

ing society to the Right and providing conditions for the establishment of a liberal-conservative consensus. First, most liberals became strong advocates of anticommunism and containment during the late 1940s and 1950s. "The lesson that Democrats drew was that never again could they afford to expose their foreign policy to the charge that it was soft on communism."<sup>37</sup> Second, conservatives increasingly accepted the notion of a limited welfare state in the domestic economy, especially during the Eisenhower administration. Finally, liberals and the political Left, who were critical of an aggressive U.S. policy of global containment abroad and believed in greater restructuring of American society at home, lost credibility and were silenced throughout the cold war years.

Ideological anticommunism became the glue that bound the consensus among liberals, moderates, and conservatives, especially within the elite public. In the words of David Halberstam in *The Best and the Brightest*, "It was an ideological and bipartisan movement; it enjoyed the support of the press, of the churches, of Hollywood. There was stunningly little debate or sophistication of the levels of anti-communism. It was totally centrist and politically very safe; anything else was politically dangerous."<sup>38</sup> These ideological and foreign policy beliefs provided the foundation for the rise of the national security and free market ethos that prevailed in the minds of policymakers during the cold war years. It explains how the domino theory became a powerful metaphor in the minds of Americans—that anything short of a policy of global containment would result in one country after another falling to communist expansion like dominoes.<sup>39</sup>

The ideological and foreign policy beliefs defined how Americans saw the world and limited the political choices available in the policymaking process. According to Hodgson, "the effect of McCarthyism has to be measured not only in individual careers destroyed but (more significantly for the nation as a whole) in assumptions unchallenged, in questions unasked, in problems ignored for a decade."<sup>40</sup> Therefore, "until after 1965, when the Vietnam crisis broke in full force, there was no opposition to orthodox anti-communism from the Left in the Democratic Party, or none worth a President's consideration. Opposition from the Right was always a more real concern."<sup>41</sup> This domestic political situation prompted greater U.S. intervention in the Vietnam War and eventually led to a crumbling of the foreign policy and ideological consensus.

#### The Post-Vietnam War Years and Lack of Consensus

Events of the 1960s and early 1970s, such as the civil rights movement, the war on poverty, and Watergate, led many Americans to question the ideological and foreign policy beliefs that were the basis of the consensus during the cold war years. But the Vietnam War had the most traumatic impact on Americans, leading to the collapse of the ideological and foreign policy consensus that prevailed throughout the cold war. These events surrounding the collapse of consensus triggered two parallel and mutually reinforcing patterns. First, American society became more ideologically diverse: the 1960s and early 1970s resulted in a resurgence of liberalism and the rise of the new Left, while the late 1970s and 1980s witnessed the rise of conservatism and the political Right. Second, the rise of ideological diversity also led to the development of competing foreign policy views or

schools of thought. These swings in the ideological and foreign policy views of Americans set the stage for the post-Vietnam War developments in domestic politics and governmental policymaking that are still under way.

**The Rise of Ideological Diversity.** Throughout most of the 1950s and early 1960s, the American public—both elites and masses—tacitly supported increasing U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia. In reality, most Americans were unaware of what was happening in Vietnam, or even where it was located geographically. They were not interested in distant foreign policy ventures. Yet, most Americans did not question the assumptions behind the ideological and foreign policy consensus that led to the nation's increasing involvement in Vietnam. Most Americans shared the belief that cold war policies were necessary to defend U.S. national security in Vietnam and promote democracy, freedom, and justice in the world.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, if the president of the United States, supported by most leaders in government and society, contended that Vietnam was vital to American interests and threatened by communism, and that the free countries of Southeast Asia would fall if the threat was not contained, the American people stood behind him. As explained by Thomas Mann, "The bipartisan foreign policy consensus that prevailed for almost two decades after World War II was sustained by a leadership stratum that shared an internationalist and interventionist view of the U.S. role in world affairs, an attentive and educated group of citizens who followed and supported this leadership, and a poorly informed and largely inert mass public that tolerated official policy as long as it appeared to be working."<sup>43</sup>

The Vietnam War undermined many of these beliefs. The war in Vietnam was a failure and Americans seemed to be dying for a lost cause—nearly 58,000 Americans would die in Vietnam, with over 350,000 other Americans wounded. For what? The tragic loss of Americans lives and the failure in Vietnam led people to raise questions about U.S. foreign policy. Was Vietnam vital to U.S. national security? Was it an international war between the forces of communism and the forces of democratic-capitalism or was it a civil war between Vietnamese factions? Were American goals and conduct of the war realistic? Were they just? Members of the mass public came to critique the Vietnam War and U.S. foreign policy predominantly from a pragmatic perspective—they emphasized the limited importance of Vietnam and questioned U.S. failure to win the war. Members of the elite public, on the other hand, were more likely to debate the goals and the justice of U.S. foreign policy. The result was that American failure in Vietnam shattered the ideological and foreign policy consensus, turning the public increasingly against the war. (See essay 9.2 on the evolution of Senator J. William Fulbright's views in chapter 9.)

A massive antiwar movement developed during the 1960s, advocating U.S. withdrawal from the war. By the late 1960s, a substantial number of average Americans also had turned against the government and its policies in Vietnam; some wanted out through victory and military escalation, but most wanted out via withdrawal. For a while, the polarization between the antiwar movement and supporters of the war, between critics and supporters of mainstream society, appeared to verge on civil war. By the 1970s, however, polarization had given way