Given his perception of the threat, Eisenhower preferred a policy of procrastination which would allow him to avoid choosing among several unattractive alternatives. Although Dulles initially favored an aggressive response, he significantly altered his policy position in response to anticipated public opinion, to support a more middle-of-the-road stance more closely approaching the direction that Eisenhower preferred. There was division in the Defense Department, however, with the JCS (led by its chair, Admiral Arthur Radford) pressing for decisive action to protect the islands and others (mainly Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson and Army Chief of Staff General Matthew Ridgway) recommending backing away completely from a commitment to defend them.

Given the dilemma that Eisenhower saw as inherent in the policy toward the islands, the option he preferred boiled down to taking a "wait and see" attitude toward action. Although he did not wish to abandon the offshore islands, he preferred to achieve his goals by keeping the American position vague and avoiding an explicit commitment. Eisenhower also remained uncertain about how to achieve this end. He firmly believed that the island of Formosa had be defended, since it entailed a clear American national security interest. In addition, he felt "certain that American public opinion overwhelmingly favors any necessary action on our part to make certain of the defeat of any such attempt" to take the island. State Department polling supported his feeling.[14]

While Eisenhower worried about the ramifications for the Nationalists' morale of allowing the offshore islands to fall into Communist hands, more bellicose action posed a problem as well. He feared a commitment to defend the islands would irretrievably engage American prestige in a possibly doomed defensive action. Furthermore, the implications of an American-backed evacuation of the Nationalist troops on Quemoy in the event of an invasion troubled him, and he noted that "my hunch is that once we get tied up in any one of these things our prestige is so completely involved."[15] Eisenhower felt strongly that the

administration should not pledge to protect the offshore islands unless they could be defended, something he found a risky prospect given their proximity to the mainland. A commitment to defend the islands, he believed, also might anger important allies.[16]

Although Eisenhower believed as late as mid-August that the offshore islands themselves were "vital outposts" of Formosa's defense, he now appeared to be weighing the costs of defending them in terms of potential damage the country's prestige and allied relations. Facing the prospect of balancing a policy between abandoning and defending the islands while avoiding the irretrievable commitment of American prestige, he settled on procrastination as the only policy that could allay his concerns by avoiding a commitment, keeping several options open, and leaving the decision up to the Communist Chinese.

Unlike Eisenhower, Dulles initially supported a more forceful stance, recommending the defense of the offshore islands because of the opportunity to regain American prestige and the possible damage to the American position in the region from their loss. During the first week of the crisis, he saw the psychological value of the islands as so great that he was willing to commit to their defense even if it meant risking a larger war, attacking the Chinese mainland, and, possibly, using nuclear weapons. He thought that if the islands were not defensible, the United States should distance itself from their fate to avoid its own Dien Bien Phu (see chapter 4). He apparently held this view at least until September 9 when Undersecretary of State Bedell Smith presented Dulles's views to a NSC meeting.[17] Although his insistence on the protection of Formosa never wavered, Dulles soon shifted to a less confrontational option of submitting the issue to the United Nations for consideration, a middle option between defending and abandoning the offshore islands that became attractive mainly because of his concerns with public opinion.

While returning from his trip to Asia on September 12, Dulles composed a detailed analysis of the offshore islands situation and proposed a possible solution to the crisis.[18] The memo reveals that his views had developed considerably since his initial reaction a week earlier. Dulles observed, "Quemoy cannot be held *indefinitely* without general war with Red China in which the Communists are defeated." The administration, he reasoned, could use President Harry Truman's 1950 order to the Seventh Fleet to defend Formosa against a Communist Chinese invasion to justify the defense of the offshore islands. In a comment reflecting his evolving viewpoint, he pointed out that this move would

"undoubtedly" result in a "serious attack on the Administration, and a sharply divided Congress and nation, if the Executive sought to use his authority to order U.S. forces to defend also Quemoy, Tachen etc." Dulles believed that the islands were "not demonstrably essential to the defense of Formosa, as shown by the fact that for four years they have not been included in the area the Fleet is ordered to defend." This perception sharply contrasts with his previous views when he argued the opposite regarding the importance of the islands.

If the administration attempted to gain broader authority to act regarding the offshore islands, Dulles reasoned that the Congress and public would "probably," but not necessarily, "respond to an all-out appeal to the Congress" on the basis that the United States could not be "acquiescent" to further communist gains in Asia. However, the current congressional elections would complicate attempts at leadership. A commitment to defend the islands would "alienate" world opinion and American allies (Europe, Australia, and New Zealand), especially since the situation "would probably lead to our initiating the use of atomic weapons." But even though the United States did not necessarily need to "disassociate" itself immediately from the islands if it decided not to fight to defend them, Dulles believed that the loss of the offshore islands (because of the implied commitment to defend them, given American aid to Formosa and American military personnel on Quemoy) would likely harm both American prestige and Nationalist morale.

To resolve this problem, Dulles concluded that the issue should be submitted to the United Nations Security Council by a "neutral," but interested, nation, such as New Zealand, with a call for preserving the status quo and studying the issue further. Although the United States would relinquish control of the issue to the international body, Dulles found certain advantages in this option. If the Soviet Union vetoed the resolution, the United States would gain standing in world opinion and with its allies and could claim the moral high ground. If the Soviets chose not to veto the resolution, the Soviets and Communist Chinese might split, and Communist China would become an "international outcast" if it still chose to act. He foresaw the ultimate outcome of the UN option as the permanent independence of Formosa and the Pescadores. As he recognized in the presentation of his proposal at the September 12 NSC meeting, the UN option placed the administration in a better position to lead the public to support a defense of the islands if it became necessary later.

The reasoning of this memorandum reflects an important shift in Dulles's thinking regarding this crisis. Although he initially felt strongly about the need to defend the islands, his arguments now recognized a tension between competing interests and motives and, to an extent, began to express a view of the situation similar to Eisenhower's. Instead of relying on unilateral military action to defend the islands, Dulles now suggested pursuing a multilateral diplomatic course that would reduce American control but still meet the administration's policy objectives.

What accounts for Dulles's shift in position from recommending a commitment to defend the offshore islands at great risk to one desperately seeking an alternative between withdrawing or fighting? One possibility is his initial concerns about the defensibility of the islands had not been met. However, given the information he received during the intervening period, this conclusion appears unlikely. On September 7, Dulles noted that the Defense Department was currently considering the defensibility issue and that the answer looked negative. But on a September 9 stopover in Formosa for consultations, Major General William Chase, U.S. army chief of the Military Assistance Advisory Group to Formosa, gave an "optimistic" report of the military situation and recommended that the United States announce its intention to defend the islands. The U.S. ambassador to Formosa, Karl Lott Rankin, while noting that some of the islands might not be defensible, recommended that the United States keep the Communist Chinese guessing and provide military assistance where it would be helpful. In contrast to Dulles's September 7 statement, the majority of the Joint Chiefs on September 11 concluded the offshore islands were important to the defense of Formosa and defensible with American assistance.[19] Finally, while Dulles's concern about the damage to American prestige and Nationalist morale continued, the reasoning of his September 12 memorandum did not discuss the potential defensibility of the islands.

Instead of defensive issues, Dulles's memorandum focused on a new element concerning the probable negative domestic reaction if the administration acted to defend the islands. This new concern with domestic division appeared to have caused him to shift his policy recommendation from defending the islands to pursuing the possible midrange alternative of the UN option and was derived from new information that appeared regarding public opinion between his September 4 and September 12 memoranda. During this time, State Department public opinion analyses, on which Dulles heavily relied for information on public opinion, reported that the public would be divided if the

United States took aggressive action. The September 2–8 China Telegram, a report distributed to American diplomatic posts in the Far East where Dulles was attending the signing of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) treaty, observed that American newspaper editors were divided on the policy the American government should choose. The following week's report indicated an even more pronounced division among commentators. In addition, other internal State Department reports warned that significant divisions in elite opinion were growing and that the possibility existed for serious divisions in the larger public should the United States use force.[20] Dulles's presentation to the NSC on September 12 emphasized the influence of public opinion to an even greater extent. In both his memorandum and his oral presentation, he stressed the future reaction of public opinion to the administration's actions. Based on this information and the reasoning in the memorandum, the shift in Dulles's policy recommendations seems to stem from this new information regarding public opinion and suggests that it heavily influenced Dulles's thinking regarding policy options to resolve the crisis.

Unlike Dulles, the JCS and Chairman Radford developed the most hawkish position based on their view of the political, psychological, and military significance of the islands and recommended several steps necessary to defend them in a September 11 memorandum to Secretary of Defense Wilson.[21] The JCS saw the offshore islands as important, among other reasons, to the Nationalists' morale, commando raiding, and intelligence gathering. Although Quemoy was not "essential" to the defense of Formosa, since the Communists could invade the larger island without the smaller one, the JCS deemed Quemoy as "substantially related" to Formosa's defense because its possession could prevent the Communists from using the best harbor in the area from which to launch an invasion. The JCS felt the offshore islands would be defensible if the United States committed naval and air forces to the area and gave the American commander the freedom "to strike when and where necessary" to thwart an actual invasion or preparations to invade. They indicated that the use of nuclear weapons would be considered "if and when" the need arose, but "with the understanding now that if essential to victory their use would be accorded."

In contrast to the JCS majority, who were willing to risk nuclear war to prevent the Communist Chinese from taking the offshore islands, Secretary of Defense Wilson and Army Chief of Staff General Matthew Ridgway argued against an American commitment to defend the

islands. Wilson believed a distinction needed to be made between the offshore islands (of little consequence) and Formosa and the Pescadores (which remained important). The basic problem arose because "it would be extremely difficult to explain, either to the people of the United States or to our allies why, after refusing to go to war with Communist China over Korea and Indochina, we were perfectly willing to fight over these small islands." Ridgway disagreed with the JCS on two major points. First, he argued that the offshore islands were not *militarily* related to the defense of Formosa, and he rejected the JCS majority's political and psychological reasoning as outside the military's purview and rightly in the hands of political authorities. Quemoy, in particular, would be of "minuscule importance" during a war because the Communists could bypass the area in an invasion of Formosa, and it offered no major objectives for counteroffensive targeting. Second, he argued that a successful defense of the islands would require a major commitment of at least a division of American ground forces, along with air and naval assets which would need to be given a free hand to attack the Chinese mainland.[22]

Policy Selection

With this range of options before them, the administration reached a policy decision on the crisis during a special NSC meeting on September 12.[23] At this session, Dulles presented, and Eisenhower approved, Dulles's recommendation for investigating the United Nations option. For the next several months, the administration focused on implementing the decision reached at this meeting.

The meeting opened with a briefing by Dulles about his trip to the Far East and meeting with Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek, who asked for a mutual security treaty with the United States. Special Assistant to the President Robert Cutler introduced the offshore islands issue by recalling that the policy toward Formosa and the offshore islands, established in November 1953, was to "effectively incorporate" Formosa and the Pescadores into the American defensive perimeter and to protect them from a hostile takeover even "at grave risk of general war." Concerning the offshore islands, the United States would "encourage and assist" the Nationalists to defend them "without committing U.S. forces, unless Formosa or the Pescadores are attacked." Regarding the Communist reaction, the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Allen Dulles, stated that the new interagency intelligence estimate was that the Communists would not act if they felt the United States would

respond militarily.[24] JCS Chair Radford then weighed in with the views of the hawkish JCS majority, Ridgway's dissent, and CINCPAC (Commander in Chief, Pacific) Admiral Felix Stump, who emphasized the importance of the offshore islands for the defense of Formosa.

Attention then turned to the question of whether the president possessed the constitutional authority to protect the offshore islands based on Truman's 1950 orders to the Seventh Fleet. Eisenhower and Attorney General Herbert Brownell expressed trepidation about the legal standing of such action. Wilson then added his support for continuing the current policy because of the difference he saw between the offshore islands, on the one hand, and Formosa and the Pescadores, on the other, and he noted that the choice lay between the damage to morale from losing the islands or the danger of precipitating a war with China that would be difficult to stop. While Radford pressed the military reasons for holding the islands, Brownell offered a memorandum on past congressional positions on Formosa indicating that Congress had not previously understood the offshore islands to be included in the Seventh Fleet's orders.[25]

After hearing this dispute among his advisers, Eisenhower then expressed views that roughly conformed with his previous perspective on the significance of the islands by underscoring their psychological value and lack of relevance to the actual defense of Formosa. Speaking generally about the approach to these types of issues, he warned that the United States needed to be careful in reacting to every possible communist threat, because if the communists found they could tie down the United States by "making faces," they would use this tactic throughout the world. If a large-scale war was to be the result, he preferred to confront the "head of the snake" (meaning the Soviet Union rather than China). After comments by Radford describing the level of action necessary to protect the offshore islands (including attacks on the Chinese mainland), Eisenhower insisted that such aggressive action, since it implied war, required congressional approval. To do otherwise, he maintained, "would be logical grounds for impeachment" and "he was damned if he knew" how important allies, especially Britain, would react to American involvement in such a war. Perhaps feeling pressure from the NSC for belligerent action, Eisenhower "said that the Council must get one thing clear in their heads, and that is that they are talking about war." Based on a reference to "not holding back" as had been done in Korea, Eisenhower clearly saw a decision to defend the offshore

islands against a Communist Chinese assault as tantamount to a commitment to a large-scale war.[26]

At this point in the discussion, Dulles introduced his proposal for UN consideration of the crisis as a means to alleviate the dilemma facing the administration. He pointed out that both sides could find support for their arguments. American weakness could lead to further Communist probing, resulting in a fight in "less advantageous conditions," with possibly "disastrous consequences in Korea, Japan, Formosa, and the Philippines." But war with the Communist Chinese over the offshore islands at this point could undermine the American position. "Outside of [South Korean leader Syngman] Rhee and Chiang [Kai-shek], the rest of the world would condemn us, as well as a substantial part of the U.S. people. The British fear atomic war and would not consider the reasons for our action to be justified. Possibly very few Americans would agree." The United States faced a "horrible dilemma." To alleviate this condition, Dulles advised submitting the issue to the United Nations to "obtain an injunction to maintain the *status quo*." If the Soviets vetoed the resolution against the UN majority will, the administration would find a "totally different atmosphere regarding our allies and the American people." If the Soviets went along, the move could be the first step in stabilizing the region. Dulles asserted that the proposal held the possibility of avoiding the two unacceptable extremes of the "moral condemnation of the world" for choosing war or the outright loss of islands. He thought that the United States also had to consult with the Nationalists and the British and added that his information indicated that no decision on the defense of the islands was necessary in the short term, since the Chinese were acting cautiously because of the immediate Nationalist reaction and uncertainty of American action.[27]

Eisenhower "heartily endorsed" Dulles's proposal and stressed the need to find out the British reaction. He saw advantages to the UN resolution, since it might allow America to act without congressional authority, as had occurred in Korea. Dulles noted that if the United States acted in the present atmosphere, the administration would have to act without congressional authorization and would "not have anyone in the United States with us." However, the UN resolution would enable congressional authorization that otherwise would not be forthcoming. After further discussion of the UN option, Eisenhower's concern for domestic opinion became apparent. According to the minutes:

> [Eisenhower] did not believe that we could put the proposition of going to war over with the American people at this time. The West Coast might agree, but his letters from the farm areas elsewhere constantly say don't send our boys to war. It will be a big job to explain to the American people the importance of these islands to U.S. security. Moreover, if we shuck the U.N., and say we are going to be the world's policeman, we had better get ready to go to war, because we'll get it. The president said that while he was in general agreement with everything that had been said, we must enlist world support and the approval of the American people.[28]

Although Eisenhower thought he might be able to generate congressional and public support if he labeled the islands as an essential national security interest, he believed that he would have to make a "terrific case." He insisted that the group "must recognize that Quemoy is not our ship. Letters to him constantly say what do we care what happens to those yellow people out there?"[29]

Continuing the NSC discussion, Vice President Richard Nixon joined the JCS majority concerning the psychological and political importance of the islands. If the United States decided to do nothing, he recommended not announcing the decision, in order to keep the Communists guessing and to take a chance on the consequences. He argued that a significant segment of the American population still felt the UN had "kept our boys from doing what should have been done in Korea" and worried that the administration might be criticized for "becoming engaged in another war under UN auspices after the example of Korea." Dulles

> agreed that there was a very vocal segment of the United States which was against the UN, but that all the polls indicated an overwhelming majority (about 75%) who were still for the UN. He thought that his proposal would be responsive to the real wishes of the American people that we exhaust all peaceful means before taking military action.

To this, Eisenhower reiterated his belief that the administration "must be able to explain our actions to the American people." Eisenhower concluded the meeting saying that only he should comment on the substance of discussions and decided to have the secretary of state explore the possibility and desirability of the UN option.

Eisenhower's perception of divisions in the American public is supported by polling from this period. Although the public supported some

form of aid to Formosa (then the current policy), it was sharply divided over the question of sending in American troops, with only a fraction of the public supporting such a move. A September 1954 State Department poll found that 53 percent of the population supported "giving the Chinese Nationalist government on Formosa all the help it needs to attack the Chinese Communists on the mainland of China," with 33 percent disapproving and 14 percent with no opinion—figures essentially unchanged since March 1952. The 53 percent supporting assistance to the Nationalist Chinese were asked what type of assistance the United States should give. Expressed as a percentage of the total sample, of which 33 percent opposed aid, the poll indicated that 20 percent supported sending troops to assist the Chinese Nationalists in this effort and 31 percent opposed troops but supported some sort of undefined aid (the remaining 2 percent of the original 53 percent gave no opinion on the use of troops).[30]

A more specific question on the defense of Formosa also revealed significant divisions in the public. A Gallup poll taken after the critical NSC meeting, during the week of September 16 through 21 and released on October 6, asked: "If Formosa is invaded by Communist China, which one of the following statements (on card) comes closest to your own view of what the United States should do?" Ten percent answered "have US planes bomb airfields and factories on the China mainland"; 31 percent indicated "have US planes and ships help keep Communist China from invading Formosa"; 28 percent responded "have US supply guns and other war materials but take no active part in fighting"; 21 percent preferred to "have the United States keep out of Formosa altogether and let them fight it out themselves"; and 10 percent gave no opinion.[31] These surveys revealed a significant division in the public over the level of American assistance to Formosa and a special concern about the use of ground troops. Even greater public opposition to an American use of force would be expected regarding the offshore islands, since even the American government questioned their strategic significance.

Public opinion strongly affected Eisenhower's choice to support Dulles's policy proposal. Even though the psychological importance of the islands provided a reason not to simply abandon them, Eisenhower was less inclined to agree with the proponents of action (such as the JCS majority) and, because the islands held little physical value, seemed hesitant to risk war and its consequences in public opinion. He clearly believed that public support for military action and congressional

authorization would not be forthcoming at the time and felt that the majority of the public would oppose any unilateral action by the United States that resulted in war. While recognizing that the islands had psychological importance and that a full-fledged education campaign might create public support for American action, Eisenhower desperately wanted to avoid another Asian war, because of the risk of domestic division. The UN option seemed to resolve the conflict between the extreme choices, held the possibility of avoiding war at least in the short term, and placed the administration in a better position to obtain the required public support should more aggressive action prove necessary at a later date. Although he was interested in leading public opinion on this issue, Eisenhower recognized that his ability to do so was limited and found a less confrontational approach more consonant with his reading of public opinion. Along with lingering concerns about the United States' allies, public opinion virtually eliminated the option of war or a strong stand regarding the offshore islands at that time.

Policy Implementation

As decided at the September 12 NSC meeting, the administration's comment on the content of the discussion was both brief and ambiguous, with Eisenhower noting that it merely entailed consultations on the region and reaffirmed old decisions. In response to inquires from the press, Dulles commented that he would keep both the Communist Chinese and the press guessing about the administration's intentions.[32]

While the administration held its cards closely in public, Dulles began consulting with the British concerning the United Nations option. The British supported the American effort to pursue a middle course between abandoning the islands and precipitating a war and were particularly relieved that the administration was attempting to avoid general war and the implied use of nuclear weapons. The United States and the British agreed to approach New Zealand about introducing the UN resolution, with subsequent negotiations among the three nations lasting through mid-October. Even though Dulles spent a great deal of time in Europe addressing these issues, the subject of the negotiations was effectively kept out of the press.[33]

During these negotiations, anxiety heightened in the administration about the potential Nationalist reaction to the UN option. In a September 30 telegram to Dulles, Undersecretary of State Bedell Smith and the U.S. ambassador to the UN, Henry Cabot Lodge, asked for his views

concerning the timing of the resolution's introduction. In particular, Smith and Lodge were concerned about the upcoming 1954 midterm congressional elections which might be complicated because of "unfavorable reaction once [the Nationalist Chinese] learn of [the] proposal and realize its full implications and this would be almost certain to generate considerable emotion in certain domestic political circles." Dulles's reply stressed the need to have the resolution under consideration by the Security Council before the United States faced the choice of losing the islands or intervening. Dulles noted that the military situation should dictate the timing, but he recommended that the resolution be introduced "either in November or when [a] serious attack [was] mounting, whichever comes first." While recognizing that some domestic sectors and the Nationalists might be upset by the resolution, he felt the action was defensible as the only available option to keep the offshore islands in Nationalist hands without American intervention, something that he thought the United States would not undertake, since it would entail a large-scale war that might include the use of atomic weapons.[34] Although Dulles's choice of timing made the military situation the top priority, by suggesting a delay on the resolution until after the November election, he attempted to avoid any possible division and negative electoral consequences if the administration's efforts became publicly known.

In a slight change in timing, on October 4, Dulles recommended proceeding with the Security Council resolution, regardless of the campaign and without prior consultation with congressional leaders. He reasoned that delaying action might reduce its effect and the resolution might even help in the election: "It is hard for me to believe that [news of the effort] will have any adverse effect, and indeed the effect might be favorable on net balance."[35] He believed that the resolution would be supported by the majority in Congress and the American public and that only a "handful" of the public favored war over the islands. Since he felt almost certain that the communists would reject the resolution, it would provide a good basis from which to bring the public to support the administration position.[36] Even so, Eisenhower and Dulles decided to delay notifying Congress about the resolution until right before its introduction, since bipartisan consultation would be difficult during the campaign. Instead, they decided to inform Senate Majority Leader Senator William Knowland (R, Calif.) immediately before the resolution's submission, because New Zealand would be introducing it, and they would be guilty of bad faith if they consulted with Congress

beforehand. Eisenhower "could not conceive of any reason why in the conduct of foreign affairs we should not follow our own best judgments," and Nixon said it would be unnecessary and dangerous for prior consultation with Congress.[37]

It soon became apparent, however, that Nationalist opposition to the UN resolution needed to be taken more seriously. On October 5, Ambassador Lodge, alluding to the upcoming elections, warned Dulles that a confrontation with the Nationalists could be politically dangerous.[38] In addition, the U.S. ambassador to Formosa, Karl Rankin, alerted Washington to a "violently unfavorable reaction" regarding the UN resolution from Chiang, who would interpret it as "another Yalta."[39] Because of Rankin's message, the assistant secretary of state for far eastern affairs, Walter Robertson, recommended to Dulles on October 7 that the United States pursue a mutual defense treaty (which had been under consideration for some time) covering Formosa and the Pescadores, in order to bolster Nationalist morale and counteract any damage to relations that the UN resolution might create. The treaty might also serve to deter the communists from taking more aggressive action in the region. Robertson's memorandum apparently had an impact. In a discussion with Eisenhower on October 7, Dulles said that the United States should be willing to grant Chiang a defensive treaty if he went along with the resolution in the Security Council. Eisenhower agreed.[40]

During discussions with the Nationalists regarding the UN resolution, Chiang requested that the defense treaty be concluded first before the resolution was introduced, which Dulles and Eisenhower found acceptable if key members of the Congress assented. By October 18, the administration had already received favorable replies from some members of the Republican congressional leadership on the treaty, including Nationalist supporter Senator Knowland, and decided that the Democratic leadership should be consulted as soon as possible. On October 19, Lodge again warned Dulles that he feared Chiang would excite the "China lobby" because of his foul mood. Dulles noted that the administration was attempting to assuage Chiang with the mutual defense treaty, since the Nationalists wanted it so badly and observed that an announcement on the treaty might be forthcoming should consultations with the Congress go well.[41]

The upcoming election also influenced the timing of the announcement of the treaty negotiations. The influential Senate Foreign Relations Committee member, Michael Mansfield (D, Mont.) recommend-

ed holding off on the treaty until after the congressional elections because it would likely become a partisan issue, much to the detriment of a bipartisan foreign policy. The timing weighed heavily on Dulles's mind and surfaced in his discussions with Nationalist Chinese officials. In an effort to head off Nationalist efforts to cause domestic problems for the administration by playing on their desire for a treaty, Dulles stressed that should the Republicans lose the midterm elections, congressional consultations would have to begin again regarding the treaty because of the change in leadership. Because of possible conflicts with the elections, Dulles observed, even though negotiations could begin before the election, no announcement should be made regarding the treaty until afterward.[42]

After Eisenhower formally approved negotiation of the treaty at the October 28 NSC meeting, the administration announced the opening of defense treaty negotiations on November 6, two days before the congressional elections, with observers expecting it to pass the Senate. Talks continued throughout November (even though the Democrats regained control of Congress from the Republicans) and concluded with the initialing of a treaty on November 23 committing the United States to defend only Formosa and the nearby Pescadores. That same day, the Communist Chinese announcement that it would imprison captured American flyers for espionage led some, including Senator Knowland, to call for a blockade of mainland China.[43]

The public reaction to the imprisonment announcement caused considerable consternation for the administration. In discussions on the resolution's introduction with New Zealand and the United Kingdom, Dulles pressed for holding off until the public's reaction to the treaty could be ascertained. He thought it would take a few days for the public to understand the treaty and feared that people might misread the resolution as retaliation for the Communist imprisonment of the American flyers. In this context, he thought the UN resolution might only exacerbate the domestic situation rather than improve it. Although Eisenhower and he were attempting to have a calming influence, he emphasized the need to proceed carefully, since public reaction to a Communist Chinese attack on the offshore islands, in this charged political atmosphere, might force the United States into a conflict. In the aftermath of these actions, Dulles recommended delaying the resolution until the public had quieted down or hostilities appeared imminent.[44]

Dulles's arguments apparently were persuasive. The mutual defense treaty was publicly signed on December 2 and ratified by the Senate on

February 9, 1955. New Zealand introduced its resolution on January 28, 1955, after new attacks by the Communists on the offshore islands. Although the Soviets introduced their own resolution condemning American aggression, the New Zealand resolution passed the Security Council on January 31. However, Communist Chinese leader Chou En-lai's refusal to accept an invitation to discuss the matter at the Security Council effectively ended the UN's involvement.[45] Even though the administration successfully implemented its alternatives, the policies failed to relieve the pressure on the Nationalist Chinese position. After worsening in early 1955, the crisis was defused, and the shelling tapered off after a Communist Chinese offer in April for discussions on the Formosa Straits was accepted by the United States. Although the Nationalists abandoned the Tachen islands in January at the urging of the United States, they retained possession of the main offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu.

With the adoption of a two-track policy encompassing the UN resolution and the mutual defense treaty, the administration hoped its policy would avoid war yet keep the offshore islands in Nationalist hands. The policy at the time seemed to meet all significant requirements. It avoided public opposition to a unilateral commitment of American forces to protect the offshore islands, and in the view of high-level officials, it also placed the administration in a good position to lead the public and American allies to take action at a later date if the Communist Chinese pursued additional aggressive action. It successfully assuaged the Nationalists' concerns and maintained the support of other American allies by not appearing too bellicose. It also held out the possibility of deterring further Communist aggression. In the end, the administration selected the policy that it felt successfully balanced all its near-term interests and provided the political foundation for more aggressive action at a later time if it became necessary.

Variables

Although the decision makers' assessments of public opinion played an important part in the determination of the outcome, their effect varied throughout the case. As officials formed their initial impressions of the situation, they largely ignored public opinion. However, as they began to formulate options and select policies, their assessments of public preferences became more closely connected to the policy process. Dulles's assessment of public opinion dramatically altered his policy

position to support the less belligerent UN option when he found that the public would not support the more rigorous defensive option he initially recommended. In considering the policy, he stressed the difficulty, at that time, of building public support for aggressive action and emphasized the UN option's ability to give the administration the time and opportunity to lead the public to support a more assertive policy if it became necessary. Dulles remained acutely aware of the dynamics of public opinion as he attempted to implement the alternative by trying to keep the administration's negotiations out of electoral politics and favoring a defense treaty with Formosa to head off Nationalist efforts to make administration policy an electoral issue. Given his concerns with public opinion, he also worked to ensure that the timing of the resolution and treaty aligned with the public's ability to support the policies. Throughout this case, public opinion proved to be a constant concern for Dulles, especially as he formulated a response to the threat.

Like Dulles, Eisenhower remained painfully aware of the limits of public opinion, which constrained both the maximum and minimum policy he could accept when evaluating possible policies. Although public opinion did not influence his initial conceptions of the attack, it reinforced his view that the administration, at the very least, had to defend Formosa. As is clear from the NSC deliberations, Eisenhower concluded that the public would not support war over the offshore islands, which would make acquiring authorization from Congress prohibitive. When confronted with the need to make a decision and pressed by the military to adopt a rigorous defense of the offshore islands, his perception of the public's lack of stomach for war steeled his rejection of these suggestions. This concern continued as Dulles implemented the policy regarding the resolution and treaty negotiations.

The effect of the assessment of public opinion increased as the case proceeded, whereas the impact of other interests correspondingly waned. Decision makers focused on national security issues in the early going as they formed their opinions about the need for an American response. Dulles framed the problem in terms of threats to the American position in the region, since the damage to American prestige associated with the loss of the islands would have psychological implications for the United States' regional allies and the Nationalists in particular. Even though Dulles thought that the American position with its Asian allies would be bolstered by a strong response, perhaps even recouping some lost prestige, he knew the European partners were just as worried that the Americans would respond too vigorously. Dulles placed more

weight on the reaction of the Asian allies early in the crisis, but once public opinion caused him to favor a more restrained alternative, his focus shifted to a balance between satisfying America's Asian and European friends when implementing the policy.

Eisenhower saw the importance of the islands as deriving mostly from their psychological significance to the Nationalists' morale, although he also attributed some military value to them. His concerns with American prestige also reinforced his desire to respond firmly to the Chinese threat. Like Dulles, as he turned to specific options to confront the threat, he balanced these interests partly against the European allies' fear of a hotheaded American response. Although Eisenhower focused a great deal on allied responses when implementing the UN option, European trepidation only partially militated against a strong American response, which was determined mostly by his concern with the domestic divisions that would erupt if he responded too vigorously to the shelling.

The influence of beliefs was apparent throughout this case, with Eisenhower's and Dulles's behavior consistent with their beliefs throughout and causally influencing their choices at critical junctures. Eisenhower was expected to formulate his views based on national security interests and then attempt to lead the public to support the chosen policy unless he perceived public opposition. During both the problem representation and the option generation stages, he reacted *consistently* with his beliefs, by focusing on national security interests rather than on public opinion. As he faced the need for a decision, these beliefs had a *causal* influence on him, by limiting the options he saw as being available. At the critical meeting to decide the policy, he almost exclusively relied on public opinion as a reason to avoid war over the offshore islands. His statements reveal that he understood that the public would not accept war, and so leading the public on the issue would be extremely difficult. Dulles's alternative provided Eisenhower with an option to rectify his competing concerns with the loss of Nationalist morale, on the one hand, and the limitations provided by public opinion, on the other. As he moved to implement the policy, his behavior remained *consistent* with his beliefs, since once he had selected the UN option, his policy implementation decisions were driven mostly by national security concerns. Eisenhower focused on his prerogatives to set foreign policy when considering a discussion of the resolution with Congress and agreed to negotiate a treaty after it was linked to Nationalist support of the UN option. When public reaction in late November

threatened to undermine his policy approach, he attempted to calm the people to preserve support for his policies. By reacting consistently with his beliefs at all times and causally at the vital decision points, the effect of Eisenhower's beliefs receives a *supportive* coding.

Dulles's beliefs suggest that he would have preferred to make decisions based on the national security determinants of policy and then lead public opinion to support it. In cases such as this one, which allow only a short amount of decision time, if he perceived public opposition to his policy, he would be constrained by it, since he would be unlikely to find the extended time he thought was needed to generate public support. While forming his initial conceptions of the threat, he focused on the national security concerns, a tactic that was *consistent* with his beliefs. While he formulated his perceptions of the policy options and the administration was selecting and implementing the policy, his beliefs had a *causal* influence. Dulles decided to change his policy recommendation after information on possible divisions in the public over aggressive action became available and was reflected in both the reasoning of his memorandum and his presentation at the September 12 NSC meeting. The UN option also gave him an issue and the time he felt necessary to persuade the public to support a more belligerent policy if it were required. As the administration moved to implement the policy, he shifted to leading public opinion as the time to create support for it became available. Even though concern with negative public reaction at first made Dulles hesitant to introduce the resolution in October, he eventually chose that month because of its positive influence on leading public opinion to support administration policy (although it was later delayed because of the treaty negotiations). His decision on the treaty reflected his desire to obtain Nationalist Chinese political agreement, although he may have been partially concerned with their influence on domestic opinion. When the Chinese announcement of the imprisonment of the American flyers raised his concern about public overreaction, he pressed the British to delay the resolution until the public could be properly led to support the treaty. This combination of influences suggests a *supportive* coding of the effect on Dulles's actions of the beliefs variable.

Coding the Influence of Public Opinion

The influence of public opinion is coded for the case in the *strong constrain category*. Although other interests affected decision makers

throughout the case and largely determined decisions during the problem representation (when decision makers focused on American prestige and the Nationalists' reactions) and policy implementation (when they focused on allied and congressional relations and public opinion affected the timing of when some alternatives were acted on) stages, public opinion greatly conditioned the choice of the UN option itself. During the option generation and policy selection stages, public opinion greatly limited the options that Dulles felt were available and forced him to seek an alternative policy to defending the islands because of mounting public divisions over the proper reaction to the crisis. During the policy selection stage, although concerns about the reactions of American allies remained, Eisenhower's perceptions of public opposition severely limited the range of alternatives he felt were available and largely eliminated the option of aggressive action.

The influence of public opinion in this case supports the Wilsonian liberal perspective, which suggests that public opinion would constrain decision makers. It provides only minor support for the realist view, which implies that decision makers would largely ignore public opinion except to lead it when implementing a policy. Support for the Wilsonian liberal viewpoint appeared as decision makers began to tackle the question of how to respond to the threat occasioned by the Communist Chinese shelling and, although it waned somewhat during the policy implementation stage, lasted throughout the rest of the case. The realist view is supported during the problem representation stage because decision makers across the board saw the situation primarily in terms of national security interests (allied relations, American international prestige) and during the problem implementation stage, when decision makers also tried, in part, to lead public opinion. However, realist predictions cannot account for the behavior at the other stages of decision in which the strength of public opinion's influence provides disconfirming evidence. This finding is particularly strong, since this case was selected to bias results in favor of realist views. National security interests remained in decision makers' minds when they confronted many of these decisions, but they relied more on public opinion than these other factors. Given these dynamics, the case largely disconfirms realist predictions.

Although the Wilsonian liberal model is mostly supported and the realist model is only partially supported by the case, the beliefs model fully accounts for the case's dynamics, in which officials focused on other interests at the beginning of the crisis and then shifted toward

TABLE 3.1 **Influence Coding: Crisis Case**

Predicted Public Influence			Actual Public Influence	Influence of Beliefs
Realist	Wilsonian Liberal	Beliefs		
No Impact/ *Lead*	Constrain	DDE: Constrain/ *Lead*	Constrain (strong)	DDE: Supportive
		JFD: Constrain		JFD: Supportive

Note: Italics indicate conditional predictions.

public opinion as they began to develop policy options. This finding is particularly important because beliefs are expected to have the most influence in the crisis context. In this sense, the beliefs model is correct where it should be strongest while at the same time the realist model is fairly weak where it should be strongest, and the Wilsonian liberal model is fairly strong where it should be weakest (see table 3.1).

Under crisis conditions, it is often argued that public opinion does not have adequate time to influence policy decisions. However, since decision makers applied data gathered in other contexts to the decision they faced in this case and even relied on reports of current public opinion to assess future public views, time did not prohibit public opinion's influence. Perhaps the strongest link connecting public opinion and policy outcomes was formed by the decision makers' anticipations of public preferences. These anticipations were often based on either perceptions of the existing opinion context or on particular evidence of the public's view. For example, this influence was most noticeable on Dulles when he projected a "serious attack" on the administration and a divided Congress and nation if the administration took aggressive action. This view was based in large part on his reading of the State Department's internal reports of how elite opinion was reacting to the shelling. His preference for the UN alternative appears at least partially a response to his reading of polling results indicating that the public approved of the UN as a vehicle to resolve international disputes. This effect can be detected in Eisenhower as well. He formed his perception of the public's attitude toward war in the area based on letters he had received (relating to the entire Asian region). Based on these data, he understood the opinion context as opposing American involvement in an Asian

war, and he also saw (undoubtedly spurred by the public's opposition to the Korean war) that the public was skeptical of claims based on national security in the region. He then used this information to anticipate that public opinion could not be easily led to support aggressive American action.

In the end, although decision makers largely formulated and implemented policy away from the public eye, public opinion still played an integral part in their deliberations, but not because a great deal of information about public preferences was available or because of a large public outcry. There was none. Instead, public opinion influenced policy because the beliefs of key decision makers predisposed them to consider public opinion an important part of the decision process. These officials used the information they had gathered in other contexts and indicators of public sentiment that they found during the crisis to formulate nuanced perceptions of future public views. This same process remains abundantly clear in their reaction to the threat to Dien Bien Phu. However, as discussed in the next chapter, because the decision context changed, officials also reacted to public opinion differently than they did in the Formosa Straits case, as would be expected from their beliefs about public opinion.