This is to certify that the

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THE LIBERAL OPINION PRESS AND THE KENNEDY YEARS IN VIETNAM: A STUDY OF FOUR JOURNALS

presented by

Daniel A. Koger

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in English: American Studies

Major professor

Date May 26, 1983

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By

Daniel Allan Koger

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English: American Studies

1983

ABSTRACT

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Body of Abstract

This study examines changes in the attitudes among four liberal opinion journals toward U.S. military involvement in Vietnam during the Administration of John F. Kennedy. The Kennedy years were selected because they were a period of transition from a moderately conservative approach to foreign affairs to an ostensibly moderate liberal approach. Under these circumstances, it was assumed that members of the liberal opinion press would reflect the kind of views that came to distinguish the liberal community during the Johnson and Nixon years in Vietnam. That is, it was expected that they would favor reduced military spending, reduced military intervention in the internal affairs of developing nations, and of course, withdrawal from Vietnam.

Examination of the liberal opinion press during the Kennedy years revealed quite an opposite situation. A wide range of opinion was discovered in this influential branch of the U.S. media regarding the changing American role in Southeast Asia. Two of the four magazines consulted, The New Leader and The Reporter, were in fact adamantly anti-Communist and strongly in favor of U.S. military intervention to stop the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia. A third magazine, The New Republic, experienced the most profound change during the

period 1960 to 1963 as the Kennedy years began. Its contributors and editors appeared confident of U.S. power and were outspoken in their belief that a diversified, well-financed military capability was necessary after eight years of neglect by the Eisenhower Administration. Ineptitude by the Diem regime, continued gains by the Viet Cong, and conflicts between the press and the Kennedy Administration over Vietnam were among factors that contributed to The New Republic's shift in attitude. By late 1963 it was advocating a negotiated settlement in Vietnam and rapid U.S. military withdrawal from Southeast Asia.

The fourth magazine, The Nation, remained opposed throughout the Kennedy years to U.S. support of autocratic Asian leaders such as Ngo Dinh Diem.

These diverse attitudes toward the Vietnam crisis represented an early crack in the tough, pragmatic, anti-Communist liberal consensus that prevailed within the liberal Establishment during much of the cold war.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks, of course, to Frankie for years of help and understanding and to Christie and Dayna, for putting up with it all.

But thanks, too, to the many others who also helped along the way: To Rich Schripsema, for being an always attentive and interested listener; to Dr. Greg Waters, for convincing me it could be done; to Mrs. Robert M. Hamady, for allowing me timely access to the fine library of her learned late husband; to my patient adviser, Dr. Victor Howard, and to the members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Douglas T. Miller, Dr. Maurice Cullen and Dr. Barry Gross.

And, of course, gratitude to my grandfather, Allan H. Bell, for inspiring me with his lifelong love of learning.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

David Halberstam, the Pulitzer-Prize winning Vietnam correspondent for the New York Times, told the story at a conference on Vietnam and the press. The meeting was held in Los Angeles in early 1983, nearly eight years after the fall of Saigon to the North Vietnamese and nearly 20 years after the deaths of John F. Kennedy and Ngo Dinh Diem. The pain lingered.

"It was the Fall of '63," Halberstam recalled. "I don't have the exact date. I was 28 at the time. I went down to the Mekong Delta with a man named Richard Tregaskis. He was a classic war correspondent of World War II. He had written a book I greatly admired as a boy called Guadalcanal Diary. We had spent what I thought was an entirely pleasant two days in the Mekong Delta. I had introduced him to sources of mine, treasured sources, men who were not easy to come by. And on the way back to Saigon he turned to me in a very gentle voice, not polemical. He said, 'what you are doing--I would be ashamed of myself.' We traveled the rest of the way in stony silence. My face, I'm sure, was ashen gray. The attacks upon us from higher officials which were to come, even be it from the President of the United States, never I think shook me and upset me as much as that harsh condemnation from a man who I thought I so admired."[1]

Halberstam's story illustrates a problem that beset the American press as the Kennedy years in Vietnam unfolded. Vietnam changed American journalism and the way American's would cover their wars

abroad. At the outset of the Vietnam struggle, there largely prevailed the old concept from World War II that corresondents were part of the total fighting team. When American boys were being shot at on foreign soil, reporters should demonstrate a degree of patriotic duty and support the war effort. Tregaskis apparently applied these standards in condemning the reports Halberstam and other young correspondents were filing on the Diem government and U.S. involvement with that government. They reported the daily dichotomies between official pronouncements at press briefings in Saigon and what was being witnessed in the field.

This sense of pressure on the American press to join in the foreign war effort, as had been done in World War II, is important in considering the earliest stages of the period examined in this study. The liberal opinion press began its coverage of the Vietnam conflict with a generally supportive attitude toward U.S. efforts at stopping Communism. The Soviet Union and the Peoples Republic of China were seen as genuine threats to the survival of the Free World. The struggle to save South Vietnam from the world Communist menace was seen as part of a larger struggle to save the entire world from Communism. As the war in Vietnam dragged on, attitudes changed, first in segments of the liberal opinion press and later in segments of the mass media.

This study examines some of these changes and the forces that brought them about--from the perspective of a small but influential segment of the American media, a segment referred to here as the "liberal opinion press." Included under this label are the four publications generally considered during the Kennedy years to have been reflective of responsible liberal opinion, The Nation, The New

Republic, The New Leader, and The Reporter. With the exception of The Reporter, these journals had histories dating back 40 years or more, during which time they were read by small but select elements of the American liberal establishment. One of them, The Nation, dated from the days immediately after the Civil War.

The Kennedy years in Vietnam changed these publications, as they slowly changed other segments of the American media. Forces unleashed by the Vietnam War undermined the post-war confidence of American society. The liberal journals reflected this phenomenon, during a time when a President generally well regarded by the liberal establishment was maneuvering the United States into its most divisive foreign military conflict.

The patterns of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam during the Kennedy years were shaped by fundamental policy contradictions that would later expand into a general shattering of America's sense of mission and power in a rapidly changing world. One such contradiction related, for example, to the nation's basic attitude toward military involvement in the internal affairs of other countries.

Americans have traditionally disliked the idea of foreign policy entanglements, especially ones involving military force. Extending Manifest Destiny to the Philippine Islands after 1900 was far from universally approved by the American people. Franklin D. Roosevelt waited until U.S. territory was directly attacked by hostile forces before taking to Congress the declaration that brought America into World War II. Among the more compelling components of General Eisenhower's first Presidential campaign was his promise to visit Korea and seek an end to hostilities there.

For policy planners during the Kennedy years, though, there

were also powerful forces that ran counter to this basic American tendency toward isolationism. During the post-war years, public opinion strongly opposed tolerance of expanding Soviet Communism. Distinguished political and foreign service careers were broken on the rack of McCarthyism. Congressional investigating committees sought out the alleged perpetrators of American "loss" of foreign territory to Communist forces. The fall of China to Mao Tse-tung's guerrilla movement was blamed, in part, on senior members of the Truman Administration by Red-hunting Republicans. Communism gave the Republican Party a powerful campaign issue in the 1952 Presidential race--one especially sweet after a 20-year absence from the White House.

Democratic liberals had their own response to the post-war Communist menace. Many rallied against the spread of Communism in a post-war and post-colonial world. Such vociferous liberals as Arther M. Schlesinger Jr. competed with anti-Communist conservatives in declaring the need to be tough with the Soviets and the newly Marxist Chinese. These pragmatic, hard-line liberals surged to dominance over liberals who had advocated a "popular front" relationship of mutual assistance with Communists during the 1930s and 40s. This tough liberal consensus against Communism prevailed through the 1950s and helped propel John F. Kennedy into the Presidency. The Vietnam War brought into question the fundamental assumptions upon which this consensus was based.

The Nation, The New Republic, The New Leader and The Reporter displayed, in varying degrees, the characteristic beliefs and assumptions of the liberal establishment regarding Communism and U.S. containment policies as the Kennedy Presidency began. In addition, these

journals displayed characteristics of the American press in general during the period, characteristics which Tom Wolfe has said made the media of the day behave like "a great colonial animal, an animal made of countless clustered organisms responding to a single nervous system." Wolfe's description of this "colonial animal," was directed at early press coverage of the Mercury Astronauts. It might have also been directed at early press coverage of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, before the work of correspondents such as David Halberstam, Peter Arnett, Malcolm Browne, Homer Bigart and Bernard Fall brought criticism to bear on some, if not all, of the U.S. policies regarding Vietnam.

In describing the resolve of the U.S. media to extoll the virtues of the Mercury Astronauts, despite any evidence to the contrary, Wolfe was simply noting the pack mentality regularly engaged in by American newspapers and electronic news outlets. "In the late 1950s the animal seemed determined that in all matters of national importance the proper emotion, the seemly sentiment, the fitting moral tone should be established and should prevail; and all information that muddied the tone and weakened the feeling should simply be thrown down the memory hole . . . in April of 1959, it took the form of blazing patriotic passion for the seven test pilots who had volunteered to go into space . . . the public, the populace, the citizenry, must be provided with the correct feelings!" (emphasis the author's). According to Wolfe's theory, much of this pack adulation of the Astronauts by the press derived from the fact that these fliers were preparing to do ideological battle in the heavens with the fearsome Soviet space juggernaut. It was to be the American Democratic system in single combat with the Soviet Communist system.[2]

Halberstam's confrontation with Richard Tregaskis was evidence of similar pressure for conformity among members of the press in their reporting of the early stages of the Vietnam War. For here, too, a small group of American military men in a lonely, distant, dangerous environment was struggling with the Communist demon. To question the conduct of this struggle or the competence and motives of those assigned to manage its operation was heretical--as heretical, in fact, as criticism of the moral and professional fitness of the Mercury Astronauts would have been.

James Thomson, a security adviser to the Kennedy Administration, has described this early response by American corresondents in Vietnam as "an inherited attitude of World War II, when the reporters traveled with the troops through the war zones." In those days "the military provided food and transportation and the reporters were considered part of the war effort. Reporters were on the same team and they believed in the national security ethic."

In Thomson's estimation, a few cracks appeared in this unified attitude during the Korean War. "But generally there was the sense that the government and the press were together to fight evil Communists. The Vietnam press corps had the same impression. But some reporters began to look more closely--reporters like Malcolm Browne, Halberstam, Sheehan." For these reporters, said Thomson, things weren't as cut and dried as they had been during earlier wars. The flaws in U.S. policy and its military implementation became more and more evident and these reporters, lacking the same sense of team commitment as their predecessors, felt compelled to report the flaws. "The reporters began to fall off the boat--to challenge first the method and then the enterprise itself."

But pressures to conform remained, as Thomson illustrated with a story about an airplane flight with a group of reporters to Asia as late as 1966. It was a U.S. government flight and aboard the plan was vice president Hubert Humphrey and ambassador-at-large W. Averill Harriman. The reporters include "the elite, Tom Wicker and such." A question was raised about the legality of American use of Thai airfields for bombing in Vietnam and Laos. Harriman heard the question and came back to where the reporters were seated. He glared at them, Thomson recalled, and said he had heard there were some questions raised about American use of Thai airfields for bombing raids. "If you believe in your country, if you are patriotic citizens, you will cease asking these questions," Thomson quoted Harriman as saying. The subject of the airfields was dropped.

"The irony," said Thomson, "was that the Thai government and the Communists knew we were using the airfields to bomb Laos. The Russians knew. The Chinese knew. The American public was the only group that didn't know. It was the national security ethic."[3]

This study examines the nature of that early commitment to support American policies in Southeast Asia, and the steady erosion of that support within a small but influential part of the American mass media. The pack mentality of American journalists writing on Vietnam during the Kennedy years, their commitment to the national security ethic, was evident in The Nation, The New Republic, The New Leader and The Reporter. These publications reflected such commitment to varying degress in the early years of Kennedy's Presidency, from reluctant skepticims in The Nation, to fervent support in The Reporter and The New Leader. As the months and years wore on, this support grew less accepting, although much of the skepticism was leveled not

against the wisdom of America's overall policy of containing Communism in Asia but rather against the quality of the Diem government in South Vietnam. These publications grew less and less willing to swallow the Kennedy rationales for aiding the Diem government. It was a painful experience, as these editors were forced to question their faith in the veracity of their highest government officials. To examine their response to the Kennedy policies in Vietnam is to watch the liberal, anti-Communist consensus and the national media security ethic crumble in slow motion.

The Nation, The New Leader, The New Republic and The Reporter were selected for this study because of their focus on current political topics, their preference for opinion and analysis over objectivity in coverage of news events, their frequency of publication, either weekly or biweekly, and their reflection of views from an important segment of American society, the liberal elite.

The title "liberal opinion press" distinguishes these publications from opinion journals of conservative bias, such as the National Review, or Leftist bias, such as Ramparts, Dissent or The Progressive.

The process by which publically disseminated facts and ideas influence society, and the way society in turn influences its public media, are extremely difficult to assess. Two formal studies of the opinion press have been conducted since 1965--one by Prof. John Schacht of the University of Illinois in 1965 for the Magazine Publishers Assn., Inc., and one by Charles Kadushin, in the early 1970s for his book, The American Intellectual Elite. Both works concluded that America's journals of opinion, including those used for this report, have influence far beyond what their limited circulations would suggest.

The opinion journals are important, not for how many people read

them, but for the kinds of people who read them. Subscribers include national politicians, mass media editors and editorial writers, academicians and business executives.

"To whatever degree readership or knowledge of the journals, or of individual articles, is increased beyond actual circulation figures, one is forced to the conclusion that the quality of the audience is more important than its numbers," Schacht concluded.[4]

One liberal opinion publication, The Reporter, had made a study of its subscriber lists in the early 1960s. Information from this study was included in a brochure that Schacht in turn used to demonstrate the type of readers one might find for the journals of reportage and opinion. The Reporter list included five cabinet members and 34 Senators subscribing in their own names. Of Reporter readers, 22.4 percent were educators, 14.8 percent were members of university faculties, 93.8 percent had attended college, 80.1 percent had at least one college degree, 60 percent had done postgraduate work, and 54.3 percent earned $10,000 or more per year. The median reader age was 38.3 years. Subscribers from the field of communications included Theodore Bikel, Marlon Brando, John Mason Brown, Art Buchwald, Norman Cousins, Marshall Field, Jr., George Gallup , Ernest Hemingway, John Hersey, Bill Mauldin, Edward R. Murrow, Katherine Anne Porter, Eric Severeid and Lawrence Spivak.

A New Republic readership study, also from the early 1960s, showed that 91.5 percent of the magazine's subscribers had completed some college work, that nearly two-thirds had done some graduate work and that 1.2 percent of those had PhDs. Median family income was $12,000 a year, average age was 35 years old and 31.8 percent of the readers were lawyers, doctors, clergymen and government workers.

Scientists and technical workers made up 13.1 percent of the readers, and teachers 22.4 percent.[5] "Others of the journals, not particularly interested in--or sanguine about obtaining--advertising, have not had such profiles prepared . . . It is probable, however, that profiles of the others would not differ greatly from these--the college educated person in his mid 30s to mid 40s, on his way to an adequate income, gained in some intellectually oriented occupation, often teaching. In other words, the journals' readers are in a position of being 'opinion leaders'--government people, teachers, churchmen, but also functioning as co-workers and acquaintances--who serve to influence others in their field of special competence."[6]

Kadushin and Schacht were impressed with the ability of the opinion journals to influence the mass media. Kadushin polled more than 100 individuals determined by their peers to be "influential" intellectuals. In assessing the potential impact of the intellectual opinion journals, many respondents referred to what Kadushin called a "trickle-down theory." That meant that information or views printed in a journal of opinion would find its way, weeks, months or even years later, into significant numbers of mass media news outlets. He quoted an editor of a "small, but influential, intellectual journal" as saying: "The journals of opinion--The New Republic, The Nation, The New Leader . . . influence other publications very strongly. You'll see the popular mass magazines pick up an issue a year after the journals of opinion have had it . . . Somebody told me that there used to be a woman who largely did nothing for Henry Luce except watch the smaller journals and mark and clip things that would be of interest."[7]

Kadushin described editors of these opinion journals as "gatekeepers," whose publications provide communications and feedback for

the intellectual circles they serve. In this way the editors resembled "the salon hostess deciding who can say what, at what length, to what audience, as well as which books will be talked about and which ignored . . . The journals connect an inner core of top intellectuals with a larger audience of intellectually active persons." He saw this as tending to make the magazines rigid in their subject matter and ideas and predictable in their handling of issues. These factors were described as strengths as well as weaknesses. The range of concerns might be limited. But, said both Kadushin and Schacht, the predictablity, the tendency to plow the same intellectual ground over and over, helped these publications drive home points that might not have permeated the public consciousness otherwise. "To a very large extent small circulation journals germinate the ideas that are disseminated out to society. They prepare the essential agenda," Kadushin declared.[8]

Schacht presented two reasons for the potential impact of the opinion journals: "They are printed so they lend themselves to discussion of complex issues that the reader can read where and when he pleases and re-examine and compare with other material. Themes are repeated. They have limited range of subject matter and intensity of presentation."[9]

Taking a longer view of these magazines and their impact on U.S. affairs, Schacht concluded that "in both domestic and foreign policy the United States for almost 100 years has moved in the directions advocated by the majority of the journals of opinion and reportage . . . in major issues the journal's views have preceded, not coincided with or followed government action and changes in public opinion . . . usually they have kept a given issue in the minds of their readers

over a period of years, exerting pressure at strategic intervals just prior to a peace conference, a Supreme Court case, or a Congressional session in which particular action is being considered."[10]

On the basis of these findings, certain possibilities can be presented regarding the potential influence of the liberal opinion press on media coverage of the Kennedy years in Vietnam and on official policy regarding Vietnam. The liberal journals had the potential to establish the "agenda" of issues regarding U.S. involvement in Vietnam. If the liberal journal editors and writers were enmeshed in the intellectual grid of liberal consensus, they would show little likelihood to question the necessity of America to halt Communism in South Vietnam. By the same token, because they would be likely to apply American liberal notions of government responsibility for individual well being and social justice, they would be highly critical of autocratic Asian leaders such as Ngo Dinh Diem, Syngman Rhee and Chiang Kai-shek. This would be likely to put additional pressure on White House policy planners to question the wisdom of supporting Diem, without forcing them to raise larger questions of U.S. interest and capabilities in Southeast Asia. Adherence within the liberal opinion press to the liberal consensus of the cold war period would have had the potential to stifle debate over those fundamental Vietnam assumptions. To determine the truth of this assertion, one would have to analyze the thought processes of all the liberal opinion press editors and Vietnam reporters for the entire Kennedy period, an unlikely project.

What can be said with a degree of certainty, though, is that the liberal opinion journals examined in this study provide a prolonged and detailed view of the attitudes and concerns about Vietnam within one important segment of American society. Such a study also provides a

view of changes in attitudes among members of that group.

At the time of Schacht's study, which was published in 1965, the circulation levels of the liberal journals were: The Nation, 25,000; The New Leader, 22,000; The Reporter, 170,000; and The New Republic, 84,000.[11] With the exception of The Reporter, the advertising content of these journals during the Kennedy years tended to be lean, consisting mostly of scattered ads for books, cultural events or public service activities. The Reporter, with its strongly anti-Communist views and unbudging support for the American system of politics and way of life, was conspicuous by contrast. It carried dozens of full-page ads, many of them in color, for such corporate American giants as AT & T, Columbia Records and General Motors. The Reporter also had the most consistently substantial backing; Max Ascoli, The Reporter's founder, publisher, columnist and chief decision maker from its beginning in 1949 until its demise at Ascoli's hand in 1968, was married to Marion Rosenwald, a Sears, Roebuck heiress who financed the magazine.[12]

The Nation, founded in 1865 by E. L. Godwin, crusading editor of The New York Evening Post, was plagued from its earliest days by financial problems. It was started with financing from a philantropic abolitionist and has maintained a precarious financial base ever since.[13]

The New Republic grew out of a dinner held in 1914 in New York. Attending were a number of leading progressive intellectuals, including Walter Lippmann, Herbert Croly and Willard Straight, all of whom became prominent writers and editors on The New Republic and important liberal thinkers in their own right.[14]

The New Leader began life in 1923 as The New York Leader, a daily newspaper published as part of the New York socialist movement.

The publication lasted six weeks. After its failure, The New York Leader was adopted as the title of the official publication of the U.S. Socialist Party. The name was shortened later to The New Leader. After a 1936 split in the Socialist Party over the relative merits of Trotsky and Stalin as leaders of the world socialist movement, The New Leader became an independent journal with links to the reform-minded Social Democratic Federation, the American Labor Party and the Liberal Party of New York.[15] Under the leadership of S.A. Levitas, a Russian emigre, a former mayor of Minsk and an ardent opponent of the Bolsheviks, The New Leader was deeply and consistently critical of Communism, while still espousing liberal causes in the United States.

Many writers for these publications, including those filing stories from overseas, were newspaper or electronic media correspondents. In his book, In Search of History, Theodore White recalled his sense of satisfaction in contributing freelance articles to The Reporter as a foreign correspondent during the Eisenhower years. Anti-Communist that he was, Ascoli still bitterly opposed the heavy-handed tactics of Sen. Joseph McCarthy, a quality much admired by White. Ascoli was a man of "impeccable courage." White had been an "outcast of American journalism early in the McCarthy years." Ascoli didn't "care a pinch of powder for McCarthy's threats, and continued to publish me on politics."[16]

White remembered Ascoli as a "strange man. It was not easy to like him, but impossible not to respect him . . . All Ascoli's shortcomings were more than balanced by his primitive virtues."[17]

Carey McWilliams, crusading editor of The Nation during the Kennedy years, would accumulate clippings on different topics until, as one writer has said, "they began forming what McWilliams recognized

as an alarming pattern still unnoticed by the rest of the media." Once having discovered such a pattern, McWilliams would contact "one of the devoted newspapermen and free-lance writers who have periodically done articles for him for relatively little money."[18]

Publications such as Newsweek and Time could present the "news" from Vietnam and elsewhere in formats that professed to be objective. Opinion would be presented under a specific label, when it occurred at all. The liberal opinion journals chosen for this study were forums for the observations, viewpoints and analyses of men and women whose highly refined reporting might also be appearing in the more objective publications. Reading material in the opinion journals years later would be like viewing the outtakes from a movie, the pieces picked up from the cutting room floor. For in the opinion journals, reporters could write what they felt, as well as what they knew, about a news situation. Such openly biased reporting allows the historian years later to gain access to the more personal views of reporters and writers as they watched events unfold in Vietnam and other trouble spots of the early 1960s. If these writers thought an autocratic dictator such as Ngo Dinh Diem was digging himself into an impossible situation, they could say so, as long as they had the evidence to defend their position. They could take the news out of the contrived world of the official statement and information office handout. They could seek life beyond the U.S. military's daily Saigon press briefing . . . the infamous Five O'Clock Follies. They could not only watch a foreign policy fall apart, they could report that it was happening. In the consensus atmosphere of early 1960s reporting from Vietnam, that alone was a major accomplishment.

INTRODUCTION NOTES:

[1]David Halberstam, "Did Vietnam Change Journalism," Vietnam Reconsidered, a conference at the University of Southern California, Feb. 8, 1983.

[2]Tom Wolfe, The Right Stuff, (New York: Bantam Books, 1980), pp. 100-101.

[3]Personal interview with James Thomson, Feb. 7, 1983.

[4]John H. Schacht, The Journals of Opinion and Reportage: An Assessment, study for the Magazine Publishers Assn., Inc., 1965, p. 71.

[5]Schacht, p. 72.

[6]Schacht, p. 73.

[7]Charles Kadushin, The American Intellectual Elite (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1974), p. 46.

[8]Kadushin, p. 14.

[9]Schacht, p. 16.

[10]Schacht, p. 38.

[11]Schacht, p. 66.

[12]Theodore H. White, In Search of History, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1978) p. 375.

[13]Leonard Downie, Jr., The New Muckrakers (New York: New American Library, 1976) p. 220-221.

[14]Schacht, p. 75.

[15]"Between the Issues," Editorial, The New Leader 22 February 1960, p. 2.

[16]White, p. 354.

[17]White, p. 376.

[18]White, p. 358.

CHAPTER I: VIETNAM AND COLD WAR LIBERALISM

PROBLEMS OF CONTAINMENT

President Lyndon Johnson's massive troop commitments of 1965 and after made the Vietnam War an American war, bringing with it the powerful notion that the man in the White House, if he failed to contain Communism in South Vietnam, could be dubbed the first American President to lose a war. Johnson spoke often of this concern.

Lyndon Johnson was the President who made the "big" decisions that authorized massive U.S. intervention in Vietnam, so he took the brunt of responsibility for a war that went so badly. Lyndon Johnson became President in late 1963, with about 20,000 U.S. military personnel in South Vietnam. He left office in January, 1969, with more than half a million solidiers in the country. Johnson had stepped into what New York Times correspondent David Halberstam had dubbed a "quagmire" and he sank out of sight.

But what of John F. Kennedy? Retrospectives of Vietnam place much emphasis on the Johnson years of the war. The Kennedy years tend to be largely overlooked or examined as preliminary rounds prior to the main event. And yet these early years are significant to a larger understanding of the origins of the Vietnam War.

To put the Kennedy years in perspective, it is necessary to go back at least to the wartime Administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the post-war Administration of Harry S. Truman. At that time, the fate of Indochina was a minor component of the great cold war

struggle between Stalinist Communism and Western Democratic Capitalism. In those days, the area of greatest concern was Europe, where Soviet military threats were clear and present. Asia became significant in the Truman containment policy after the fall of China to Mao Tse-Tung in 1949. Aid was provided to the French in Indochina, in moderate amounts, to check the spread of Communist nationalism beyond the Chinese borders. Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, helped establish the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization to institutionalize this Asian containment strategy. Dulles' State Department also helped engineer creation of the Republic of Vietnam after the fall of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, with Ngo Dinh Diem coming out of exile in the United States to be its President. To aid Diem, the United States gave assistance that included providing U.S. administrative, agricultural and military advisers to help train and motivate members of the South Vietnamese bureacracy and military. Levels of military involvement were kept purposely low, for reasons of domestic politics in the U.S. and because the period 1954 to 1960 was a time of consolidation for Ho Chi Minh's Communist regime in the north. Militarily, South Vietnam was relatively quiet.

John F. Kennedy entered office at a critical time in the brief and troubled history of the Republic of Vietnam. Diem's mandarin, autocratic style of rule had alienated important political factions in his country, especially among the majority Buddhist population. In November, 1960, a coup attempt by the military, which included a bombing run on the Presidential Palace in Saigon, had been foiled by a series of political ploys. But the Diem regime was shaken. In addition, in 1960 the National Liberation Front, the Viet Cong, had announced its existence and its intention to overthrow the Diem government by

guerrilla tactics. The Viet Cong movement was quickly given the support of Ho Chi Minh's Communist government in North Vietnam.

There were about 600 American military advisers in South Vietnam when John F. Kennedy took office in January, 1961. When he was assassinated in 1963, there were 20,000 American solidiers in the country and U.S. commanders were requesting more fighting men if the country was to be saved from Communism.

There was a pattern to Kennedy's deepening military involvement in the destiny of South Vietnam, a pattern that has been described by Daniel Ellsberg as the "stalemate trap." This trap made it politically unpalatable to be the President that let Vietnam, or any other Asian nation, slide into the Communist orbit. Rule number one of the stalemate trap, Ellsberg said: Do not lose the rest of Vietnam to Communist control before the next election.[1] Kennedy fell into this trap early in his administration, at a time when members of the liberal opinion press were praising Kennedy as the President who could change the way America operated, at home and abroad. Kennedy would undo the years of neglect by the Eisenhower administration. Liberal opinion journals generally welcomed this young, eager, but largely untested politician, although one publication, The Nation, gave his election only two cheers. The third would be given upon demonstration of worthy performance in office.

These same journals were dismayed and then anguished at the long run of Kennedy foreign policy failures during that first year--at the Bay of Pigs, then with Khrushchev in Vienna, then in Berlin, and from late 1961 on, in South Vietnam. Kennedy had promised to scrap Eisenhower's allegedly tired, unimaginative conduct of foreign affairs. Instead, his major accomplishment in the first year, it appeared, was

to agitate the smoldering embers of the cold war to the point where conflict between East and West was more intense than it had been in years. Kennedy's declaration in his inaugural address, to "bear any burden, pay any price" in pursuit of peace, began to take on ironically costly meaning. Among those members of the media who seemed to pay the highest price in dashed expectations were the most prominent members of the liberal opinion press, The Nation, The New Republic, The New Leader and The Reporter.

Responsibility for much of this disappointment seems to fall on the liberal opinion press itself. Like most segments of the American media, these publications demonstrated little capacity to question cold war containment assumptions that dated from at least 1949. On the contrary, the liberal opinion press came to the Vietnam conflict apparently confident of the wisdom and necessity to practice the same containment policies in Southeast Asia that had been practiced in Europe. These journals showed little inclination to examine the differences in foreign affairs problems posed by Europe and Asia--differences of time, place, history, culture, social values, political behavior and geography. Communism was generally viewed as a monolithic force, whether in Asia, Europe or Latin America, especially when Communist interests conflicted with those of the United States. The liberal journals could show discrimination in analyzing conflicts within the Communist bloc itself. This was the case in reporting and commentary on the 1960 rift between the Soviet Union and the Peoples Republic of China. But in writing about those areas where the U.S. government had chosen to take a stand, particularly a military stand, against Communism, the opposing forces might be labeled "the Reds," "fellow travelers," or just "the Communists," with little or no analysis of U.S. interests in

pursuing its designated policy course.

Challenges to Kennedy's policy in Vietnam, when they occurred, tended to be directed at the wisdom of backing the Diem regime. The liberal journals seldom criticized the ability or necessity of the U.S. to stop the rise of a Communist nationalist movement in the country. Tom Wicker, the New York Times columnist, noted this failing in a 1971 article criticizing press coverage of the Vietnam conflict. The American press didn't "adequately question the assumptions, the intelligence, the whole idea of America in the world--indeed the whole idea of the world--which led this country into the Vietnam War in the 1960s. It is not commonplace, now, when the horse has already been stolen, to examine these assumptions. But where were we at the time we might have brought an enlightened public view to bear on that question?"[2]

THE LIBERAL CONSENSUS

One answer regarding the whereabouts of the liberal press was that its writers and editors were still enmeshed in the "liberal consensus" of the 1950s, a period during which large segments of the liberal Left moved to the center of the political spectrum. "Unfortunately," writes intellectual historian Douglas T. Miller, "most thinkers saw the need for goals only within the rigid context of the fifties thinking; a domestic policy aimed at accelerated economic growth and a foreign policy based on containing and ultimately triumphing over communism." Miller saw this mentality reflected in the calls of John F. Kennedy for "self-sacrifice, a faster growth rate for the GNP, and putting a man on the moon" that so excited the liberal opinion press.[3]

Godfrey Hodgson, in a closely reasoned analysis of the cold war,

declares the Left to have "virtually ceased to count in American political life" by the late 1950s, a victim of the "liberal consensus." The "consensus" mentality produced a basic theme by the time Kennedy began to seek the White House: "Never so much hope in America, never so much danger abroad."[4]

But the Kennedy "toughness" in Vietnam, the determined support for a mandarin autocrat such as Diem, and the contribution of this policy to the dilemma of loyalties faced by the liberal opinion press has still deeper roots. It could be traced to the conflicts and divisions within the liberal community during the years immediately following World War II, years when American liberalism attempted to come to terms with its own concepts of itself.

American liberalism has had a number of definitions over the years. It has been seen in American history, for example, as the ideology of the bourgeoisie class which rose out of the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century. It has also been seen as a demand for individual liberty from the social constrictions imposed by that same industrialization process. "Social liberalism," according to Norman Markowitz, had trouble uniting in its drives for corporate as well as humanitarian reforms. One liberal group "sought the use of the state to consolidate private economic power." Another, more humanitarian group "hoped to use the state to redistribute wealth and power, to liberate men and to eradicate social injustice."[5]

David Spitz has described liberalism as a force advocating the interests of "lower classes," with conservatism advocating the interests of the "upper or dominant class." Spitz committed a large portion of one essay on liberalism and conservatism to refining these broad generalizations, warning along the way that the reader should be wary of

attempts to firmly label either of these two groups.[6] Having issued such a warning, he then attempted to present a definition of modern liberalism that encompassed a broad range of liberal belief and behavior. The modern liberal, said Spitz, denies the validity of entrenced privilege and defends the rights of the individual. "Each man requires freedom--to exercise his reason, to discover and develop his talents, to achieve his full growth and stature as an individual . . . each man has a common stake in the conditions, and in the determination of the condition, under which he lives."[7]

Liberalism during the New Deal period of the 1930s could often find common cause with the Communists--at least in the advocacy of more vigorous action to benefit the common man in his conflict with entrenched economic interests. The rise of Fascism in Europe further united many liberals and Communists in conflict with what they saw as a common foe. "In the midst of depression during the 1930s and 1940s, social liberals joined Communists to support the Roosevelt Administration's attempts at social reform and its fight against Fascism."[8] This alignment came to be known as the "popular front." Its liberal members were later the targets of severe criticism from anti-Communist liberals, advocates of a tough-minded brand of thinking that was labeled after World War II as "the new liberalism."

This rift within post-war liberalism was reflected within the liberal opinion publications examined in this study. The New Leader and The Reporter were staunchly anti-Communist and highly critical of those intellectuals and politicians who could find favor with Communism in any form. "In the 1950s," writes Markowitz, "the anti-Communist liberals and radicals of The New Leader and Partisan Review echoed Sidney Hook's attack on the popular fronters as 'totalitarian liberals.'"[9]

Meanwhile, "during the war, The New Republic and The Nation, the major organs of liberal opinion, consistently supported a policy of Soviet-American cooperation." Vice-President Henry Wallace, an advocate of the popular front and for a brief period in the late 1940s an editor of The New Republic, advocated a "new international order," built on cooperation with the Soviet Union. "Wallace became the leading wartime defender of what Freda Kirchwey, publisher of The Nation, called a 'New Deal for the World.'"[10]

It was these same popular front liberals whom Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. referred to derisively as "doughface liberals" in his book The Vital Center.

Debates over the divisive issues of American post-war politics--issues such as foreign policy and the role of Communists in American government and society--continued to disrupt American liberalism, finally giving rise to what Mary McAuliffe has described as "the new liberalism." This was a tough, realistic approach to the role of liberalism in what was seen as an increasingly dangerous and threatening post-war world. In pursuing their beliefs, these "new liberals" gave up "many traditional liberal tenets--the belief in progress, in man's goodness, in popular democracy, and in world peace--replacing them with a chastened and, in their view, 'realistic' philosophy which stressed man's sinfulness, the seeming inevitability of conflict among nations, and the dangers of democratic rule."[11] These hardened new liberals found their place at the center of American political thought, rather than on the Right or Left. They came down hard on the need to preserve basic American political and economic traditions against internal and external threats.

This tough, anti-Communist stance continued into the Kennedy

years, and was evident in the editorials and reportage on Vietnam appearing in the liberal journals examined in this study. It is the contention here that the rise of "new liberalism" with its pugnacious attitude toward Communism and its assumption of U.S. capability to halt Communist expansion in the developing world, helped subdue liberal establishment opposition to American involvement in Vietnam during much of the Kennedy Presidency. Because of the "new liberalism's" deep commitment to realism and political pragmatism, opposition to U.S. policy in Vietnam was slow to develop in the liberal journals. And when it did develop, this opposition was directed toward such practical matters as the nature of guerrilla warfare, the relative strength of the Viet Cong, the questionable record of the agroville program and, of course, the wisdom of continuing to support a government in Saigon that wasn't effectively accomplishing its anti-Communist mission.

There was little doubt among conservatives that America should intervene in the affairs of nations threatened by Communism. National Review editor William F. Buckley, Jr., and his colleagues repeatedly called for armed attacks against Cuba and rapid, hard-hitting U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia, with the option of carrying the assault of China if necessary. Of significance is that similar, though less bellicose positions were often advocated by the nation's leading journals of liberal opinion during the period from 1960 to 1962. Debate on U.S. involvement in Vietnam during the 1960 campaign and the first year of the Kennedy Administration, when it occurred at all, centered on issues of degree rather than necessity or capability. From 1962 to the end of 1963, questions of capacity, of U.S. ability to handle the Vietnamese situation, began to emerge in the liberal journals.

Why were such questions of capability so slow to develop? For American liberals during the Kennedy years in Vietnam, to depart from the accepted assumptions in liberal circles was to risk sacrifice of one's credentials as a trustworthy commentator on world affairs. "Not only in Washington but in the press, on television, and--with few exceptions--in the academic community, to dissent from the broad axioms of consensus was to proclaim oneself irresponsible or ignorant. That would risk disqualifying the dissenter from being taken seriously and indeed from being heard at all."[12]

And so the liberal opinion press during the Kennedy Administration concentrated on criticism of Ngo Dinh Diem and his senior officials and thereby failed to grapple with Wicker's underlying assumptions.

With this narrow range of view, though, the criticisms of Diem and U.S. policy toward him were pursued with considerable vigor. Kennedy and his policy makers made easy targets in this regard, possibly for reasons having to do with the nature of Kennedy's political options. Vietnam War critic Daniel Ellsberg has charged that survival-based demands on post-war Presidents helped contribute to creation of a stalemate policy in Vietnam. Presidents from Truman to Nixon, Ellsberg said, had "aimed mainly to avoid definitive failure, 'losing Indochina to Communism' during his tenure, so that renewed stalemate has been for them a kind of success."[13]

DEALING WITH DICTATORS

Under such pressure to contain Communism, these Presidents were forced to deal with a variety of governments among America's anti-Communist client states, including many in Asia that were oppressive and autocratic in the best mandarin traditions.

It was the necessity to support objectionable regimes that provided the context for one form of American liberal objection to U.S. Vietnam policy. The regimes of Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan, Syngman Rhee in Korea and Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam were highly offensive to most members of the liberal opinion press most of the time. The Nation sarcastically declared Rhee in 1960 to be among "the most virtuous of men," when considered in the context of America's cold war campaign against Communism. "By now," the magazine said in a January, 1960 editorial, "it must be a truism that the only virtue that matters is anti-Communism, and by that standard Syngman Rhee, the aging tyrant of Korea, is the most virtuous of men.[14]

Saul K. Padover, a professor at the New School of Social Research, compared conditions in North and South Korea for a May, 1960, article in The Reporter. South Korea, "America's 'show window of democracy,' has wallowed in stagnation and corruption," Padover wrote. Meanwhile North Korea "has made vigorous progress in industrialization and in economic planning. If North Koreans had no liberty, they at least had jobs. American-protected South Koreans had neither."[15] New Republic correspondent Edward Neilan had to reach far into the past in explaining political conditions under the Rhee government. "Democracy in Korea is something less than a 'showcase.' Still, seen on the spot and whenever one remembers the 40 years of totalitarian Japanese rule, enforced by a ruthless police system in which most of today's police leaders were trained, the progress has been considerable. Certainly the improvement has been marked since 1946, when there were 143 political "parties and Boy Scouts were disbanded for political 'terrorist activities.'"[16]

The exile government of Nationalist Chinese leader Chiang

Kai-shek was the target of similar criticism from liberal commentators. The New Republic and The Nation, for example, both took strong exception to Chiang's 1960 persecution of a Taipei journalist critical of official pronouncements that that Nationalists would one day recapture the mainland. "Dictatorships being dictatorships," said The New Republic in a 1960 editorial, "few in the West were surprised when a military court in Formosa on October 8 sentenced Lei Chen, editor of the Free China Fortnightly, to 10 years' imprisonment."[17] The Nation recalled, in commenting on the court martial of Lei Chen, that 'it is no longer patriotic for Americans to remember it, but the fact is that Chiang Kai-shek shot his way into Taiwan, massacred some 40,000 of the natives, and continues to govern them by force and the resources lavished on his regime by the United States."[18]

In pursuing his Southeast Asia policy, Kennedy had to support one of the most autocratic, undemocratic and self-destructive Asian leaders of them all--Ngo Dinh Diem. Diem's one-family dictatorship behaved in ways that contributed to its eventual downfall. The extent of American liberal displeasure at Diem's practices was revealed in great detail in The Nation, The New Republic, The New Leader and The Reporter. On the one hand, as has been shown, liberals found the behavior of client regimes such as Diem's highly objectionable. On the other hand, though, the mood of the liberal consensus that prevailed during the Kennedy years in Vietnam also caused writers in the liberal opinion press to be committed to the idea that Communist expansion should be blunted in Indochina. Communism was bad, but so, too, were the compromises in philosophical, political and material values that Americans were being forced to make in pursuit of anti-Communist policies in Southeast Asia. The intensity of this intellectual dilemma

increased as conditions under Diem deteriorated, despite ever-expanding U.S. support.

KENNEDY'S CUL-DE-SAC

Another factor also helped drive the U.S. deeper into Vietnam. This was the tendency of the Kennedy Administration to force itself into what Pentagon Papers author Leslie Gelb has described as a kind of political cul-de-sac. Gelb, writing in 1972 issue of Foreign Affairs, declared that wise Presidents and policy planners don't get caught playing politics with foreign affairs. "The unfounded but nevertheless potent myth about politics stopping at the water's edge creates great pressure to keep one's mouth shut, to think and speak of foreign affairs as if it were something sacred."[19] The message was clear. Administrations could rise and fall on the basis of a President's involvement or avoidance of involvement in the internal affairs of other countries faced with a Communist threat.

But the message was also clear that Presidents couldn't appear to be aware of this, at least not in a public and seemingly self-serving way. There were no clear guidelines. Presidents had to feel their way along, doing enough to contain Communism, but not enough to incur public protest at the involvement of excessive amounts of military manpower in the process. Post-war Presidents, including John F. Kennedy, had to weigh carefully the degree of military commitment needed to preserve friendly, anti-Communist governments. As a result, Kennedy planners increased military aid to Diem, while also trying to 'pressure him into reforming his regime. Diem sought aid, while avoiding the reforms. As conditions in Vietnam deteriorated, the liberal opinion journals in the United States grew more critical of

Diem's ability to cope with the Communist threat. They were patient, though. This patience was in keeping with dictates of the "new liberalism," as outlined a decade earlier in Schlesinger's The Vital Center. In that call to arms for liberals, Schlesinger had outlined his concept of "fighting radicalism," which entailed endurance of a certain amount of sacrifice if the Communist menace was to be destroyed. Those who sought peaceful co-existence with the Soviets were seen as throwbacks to old "popular front" days. These were the "doughface liberals." Their approach to world affairs was conditioned by Stalin's militarism and harsh rule along with significant losses to the Free World in China and Eastern Europe. As a result, cooperation with the Soviets was tantamount to seeking a pact with the devil. In the view of Schlesinger and other advocates of liberal toughness, evil understood only the controlling influence of countervailing power. America must marshal that power and apply it actively in areas threatened by Communist aggression. Advocates of just this kind of militant liberalism were recruited into the Kennedy foreign policy staff, with Schlesinger in place as resident intellectual adviser.

Manifestations of this brand of militant liberalism were evident in the liberal journals of the Kennedy years, regarding Vietnam and other world trouble spots. It was Diem who confused things in those early days of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. The liberal journals advocated enlightened opposition to Soviet aggression. But they were also put off by Diem's autocratic and ineffectual methods of government.

So attracted were these journals to Vietnam as part of a global struggle that they almost entirely ignored the realities of Vietnamese history, culture and political behavior. They analyzed American

progress, or lack of progress, in its battle against Vietnamese Communism. Lost in all of this analysis were the Vietnamese as something other than citizens of a nation of squabbling sects and factions having varying relations to the anti-Communist struggle. And yet it was these cultural, historical and social realities that Frances FitzGerald said American policy planners ignored to their peril. The Kennedy Administration entered the Vietnam conflict with no apparent expertise in the internal subtleties of Vietnam's civil war. As Daniel Ellsberg put it in assessing the qualifications of Kennedy's senior policy makers in pursuing the Vietnam War:

> It is fair to say that Americans in office read very few books, and none in French; and that there has never been an official of Deputy Assistant Secretary rank or higher (myself included) who could have passed in office a midterm freshman exam in modern Vietnamese history, if such a course existed in this country.[20]

If writers in the liberal opinion press had greater knowledge of Vietnamese history, culture or society than government officials during the Kennedy years, it was seldom displayed on the pages of their publications.

Perhaps it would be a measure of the power of the 1950s cold war liberal consensus that fresh ideas on America's foreign policy assumptions and the quality of its cold war allies should have been so sparse in these publications during most of Kennedy's time in office. The liberal opinion press was tough on Communism and demanding of those, in and out of government, who would halt the expansion of Communism in the world. Kennedy and members of his administration strove to be equal to the challenge. Reporting and editorials on Vietnam in the liberal journals from 1960 through 1963 did little to counter established views of the Communist menance. America had a job to do in South-

east Asia, distasteful as it might be. The thing to do was to proceed with or without Ngo Dinh Diem. Only with great reluctance did the liberal journals leave the American fighting team and begin to question America's capacities to pursue its anti-Communist crusade in the jungles of Southeast Asia. In time they came to see the demands of the conflict as being perhaps beyond the real interests of the United States. This doubt started to emerge during 1962 and continued to grow as American military involvement in South Vietnam increased. Slowly the liberal journals started to sketch in the true dimensions of the struggle and they didn't like the picture that was appearing. Tentatively, reluctantly, they began suggesting that a negotiated settlement with Ho Chi Minh might be the more prudent course for U.S. policy planners. For, not only was Diem emerging as a weak reed in a prolonged military struggle, but the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese were proving to be tough opponents. The Malaya analogy grew thinner and thinner. Perhaps the agrovilles weren't such good ideas. Anti-guerrilla warfare, the Green Berets--maybe they couldn't do the job and large contingents of American footsoldiers would be needed. The doubts began in 1962 and continued through 1963. Then the assassination of Diem occurred and the liberal opinion press suggested that perhaps now U.S. policy makers would truly reassess the nation's interests in South Vietnam.

Faced with the ever more foreboding realities of American involvement in Southeast Asia, the liberal consensus of the 1950s had started to crumble. This process can be viewed in the publications that, for this study, constitute the liberal opinion press.

CHAPTER I NOTES:

[1]Daniel Ellsberg, Papers on the War (New York: Pocket Books, 1972, p. 105

[2]Tom Wicker, "The Greening of the Press," Columbia Journalism Review, May-June, 1971, p. 7-12.

[3]Douglas T. Miller, The Fifties (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1975) p.242-243.

[4]Godfrey Hodgson, America In Our Time (New York: Vintage Books, 1976) p. 69.

[5]Norman Markowitz, "From the Popular Front to Cold War Liberalism," in The Specter (New York: New Viewpoints, 1974) p. 93.

[6]David Spitz, "A Liberal Perspective on Liberalism and Communism," in Left, Right and Center (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, 1965) p. 20.

[7]Spitz, p. 26.

[8]Markowitz, p. 94.

[9]Markowitz, p. 94.

[10]Markowitz, p. 95.

[11]Mary McAuliffe, Crisis on the Left (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1978) p. 63.

[12]Hodgson, p. 72-73.

[13]Ellsberg, p. 1.

[14]"Most Virtuous of Men," Editorial, The Nation 22 January 1960, p. 2.

[15]Saul K. Padover, "The Korean Drama--Misery and Revolt," The Reporter 26 May 1961, p. 21.

[16]Edward Neilan, "Rhee Ad Infinitum," The New Republic, 7 March 1960, p. 9.

[17]"Chiang and His Critics," Editorial, The New Republic 31 October 1960, p. 7.

[18]"Taiwan's Syngman Rhee," Editorial, The Nation, 8 October 1960, p. 218.

[19]Leslie Gelb, "The Essential Domino," Foreign Affairs April, 1972, p. 460.

[20]Ellsberg, p. 24.

CHAPTER II: KENNEDY TAKES OFFICE

REMEMBERING IKE

Communist totalitarianism was abhorrent to the liberal opinion press. But the four journals examined in this study had different opinions on what to do about the post-war Communist challenge in the former colonial regions. This division continued into the early 1960s. The Reporter and The New Leader wanted strong action, military if necessary, to stop advances by the Soviet Union, Communist China and other members of the Communist bloc. The Nation and The New Republic began the decade with more moderate attitudes. They agreed that Communism was oppressive. But they also questioned the routine use of military power to threaten the Soviets and the Chinese. Instead, they tended to approach the Communist powers as realities on the world scene, as forces to be worked around in the diplomatic pursuit of peace. They favored negotiation instead of the sabre rattling that so often emanated from the pages of The Reporter and The New Leader. Evidence of these differences within the liberal opinion press appears in coverage of the 1960 Presidential campaign and in commentary on the first year of the Kennedy Administration.

To be sure, there were trouble spots in the world as the 1960 Presidential campaign began. But as the United States entered the 1960s, East-West tensions appeared to be easing.

Soviet Premier Krushchev's peace efforts of 1959 contributed to this relaxation. In January, Khrushchev had called for a summit

conference on the German question and continued to push for such a meeting throughout the year. The Soviet leader came to the United States in September and spent two weeks visiting American cities, farms and factories. He spoke often on his visit of the virtues of world peace and arms reductions. In October the journal Foreign Affairs published an article by Khrushchev in which he called for economic rather than military competition between East and West. In January, 1960 Khrushchev offered to reduce Soviet armed forces by more than one million men, a plan quickly approved by the Soviet Supreme Council. That same month the Soviet leader also accepted invitations from France, West Germany, Great Britain and the United States to meet for summit talks in May.

For his part, President Eisenhower had also reduced world tensions. He welcomed Khrushchev to the United States in September and treated him warmly; this only days after returning himself from successful meetings with allied leaders in Bonn, London and Paris. Following a triumphant tour of Asia and Europe in December, Ike had joined other Western leaders in inviting Khrushchev to peace talks in Paris.

In all, it appeared the nation could finally relax, after enduring Sputnik, Quemoy and Matsu, Marines landing in Lebanon, Castro's increasingly left-leaning revolution in Cuba, big-power sabre rattling in Europe and other crises of the late 1950s. Americans appeared to welcome the opportunity; year-end opinion polls gave Ike high marks in popularity.

Not all Americans were soothed by this peaceful interlude, though. Conservative writers for The National Review were deeply morose about the problems Eisenhower had bequeathed to his successor. Writers for

the liberal opinion journals, The New Republic, The New Leader and The Reporter, were hardly less dismal in their views of the world.

Looking back on the Eisenhower years, an editorial in The National Review described Eisenhower as "a man one can trust to do the good, according to his lights. And yet it must be said, what a miserable President he was!"[1]

In the view of writers for the liberal journals, things were hardly better. This was apparent as the election year 1960 began. Danger lurked beneath the surface calm, and Eisenhower was to blame. Ike was seen as an avoider of conflict, not a peacemaker; a do-nothing Chief Executive, not a fiscally prudent defender of U.S. interest. Ike's control of defense spending was an invitation to war, not peace.

The New Republic's anonymous columnist, T.R.B., reflected this mood. The views of Allen Dulles were invoked in a February 1960 column as evidence of the looming danger. Dulles, Eisenhower's own CIA director, had declared Soviet economic growth to be twice that of the United States, a circumstance that had failed to jar Ike's apathy.[2]

Eisenhower had also been lackadaisical about space exploration, even as the Soviets were hurling machinery, dogs, and rabbits into orbit and firing rockets at the moon.

"Other nations universally regard the Soviet Union as preeminent in science and technology," T.R.B. declared.

Things looked better at The Reporter. The magazine considered itself "sanquinary about the sixties" in an editorial on Jan. 7, 1960. Members of the Eisenhower administration had left too many issues untouched; perhaps for political gain. "True," the magazine said, "there are still men in high position and anxious to advance to even higher ones who wouldn't mind continuing to push unpleasant facts

under the carpet; but the carpet is bulging."[3]

The New Leader's Washington columnist, Julius Duscha, called Eisenhower's final state of the union address, delivered Jan. 7, 1960, "a fairly comprehensive catalogue of the nation's needs, but hardly a satisfactory program for action." The President's state of the union messages "have been notable for their pedestrian generalities and lack of specific proposals."[4]

Duscha, like T.R.B., saw in Eisenhower's avoidance of foreign and domestic needs the potential for danger to the nation. In Duscha's view, events moved slowly enough in the 1950s to allow Presidential apathy. No such luxury would exist for Chief Executives in the coming decade. "Whoever succeeds Eisenhower . . . will be forced to do more than list the nation's hopes and fears . . . America must either meet its needs or suffer the consequences of demotion to a second-class power . . . It is going to take more than the familiar phrases and vague remedies of the President's message to meet the challenges of the 60s."[5]

Only in The Nation among the liberal opinion journals was the Republican President seen as a prudent peacemaker with the praise-worthy ability to say no to the generals and admirals and still maintain the nation's defense. In a Jan. 23, 1960 editorial, for example, the magazine took note of what it called "the desperate season," that time each January when "Congress assembles and the battle of the budget begins." During the desperate season, said The Nation, "the threat to the survival of the United States climbs to a plateau which is then maintained until the funds have been allocated and the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines each knows the extent of its deprivation."[6]

Laid low by Eisenhower's curbs on defense spending, the military

leaders "are climbing their Calvary with a heavier cross than ever before," and with quiet resignation are "waiting for a new administration that will not be so merciless." The other liberal publications saw Eisenhower's defense policies as outmoded, inappropriate for the coming decade, and in need of budgetary invigoration. To The Nation, military budget demands were seen as efforts by the defense establishment to boost its own power. "Most problems of the next President are hidden behind the veil of the future," said the magazine. The demand for increased defense expenditures "is one that can be predicted a whole year before he takes office."[7]

KENNEDY EXAMINED

But what of the young Democratic candidate from Massachusetts? How was John F. Kennedy being treated by the liberal journals? The New Leader gave Kennedy a forum on defense.

In a Question and Answer format in the Mar. 28, 1960 issue of The New Leader, Kennedy criticized the defense lethargy of the incumbent President. Kennedy said in his remarks, quoting from a campaign speech he had given in Gary, Ind., that "the Republican peace and prosperity is a myth. We are not enjoying a period of peace--only a period of stagnation and retreat, while America becomes second in missiles, second in space, second in education, and if we don't act fast and effectively, second in production and industrial might."[8]

Shortly before the Democratic Convention, The Nation joined the other liberal journals in condemning the perilous state of the world. By that time, of course, the shooting down of a United States U-2 reconnaissance aircraft over the Soviet Union had shattered the peace efforts of Khrushchev and Eisenhower, contributed to the destruction

of the Paris summit and put East and West back on a cold war collision course.

The Nation held out hope for Stevenson as a Presidential candidate, and even as late as July 2, it proposed a Democratic ticket of Stevenson and Kennedy. The magazine criticized "those liberals who are rushing to jump on the Kennedy bandwagon" simply as a means of showing that the liberals aren't a "faint-hearted breed." The country and the world, said The Nation, "are in the gravest kind of trouble." Both are in need of men with "good will, long experience and first-rate minds" if the human race is to "escape mass immolation." Eight more years would season young Senator Kennedy. "In 1968, he will still be only fifty, and far better qualified for the Presidency than he is now."[9]

Max Ascoli, founder and publisher of The Reporter and the man who established the magazine's editorial positions, finally endorsed Kennedy, on the basis that "we have a chance with Kennedy, we are sunk with Nixon." To Ascoli the United States was in deep trouble, especially in its battle with international Communism. During the Eisenhower years, he wrote in September, 1960, "the manipulators of slogans never stopped telling the people that everything was going fine, that the Communist enemies were in retreat, and indeed, that their rout was going to start any moment." Ascoli saw in world events during 1960 a kind of draconian plot. "In faraway lands ludicrous things are happening, all somehow arranged or exploited against us--and the list is just as long as it is sickening."[10]

The Nation, meanwhile, attempted to refute the idea that world events were the result of devious manipulation. Rather, the magazine chided Kennedy for trying to capitalize on such beliefs among the

electorate. Commenting on a Kennedy television speech, The Nation accused the candidate of adopting the "devil theory of communism" espoused by the Eisenhower Administration, and in fact promising to make this view more intense. Kennedy had said in his speech that the next President must begin his term with a request for increased nuclear and conventional military capabilities. "If Mr. Kennedy is that President," The Nation said, "he promises to act first, act fast, and act tough. He will, that is to say, bring us to disaster all the sooner."[11]

WASHINGTON 'BRISTLES'

After Kennedy had won the election, members of the liberal opinion press wished the President-elect all the best as the year 1961 began, although in its usual manner, The Nation was circumscribed in its enthusiasm for John F. Kennedy's vigorous style of liberalism.

"Happy New Year, Jack," was the title of New Republic columnist Gerald W. Johnson's salutation to the incoming Chief Executive. Johnson acknowledged that President Kennedy couldn't truly expect to have a happy, problem-free year, nor would he necessarily want one anyway. When you're the President of the United States, happiness is a minor objective. It was this desire for tranquility that had made the Eisenhower years such a "dismal experience." The columnist wanted no more of that. "The two happiest Presidents of recent years undoubtedly were Coolidge and Eisenhower. We know what Coolidge brought us to; and what Eisenhower may have brought us to is no fit subject of speculation on a festive occasion."[12]

Elections analyst Richard Scammon gave John F. Kennedy a "clean slate" in foreign policy, as the new President entered office, especially since, in Scammon's estimation, Americans were only moderately con-

cerned with foreign policy matters anyway. He had studied analyses of the Presidential election returns and found most voters had been influenced by party loyalties, religious considerations, image perceptions and "concern over domestic--particularly economic--issues." (emphasis Scammon's)[14]

The New Administration looked good, on paper and in the flesh. To New Leader columnist Julius Duscha, the Kennedy men were exciting, energetic and blessed with intellectual ability . . . "Washington likes the looks of the President-elect's carpentry work," Duscha wrote. The cabinet's most commendable feature: Its youth and vigor. Only Commerce Secretary Luther Hodges was over 60, and "his job amounts to little more than housekeeping." Secretary of State Dean Rusk was the "elder statesman" at 51. Stewart Udall, at 38, was knowledgeable on matters vital to his job as Secretary of the Interior.[15]

New Leader columnist and executive editor William E. Bohn saw the rise of Kennedy and his young team as a continuation of a liberal struggle dating from the days of Theodore Roosevelt. Since the turn of the century, said Bohn, "we have been carrying on a debate about what sort of country this was intended to be." Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt and Truman had "aimed at a welfare state in which all--or nearly all--citizens would have the Government pulling for them." Other Presidents, the Republicans ones, including Eisenhower, had determined that if they "just left things alone everything would come out all right." Bohn was interested in Kennedy's new Administration because it represented, in his estimation, a clear triumph of progressive over conservative preferences among the electorate. Franklin Roosevelt had been elected because of the Great Depression and World War II. "And then, as soon as the people had a chance, they voted

by immense majorities in favor of backward movement." Nixon had represented an attempt to continue these laissez-faire government policies, policies that amounted to ignoring the nation's increasing problems. Kennedy's election stood as a departure from such apathy. "Kennedy was clearly and energetically on the other side. He does not believe in unemployment, in letting things go until they right themselves. He believes in using the great powers of our Government to put things right and keep them right."[16]

Great expectations and anticipated action, followed the Kennedy men into the White House. The liberal opinion press wanted to see things happen in government. They wanted Washington to get involved, to take action on affairs at home and abroad. Kennedy hadn't been in office more than two months before The New Republic and its columnist, T.R.B., were asking "why doesn't Kennedy move faster? Why are his requests so modest?" T.R.B. laid the sluggishness at the doorstep of Congress.[16] Editors of The New Republic agreed. The magazine's Washington sources "fear Mr. Kennedy retreats too early, compromises too soon, asks too little." Kennedy's formidable job was "to awaken a people that has not believed it was asleep."[17]

T.R.B. and The New Republic editors soon got the action they craved. On Mar. 27 T.R.B. described "the new Washington," a city that was "crackling, rocking, jumping! It is a kite zigging in a breeze, it is a city released from a heat wave." Kennedy was a wonder to the press, T.R.B. exclaimed. "At first reporters glanced at each other in wild surmise, later they asked, 'Do we really know this man Kennedy?' Now they gasp and hold on." Eisenhower had become a dim and unregretted memory, a Model T in a Thunderbird age. Gone were "Christian Herter and the Secretary of Commerce--let's see,

what was his name?"[18]

In his ecstacy, T.R.B. described the now-bristling Washington as resembling:

> A ship that Richard Henry Dana sailed on, a proud Cape Horner or stately Indianman, that is long becalmed. Sudenly the vacant winds flap, the crew comes up speculative, the breeze rises. "Sail," cries the captain; the great vessel comes around, gains headway; the spars begin to talk, water ripples under the keel, she begins to fling foam from her bows. What a moment! Now under a pyramid of canvas the erstwhile listless vessel had come alive, clouds swaying overhead, the whack and rhythm alongside, she moves gloriously through the water--dignity restored, bound for great destinies.[19]

"Yes sir, that's Washington," said T.R.B. recovering from his nautical reverie, "something doing every minute. Kennedy moves so fast reporters lose track . . . What all this sounds like out there where you are, folks, I don't know. It's fun here!"[20]

The Reporter suspected that "President Kennedy will be busy enough during his first year in office rolling back the White House rug to find all the problems that have been swept under it."

Max Ascoli remarked on the lack of ideological commitment by the Kennedy team something about which the nation should be grateful to the new President. Kennedy's only election promise had been to get the nation moving again. Men of action were needed and Kennedy's people were ideal for the job. "Not much blueprinting is asked of them, for there have been even too many blueprints to dust off and relearn."[21]

The Nation acknowledged the "drive and energy" Kennedy had brought to the White House and declared him a "young man in a hurry." At the same time, though, it asked probing questions about the substance and maturity of a young man who had risen from a 34-year-old freshman Congressman to President of the United States in only 10

years. The Nation's editors saw Kennedy as being "always a step or two ahead of the locomotive of history." He had been elected to the House of Representatives in his early thirties, been an aspirant for the Vice Presidency in 1956, when he was only 39 years old, and made a successful bid for the Presidency in 1960 that was, "in a way, even more premature." The President, as usual, was rushing history.[22]

RUSHING AHEAD

History or no history, though, Kennedy was indeed elected and on the job. He rushed bills to Congress, held press conferences, announced decisions. There was action, but to The Nation's taste, precious little substance or response from official quarters. Go slow, The Nation advised.[23]

Of course, the Kennedy team didn't wait, didn't take the longer, more thoughtful, more patient view.

One of the first major reforms undertaken by the Kennedy administration was to expand the range and flexibility of the armed forces. As already noted, there was pressure for this from most segments of the liberal opinion press. Massive retaliation, "the new look," wasn't up to the challenges of guerrilla warfare, of defending the former colonial world from Communism.

In defense, as in other areas of reform by the Kennedy men, The New Republic urged haste. Time was slipping away. The magazine quoted General Maxwell Taylor, former Chief of Staff of the Army, on the need to move quickly in defense matters. The Pentagon was ready for change, the magazine said. Now was the time to move. A recent Taylor article in Foreign Affairs was quoted: "World conditions have changed drastically since the adoption of the so-called New

Look in 1953 and its supporting strategy of massive retaliation . . . a program is needed which will take the changes into account. Such a program needs to be based on a flexible military strategy designed to deter war, large or small." McNamara was a novice in defense matters. This inexperience could contribute to further delay, said The New Republic. But there were clear signs for McNamara to follow and experienced defense hands for him to turn to for advice. The President himself was a source of guidance. A Kennedy speech in the Senate the previous year was quoted as an indication of what The New Republic had in mind for the modern defense establishment. The President-to-be had said:

> Both before and after 1953 events have demonstrated that our nuclear retaliatory power is not enough. It cannot deter Communist aggression which is too limited to justify atomic war. It cannot protect uncommitted nations against a Communist takeover using local or guerrilla forces. It cannot be used in so-called brush-fire peripheral wars. In short, it cannot prevent Communists from gradually nibbling at the fringe of the free world's territory and strength, until our security has been steadily eroded in piecemeal fashion--each Red advance being too small to justify massive retaliation, with all its risks.[24]

Here, indeed, was an early view of a mindset that could become involved in an Asian land war. The free world was being slowly, insidiously consumed, as if by cancer. Communism, like a degenerative disease, was eating at territory considered friendly to the United States and its interests. Dropping atomic bombs on such infected territory would only kill the patient in order to save it. The New Republic saw this metaphor as a justification for spending more money on defense, for creating flexibility in lieu of Eisenhower's concept of massive nuclear retaliation, a concept that, by Kennedy's own assessment, made it virtually impossible for the United States to become involved militarily in the internal affairs of emerging nations. With

The New Republic's blessing, Kennedy and his defense secretary would change that. They would scrap rigid Eisenhower defense policies and replace them with the flexible means to intervene in the guerrilla conflicts of the world.

The New Leader's view of defense resembled that of The New Republic. For example, an article in early January by Anthony Harrigan, a reporter for the Charleston (S.C.) News Courier, held out hope that McNamara would rise to the needs of the military "at a time when the services must adjust to reality." Harrigan was dissatisfied with a defense policy "based on spiralling numbers of manned bombers and ballistic missiles." This, he said, offered only "rigid and unreal response to the Soviet and Communist Chinese military challenge." Harrigan, like Kennedy in his Senate speech quoted by The New Republic, saw Communist advances as nibbling operations, in which small chunks of the underdeveloped world were being consumed to the peril of U.S. interests.[25]

"First priority," said Harrigan, "must go to forces of the cold war and limited war to make Communist nibbling unprofitable."

Haste in foreign affairs, haste in refitting the armed forces, haste in scrapping the tired, outdated Eisenhower policies--the liberal journals wanted haste, speed, change. Only The Nation suggested editorially that perhaps the people didn't really want such rapid change.

Richard Scammon had read the patterns in the 1960 Presidential election and found evidence that this was indeed the mood of the people as the year 1961 began. The people hadn't liked Nixon, they had put Kennedy in the White House with a margin of barely more that 100,000 popular votes, and there was reason to believe that Kennedy was in office as the benefactor of superior public relations skills

rather than superior programs to serve the American electorate. There was little empirical evidence to indicate that Kennedy's victory was a cry from the people for radical change from the Eisenhower approach to government. The liberal opinion press, not necessarily the majority of the American people, wanted rapid change. If Kennedy and his advisers, many of whom had written for the liberal journals, were to hear voices of moderation, these voices wouldn't come from the liberal opinion press. Only The Nation advised caution, contemplation, slow change and preservation of the "afterglow" of the Eisenhower years.

THE REVELRY ENDS

T.R.B.'s Washington was "crackling, rocking, jumping," in late March. By early May the city was smitten. The President whom T.R.B. had viewed so fondly during the campaign, looking boyish and patrician in a speech at the National Press Club, was again addressing the press. But this time Kennedy was standing in front of members of the National Association of Newspaper Editors and instead of criticizing the stagnant Eisenhower defense policies, he was defending his own. He was attempting to explain why the Cuban invasion had gone sour. "Here was a President in trouble," T.R.B. wrote. The President stayed cool. T.R.B. made what he could out of the speech. Kennedy "did not bluster nor pound the lectern; he did not make excuses, he did not say very much." For T.R.B., Kennedy had erred and then shown potential for learning from his mistakes. And then had come the news that the Cuban invasion had been an American, and, more precisely, a Kennedy operation. "All pretense was over," T.R.B. said . . . "We had mounted the invasion, planned it, drilled it, financed

it, delivered it; it was invasion by proxy. It made the anti-intervention qualifications by Kennedy and Adlai Stevenson look cheap."[26]

In his column one week later, after having had the time to brood on the duplicity of the new President, T.R.B. was no longer shocked. He was angry. The columnist recalled the news, one year earlier almost to the day, when an American U-2 reconnaissance plane had been shot down over the Soviet Union. Eisenhower had denied that the plane had been on a spying mission for the CIA. When news of Eisenhower's denial had come in, T.R.B. said he had telephoned a State Department source at his home. "Confidentially, and not for attribution," T.R.B. had asked, "was our side lying?" "Absolutely not!" the source had replied, indignantly. And then the source had explained at length why charges of spying were false. "Well, he was wrong," T.R.B. wrote. "He did not intentionally deceive us; he was deceived himself."[27]

And now the lying in high places had happened again. For T.R.B. there were "few things more shattering than the discovery that our country was lying. In a quiet way we take a lot of pride in our country." The President had denied he was planning the Cuban invasion. And then he had authorized just such an invasion. "It made you wonder once more whom you could trust," T.R.B. lamented.[28]

Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, a regular contributor to The New Leader, was equally distressed by the Cuban action. It had rocked his belief in the essential soberness and common sense of the Kennedy Administration. "The question is now being raised whether the Cuban undertaking revealed recklessness." Niebuhr reported considerable uneasiness among "those who previously hailed the new, creative steps that the Administration had taken in Latin America." Rebellion against

the Eisenhower slowness had suddenly mellowed. Niebuhr quoted a Latin American friend: "The Eisenhower inaction was bad enough. But wrong action is worse." In his haste, said Niebuhr, Kennedy had failed "to measure the breadth and depth of anti-yankee sentiment both within Cuba and in the whole of Latin America."[29]

But where Niebuhr had seen failure of perception on the part of the Kennedy men, New Leader columnist William Henry Chamberlain had seen failure of nerve and resolve. Kennedy's mistake had not been to launch the invasion of Cuba, but rather to have launched too small of an invasion. He had abaondoned the "freedom-loving Cubans" on the beaches and thereby reaped the "familiar bitter consequences of hitting soft." Communists deserve no quarter because they give no quarter, either to dissenters at home or to enemies abroad.[30]

The Nation in its anger over the Cuban fiasco, looked within the U.S. government itself for answers.

Kennedy would do well, in the wake of the Cuban invasion, to examine the sources of Ike's popularity, the magazine suggested. "How, then, did General Eisenhower gain such a secure place in the hearts of his countrymen? Psychoanalytic 'images' aside, it was largely because he was unmistakably a man of peace." Among Eisenhower's achievements: "He had shut up the blow-hard generals and elevated diplomatic intercourse to a higher plane, without pointless abuse of some of the Eisenhower ambassadors." The Nation warned, prophetically, that "the last thing Kennedy wants is to unleash the forces of the frenetic Right, always latent in the American setup and now inflamed by American reverses."[31]

One lesson The Nation suggested might be learned from the Cuban invasion, a lession applicable for Santo Domingo, Haiti, South

Vietnam and other nations enjoying American military support: Establish a single standard for dictators--leave them all alone "The good dictators are those who are with us, the bad dictators are against us. To much of the rest of the world, unfortunately, this will look like a double standard established primarily for our military convenience."[32] If America couldn't abide a Fidel Castro in Cuba, it shouldn't, by this logic, abide a similarly tyrannical dictator in a nation we were allegedly protecting from Communism.

Kennedy, of course, didn't heed such advice, but rather chose to follow the familiar cold-war pattern in developing nations. He abided tyrants on the order of Ngo Dinh Diem in South Vietnam, Chaing Kai-shek in Taiwan and Duvalier in Haiti, but authorized an invasion of Cuba.

The aftermath of this ill-begotten decision shattered the zestful mood of Washington and threw liberal columnists such as T.R.B. of The New Republic and Tristram Coffin of The New Leader into deeply pensive and somber moods regarding the immediate future of the Republic. Frightening events leap-frogged over one another in the weeks after the Bay of Pigs. "Every day we say the pace can't last; every day it accelerates. Now it is Khrushchev and Vienna in June and God knows what thereafter," T.R.B. wrote in late May, as a preface to a grim listing of the debits and credits of the new Administration. The heaviest debit was Cuba. "It shook us up," T.R.B. declared. "It ended the honeymoon. It showed us our paragon is fallible." T.R.B. agreed that any President, especially a young one, is entitled to one mistake of great consequence. But, the columnist wondered, was this an isolated incident? Or was this a portent of things to come, of flawed judgment in the hard-hitting young man who

had so enthralled the liberal opinion press only a few weeks before. Was the Bay of Pigs decision "an isolated mistake or a settled point of view? T.R.B. asked. "If the latter," he said, "we are in trouble."[33]

Even here, though, T.R.B. managed to trace some of Kennedy's leadership problems to residual affects of the Eisenhower years. Americans were still lethargic, unwilling to surge into action at the President's calls for sacrifice, especially when the President hadn't told them precisely what it was he wanted them to sacrifice, in what way the gesture was to take place and to what specific ends the sacrifices would be made. The U.S. was still dozing "from the Eisenhower pills." Kennedy's second heaviest debit, then, was "his failure to take the country into his confidence, to fireside talk--to educate." (emphasis T.R.B.'s) Press conferences and other public relations gimmicry weren't enough. "We think he must talk to the nation. The country is eager to be led. It hears of 'sacrifice' and doesn't know what it should sacrifice."[34]

New Leader columnist Tristram Coffin also read discontent in the mood of the country, after the first honeymoon months of the Kennedy Administration. But for Coffin the source of the discontent wasn't the President's reticence or his improvident Cuban decision. Instead, the source of America's anger and the object of its increasing fury was the Soviet Union. Coffin described the average American as resembling a man who arises from a good meal, folds his napkin, stands, lets "the anger and doubt and frustration fill him," then walks next door and hits "his neighbor full in the face."[35]

"To put it simply," said Coffin, "America is getting a belly full of Soviet Russia. If Moscow gets rough over West Berlin, the pressures on the Administration to fight will be almost unendurable."[36]

Washington Post editorial writer Karl E. Meyer was equally concerned. Using terminology fit for describing a man recovering from an alcoholic binge, Meyer surveyed for The New Leader the disarray of the Kennedy Administration after six months on the job. The Kennedy mystique was quickly evaporating. The Administration was just six months old and "it has become the source of sour wisecracks among those who perhaps expected too much, too soon." An Administration that had impressed everyone with its youthgful vigor "now seemed so middle aged."

Here once again was seen evidence of the cold, residual hand of Eisenhower. Franklin Roosevelt was elected by a wide margin and the Hoover Administration had been severely discredited. Roosevelt could use this clean break with the past to help make his New Deal stick. Kennedy had no such luxury, Meyer said. He was "bound--or better, trussed--by the final budget left by Dwight Eisenhower." Moreover, the new President had been the victim of a leftover foreign policy that included plans for the Cuban invasion, a kind of undetonated bomb ticking away in the Oval Office. "The case of Cuba . . . was only the most calamitous instance of how policies initiated by the old Administration could blow up in the face of the new."[37]

In attempting to shape foreign affairs, said Meyer, Kennedy was faced with "irritating, unbudgeable slagheaps of frustration which cannot be moved by kicking, cajoling or even by recourse to the telephone." Swift, clean action "of the kind so congenial to Kennedy" wasn't feasible in trying to dent these mounds . . . littered as they were with such problems as Berlin and Laos. Kennedy's one attempt to manage the mire--the Cuban invasion--"only provided a melancholy confirmation of the dilemmas one confronts in trying to use a bulldozer

on the slagheap."[38]

From these observations, it would appear that Camelot had ended almost before it began. American liberals, at least those writing in the liberal opinion press during the early Kennedy months, seemed to be suffering deeply at the sight of this vigorous young President, an intellectual like themselves, virtually one of their own, being so buffeted by events. Always tending toward the excitable, Max Ascoli's melancholy at the woeful condition of world affairs turned to fear and despair in the summer, 1961, as the Berlin crisis moved inexorably toward what looked to be a titanic confronation. "It's coming," Ascoli exclaimed in his column of July 20, 1961. "The test, the confrontation is coming between the West and the Communist empire, between our peace and their peace." Ascoli saw the origins of this frightening morass not in the helter-skelter actions of the Kennedy team but rather in the short-sighted appeasement tactics of America's immediate post-war leaders. Kennedy had inherited what they had begun. Still, Ascoli held out hope that "there is no humiliation that cannot be overcome if we and our leaders are firm and unafraid in thinking through the situation that is now facing us." Ascoli saw Berlin as a spiritual extension of America, "as if West Berlin were our own home, and on its freedom depended what makes life worth living."[39]

Here, too, Eisenhower could share some of the blame for Kennedy's plight. In Ascoli's estimation, the Russians had been probing at America's will for months, "from the Congo to Laos, by using proxy powers." Eisenhower had succumbed to the notion that America's forces should not be wasted in resisting those proxy encroachments in the underdeveloped world, the nibbling tactics mentioned earlier. Finally the Soviets had become so bold, according to Ascoli's thesis,

that they had signed a peace treaty with the East Germans, thereby also implanting a proxy in the heart of Europe. To Ascoli's horror, even though the Kennedy Administration had come into office pledging to reverse these Eisenhower sins, it had in fact continued "advocating Africa for the African's, applauding with equal zest supranationalism in Europe and bush-league nationalism for the most improbable countries." Now the ultimate danger of such policies, the Soviet over-run of West Berlin, had arrived. The U.S. government and the American people must "stand firm" and communicate to the other side American charity--and courage.[40]

T.R.B. saw "nationalism breaking out all over," at the same time that the super powers were amassing awesome stockpiles of nuclear weapons and new nations, including Red China, were preparing to join the nuclear club. As the Berlin crisis worsened, T.R.B. speculated that "if we were running a broker's office on Mars, say, we should quote changes of Earth's survival at a rather reduced rate." He predicted that the end of the world, when it came, would be punctuated not with the sound of Garbriel's trumpet blaring out the notes of a golden horn, but rather with the furtive "ping-pinging" of a wire-service teletype alarm, the one reserved for must-run doomsday stories.[41]

The Nation, meanwhile, in assessing the post-Cuban world situation, surveyed the chaos of things and simply called for "a little quiet, please." Understating the matter in particularly wry terms, The Nation recalled that the confusion was all part of Kennedy's "design to arouse the nation and to condition the people to sacrifice." The magazine suggested that perhaps the Kennedy team ought to be careful not to overdo it. For example, its members shouldn't try to

satisfy Senator Barry Goldwater and the rest of the far-Right crowd, who would hurl charges of "drifting," "inaction," and "weak-kneed foreign policy" no matter what is done. Instead, Kennedy should prudently assure that he doesn't "back a strong opponent into a corner, and that he leaves all concerned enough freedom of action to avoid making Berlin the end of the world."[42]

And, said The Nation, the President must avoid the idea that "at any cost we must achieve triumph over Khrushchev to compensate for the psychic wounds of Laos, Cuba, Korea, etc." This was a position directly opposite that of Ascoli, who said we must defend Berlin as if it were American sovereign territory. To the Nation, we were committed to the defense of freedom for the people of West Berlin. But the President must avoid a fixed refusal to, in the words of Senator John Sherman Cooper, "examine the realities of the situation, or to communicate with Soviet Russia."[43]

By the end of 1961, few could say that Kennedy had had a dull first year in office, even though the excitement wasn't necessarily of the type the liberal opinion press had in mind twelve months earlier. And through it all, the bad situation in South Vietnam remained bad. The Berlin crisis came and went, as did the Cuban crisis and the Laos crisis. South Vietnam, at least from the perspective of the liberal opinion press, was just there, not improving much, and not deteriorating much, but always remaining troublesome.

CHAPTER II NOTES:

[1]"So Long, Ike," Editorial, The National Review, 14 Jan. 1961, p. 8.

[2]"T.R.B. From Washington," The New Republic, 1 Feb. 1960, p. 2.

[3]"Sanquinary About the Sixties," Editorial, The Reporter, 7 Jan. 1960, p. 4.

[4]Julius Duscha, "The State of the Union Address," The New Leader, 18 Jan. 1960, p. 3.

[5]Duscha, p. 5.

[6]"The Desperate Season," Editorial, The Nation, 23 Jan. 1960, p. 60.

[7]The Nation, p. 63.

[8]"Kennedy and Humphrey Answer Key 5 Questions," The New Leader, 28 March, 1960, p. 3.

[9]"The Job and the Man," Editorial, The Nation, 2 July, 1960, p. 1.

[10]Max Ascoli, "The Only Choice," Editorial, The Reporter, 29 September 1960, p. 14.

[11]"Act First, Act Fast, Act Tough," Editorial, The Nation, 1 October, 1960, p. 189.

[12]Gerald W. Johnson, "Happy New Year, Jack," The New Republic, 2 Jan. 1960, p. 10.

[13]Johnson, p. 10.

[14]Richard Scammon, "Clean Slate in Foreign Policy?" The New Republic, 23 January 1961, p. 8.

[15]Julius Duscha, "The New Deal Spirit Revived," The New Leader, 2 January 1961, p. 5.

[16]William E. Bohn, "Kennedy's New Administration," The New Leader, p. 14.

[17]"T.R.B. from Washington," The New Republic, 6 March 1961, p. 3.

[18]"T.R.B. from Washington," The New Republic, 27 March 1961, p. 2.

[19]T.R.B., p. 2.

[20]T.R.B., p. 2.

[21]Max Ascoli, "Inauguration Day," Editorial, The Reporter, 19 January 1961, p. 22.

[22]"Man in a Hurry," Editorial, The Nation, 22 April 1961, p. 333.

[23]The Nation, p. 334.

[24]"What Kind of Defense," Editorial, The New Republic, 9 January 1961, p. 6.

[25]Anthony Harrigan, "Twilight War," Editorial, The New Leader, 2 January 1961, p. 8.

[26]"T.R.B. From Washington," The New Republic, 1 May 1961, p. 2.

[27]"T.R.B. From Washington," The New Republic, 15 May 1961, p. 2.

[28]T.R.B., p. 2.

[29]Reinhold Niebuhr, "Mistaken Venture," The New Leader, 1 May 1961, p. 3.

[30]William Henry Chamberlain, "The Results of Hitting Soft," The New Leader, 29 May 1961, p. 22.

[31]"History Will Not Absolve Him," Editorial, The Nation, 6 May 1961, p. 382.

[32]"Single Standard for Dictators," Editorial, The Nation, 13 May 1961, p. 401.

[33]"T.R.B. From Washington," The New Republic, 29 May, 1961, p. 2.

[34]T.R.B., p. 2.

[35]Tristram Coffin, "Americans Are Fed Up," The New Leader, 27-24 July 1961, p. 7.

[36]Coffin, p. 7.

[37]Karl E. Meyer, "Yellow Leaves on the New Frontier," The New Leader, July 31-August 7, 1961, p. 5.

[38]Meyer, p. 6.

[39]Max Ascoli, "The Long Moment of Truth," Editorial, The Reporter, 20 July 1961, p. 18.

[40]Ascoli, P. 19.

[41]"T.R.B. From Washington," The New Republic, 11 September 1961, p. 2.

[42]"A Little Quiet, Please," Editorial, The Nation, 29 July 1961, p. 41.

[43]Ibid. p. 41.

CHAPTER III: THE WAR IN VIETNAM, 1961

News from Southeast Asia at the start of 1961 had mostly to do with Laos, a place Max Ascoli referred to as a wretched little kingdom where East and West were fighting one another with proxy armies.

Although most of the world's media attention was on Laos, didn't mean Vietnam was hardly trouble free. Far from it. Much of the more obvious violence was occurring in Laos during 1961, especially early in the year. But 1961 was the year the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) began operations in Vietnam as a formal military organization opposing the Diem government. Viet Cong activity increased, at least in terms of individual incidents of terrorism. Because it was a guerrilla movement, the Viet Cong avoided large, pitched battles under most circumstances, although this pattern was scrapped in September. During that month the guerrillas launched attacks involving 1,000 soldiers or more in Kontum and Phuoc Thunh provinces. The guerrillas seized the capital of Phuoc Thunh Province, an impressive accomplishment since it was only 60 miles from Saigon.

For the new American President, 1961 was largely a year of information-gathering about South Vietnam. Kennedy sent Vice-President Lyndon Johnson to Saigon in mid-May. A month later he dispatched a mission headed by Eugene Staley, President of the Stanford Research Institute. And possibly most significant to future U.S. military involvement in South Vietnam, the President sent his own military adviser, General Maxwell Taylor, to South Vietnam in

mid-October. These missions, which were to provide much of the information used in subsequent Kennedy decision making about South Vietnam, are significant to this study, that they were almost entirely ignored by the opinion press, conservative as well as liberal. These publications had, by 1961, already staked out the boundaries of their concern about the turmoil in Souteast Asia. New information didn't seem to matter. The National Review, representing conservative views, was adamant about the need to stop the advance of Communism in the region. So, too, were members of the liberal opinion press. The differences between conservatives and liberals at this point had to do with the means for attaining this fundamental objective. Such a pattern was to remain largely unchanged throughout the year although in the liberal journals there is some evidence of concern about America's right to interfere with the internal affairs of South Vietnam and other nations.

LACK OF RESOLVE

On the conservative side there were no such pangs of conscience. For these writers and editors the overriding problem was Communism, euphemistically referred to as the "enemy." This "enemy," emanated from Moscow, was totally controlled from Moscow and popped up from time to time in sensitive parts of the world--now Cuba, now Laos, now the Congo, and so on. The National Review's anger was consistently directed at the Kennedy Administration for not having the will, the resolve, to attack the problem of Communism at its roots, to exorcise the demon by attacking its heart, which was in Moscow. Without actually saying "let's have the Third World War and get it over with," The National Review obsessively advocated policies that would have

accomplished the same result. A fundamental assumption behind such conservative policy recommendations seemed to be that, confronted with American might and will, the Soviets would capitulate throughout the world. So, went this reasoning, if massive amounts of American military power were dispatched to each locale where a Communist insurgency appeared, the insurgency would disappear, pulled back by Moscow planners fearful of the righteous American giant at last aroused.

The liberal journals examined here were also firm in their commitment to anti-Communist policies in Southeast Asia and elsewhere through 1961. The difference between them and The National Review, as representative of conservative foreign policy thinking, is that the liberal journals wanted this opposition to Communism to occur as part of a policy that would also bring social justice and economic progress to these troubled areas. As a result, the liberal writers had little tolerance for social abuses of the Diem government, just as they had little tolerance for the social abuses of the other Asian dictatorships. When members of the Kennedy Administration inevitably winked at this requirement, contrary as it was to the conduct of military operations in an extremely hostile environment, the wrath of the liberal opinion press was provoked. As this and subsequent chapters will illustrate, it was means, not ends, that distinguished the conservative from the liberal opinion journals.

The conservatives had no particular concern for liberal values, especially in the anti-Communist hot spots of the world. For them the heroes of the anti-Communist struggle were the Syngman Rhees, the Chiang Kai-sheks and the Ngo Dinh Diems. The major problem faced by such leaders, as their circumstances were presented on the pages

of The National Review, was not actually the Communists. Those devils could be dispatched with proper show of American force. No, for the writers of The National Review the problem was at home, in the White House, in the State Department--in fact, throughout the higher echelons of national government. Policy was being made and implemented by "appeasers" in the government, by men afraid or unwilling to make the hard decisions, take the big gambles, spill the inevitable blood, in order to rid the world once and for all of Godless Communism.

Evidence of these similarities and differences between the liberal and conservative segments of the opinion press regarding Vietnman began to emerge in 1961, as the Kennedy Administration sank deeper into the Vietnamese and Southeast Asia quagmire.

THE LAOS PROBLEM

The National Review saw the Laotian situation at the start of 1961 as a deja vu experience. For that publication it was a matter of returning to Korea "almost as if the entire eight years of the Eisenhower Administration were sponged off the slate." Here, as in Korea, American policy makers seemed incapable of seeing that the United States was in "a continuing, unrelenting struggle for the world, and for survival." What was needed in Laos, as in Korea, was to face the reality of America's anti-Communist struggle. America must heed the words of Douglas MacArthur "when he tried to tell his Commander-in-Chief and his countrymen: In war, there is no substitute for victory."[1]

National Review columnist James Burnham, whose space each issue was entitled, "The Third World War," took an even harder view of the

needs in Laos. His attitude toward the Laotians was reminiscent of that enunciated earlier by Reporter publisher Max Ascoli. Burnham described the people of Laos as "Buddhist, illiterate, lighthearted and lazy." He, like a number of writers for the liberal journals, was critical of the U.S. military for not developing the tools to fight in a place such as Southeast Asia. The problem must be attacked at its source. "The defense of Laos is possible only if it includes operations outside of Laos."[2]

Burnham's concerns about lack of appropriate American forces in Southeast Asia, or lack of American resolve in the war against Communism, were addressed in similar fashion in The New Leader in mid-1961, and by none other than W.W. Rostow, a senior Kennedy security adviser. He didn't advocate the dispatch of Nationalist Chinese forces to Southeast Asia. Otherwise, his remarks sounded every bit as hard-nosed and militant as those of the National Review columnist.

Laos, according to Rostow, was one of four major crises confronting the Kennedy team when it came to power, the other trouble spots being Cuba, the Congo and Vietnam. "Each represented a successful Communist breaching--over the previous two years--of cold war truce lines which had emerged from World War II and its aftermath." All were the result of "efforts of the international Communist movement to exploit inherent instabilities of the underdeveloped areas of the non-Communist world." Each also involved use of guerrilla tactics. Khrushchev had put his verbal support behind wars of national liberation and his military support behind guerrilla warfare. Faced with this situation, the Kennedy Administration had "indeed, begun to take the problem of guerrilla warfare seriously."[3]

Rostow described the underdeveloped world as a "vast arena"

where the struggle between freedom and oppression was being waged. The Communists were convinced that their methods of social and economic organization were "ideally suited to grasp and hold power in these turbulent settings." There was a limited amount of time for the Communists to carry out their exploitation of the Third World. If problems inherited from traditional social systems were solved, Communist influence would wane. The Communists were concentrating their efforts on the weakest nations. Meanwhile, the U.S. was committed to assuring that the modernization process went forward with guarantees of independence for the emerging nations. Military pacts would be formed with these nations only when their independence was threatened by "outside military action."[14]

Guerrilla warfare would definitely be a problem, Rostow admitted. But it could be handled once the threatened nations became able to control their borders. Rostow's assumption throughout seemed to be that guerrilla warfare was inherently an external phenomenon, an alien force that preyed on a sick but not necessarily terminal host society. In this regard, too, his thinking was in line with that of Burnham and other National Review writers, who readily assumed that all Communist insurgencies in the Third World were inspired by Moscow and Peking.

"I, for one, believe," said Rostow, "that with purposeful efforts, most nations which might now be susceptible to guerrilla warfare could handle their border areas in ways which would make them very unattractive to the initiation of this ugly game." Rostow, like other liberal commentators of the period, including President Kennedy himself, described Communist encroachments on the underdeveloped world in terms of cancerous erosion, of insidious nibbling. "We confront in guerrilla warfare in the underdeveloped areas a systematic attempt by

the Communists to impose a serious disease on those societies attempting the transition to modernization." To combat this disease, the U.S. must not only accept the risks of war, including guerrilla war, but also work closely with the emerging nations to help them "stand up straight and assume in time their rightful place of dignity and responsibility in the world."[5]

THE PERILS OF NEUTRALISM

The National Review was consistently opposed to neutralism in any form, in Southeast Asia or elsewhere. Such a policy was merely a step further into the Communist camp. This was stated, for example, in a February, 1961, editorial entitled, "The Care and Feeding of Neutralism." In the journal's view, Laotian Leader Souvanna Phouma had adopted a neutralist position out of military pressure from Communist China, Russia and North Vietnam. He then "began diplomatic relations with Moscow, got Soviet aid, and planned a coalition government including the Pathet Lao--i.e., a People's Front government that would swing Laos into the Soviet sphere."[6]

The same type of concern about the portents of neuturalism was presented by Robert S. Elegant, chief of Newsweek's bureau in Southeast burea and a regular contributor to The New Leader. In Elegant's view, the Communists would never allow neutralism to work. The only reasonable approach for the U.S. was to provide major assistance to countries in the region, including military assitance.[7] America's real job was not to capitulate to the Communists by accepting neutrality for the region, but rather to bolster the friendly governments there, to adopt a basic policy of uplifting the region. America's job was "to stimulate an honest enthusiasm for general betterment in the hearts of

Asia's political and intellectual leaders, and to encourage those leaders to establish real communication with the masses."[8]

In allowing Laos to become a neutral nation, the U.S. had learned a bitter lesson, William Henderson, associate director of the Council on Foreign Relations, asserted in the October 6, 1961, New Leader. America's lesson had been that its policy was "wisely conceived" but not backed by the requisite conviction or courage. In other words, the U.S. hadn't displayed a sufficient willingness to go to war over Laos. But because events in the months after neutralization in Laos had not gone to the Kennedy Administration's liking, the White House had delcared itself unwilling to make the same mistake in South Vietnam. If Communist activity in that country increased, the U.S. was prepared to intervene militarily. Henderson declared himself pleased with this final show of resolve and disappointed that it hadn't taken place sooner. All of Southeast Asia was, to him, clearly a military problem first of all. There was merit in improving conditions within countries there, but a prerequisite for such improvement lay in first defending against "the traditional Communist weapons of aggression and subversion."[9]

Henderson accepted the prospect of U.S. military involvement in the area, if that was required to protect it from Communism. Such things "cannot be bought on the cheap by means of aid programs alone, no matter how massive." Kennedy and his advisers could do what had to be done in Southeast Asia, but first the American public would have to be educated. It was highly questionable, under prevailing circumstances, that "the American people are psychologically prepared to accept the risks and sacrificies which might be required in assuming" responsibility for the region. If Kennedy were indeed to

follow through on plans to defend South Vietnam militarily, he would have to gain "overwhelming popular understanding and support." Americans had to be convinced that peace in Southeast Asia wasn't necessarily the most important priority of American policy. His comments in this regard are instructive:

> Somehow the public must be persuaded that the stake in Southeast Asia, as in many parts of the world, is genuinely vital to the national interest of this country. At the same time, it has to be made clear to the man in the street that peace cannot be the highest desideratum of American policy, that our interests cannot be maintained without possession, and, where necessary, the use of force.[10]

Henderson, like others writing in the liberal opinion press, wanted action from the Kennedy Adminstration. The old Eisenhower policies of attempting to buy progress in the underdeveloped world with massive aid programs would no longer be enough. Now it was time to get tough. The U.S. should station "highly mobile land, sea and air units . . . in or along with periphery of Southeast Asia" and it should demonstrate "a willingness to use them by frequent maneuvers, training exercises, fleet visits, fly-pasts, etc." All this would generate a kind of respect not attainable by "verbal protestations." For Henderson, the days of mere diplomatic efforts in the Third World were over. The kind of action he wanted from the Kennedy Administration was military action. No matter what other tactics of persuasion Kennedy might employ in pursuing U.S. interests in the region. They would remain "an empty vessel unless backed by the power and resolution of an awakened America."[11]

Max Ascoli found grim humor in attempts to render Laos a neutral participant in the East-West struggle. To him most of the tiny nations emerging from colonial domination were ludicrous shadows of real nations anyway. "The neutrality all seek for the Laotians, for example,

is nothing but a variety of attempts to relieve those unhappy people from some of the more painful obligations of nationhood." Ascoli saw such neutrality as a "sort of political limbo." The Russians would respect no such subtlety. "Their aim is ultimately to relieve the Laotians of any vestige of independence, whether municipal or tribal."[12]

NEUTRALISM RECONSIDERED

The Nation used satire to argue the opposite position, to present the merits of peace in the area and to ridicule the values of America's warrior classes. The Nation described Laos as "a little country" that had become for East and West "an excruciating problem." The journal saw the problem mainly as one of native inclination toward passiveness, a trait Burnham had been critical of in The National Review. To The Nation, such behavior was admirable, although not necessarily to those in America seeking a military solution to conflicts in the Third World. The Laotians had simply not developed "the red-blooded instincts of modern man" and were therefore "not interested in organized man-slaughter." Even though they were were not Christians and were therefore ignorant of the Sixth Commandment, they still had an abiding distaste for killing one another. Despite a supply of arms sufficient to replicate the Battle of the Bulge, outside supporters of the two warring factions in the Laotian civil war still couldn't get thier charge-lings to behave with the necessary savagery. "True, a soldier is shot now and then, or more like a civilian, but the bloodletting is a mere trickle." Such performance was a "disgrace to the profession of arms and to the earnest outsiders who have labored to bring civilization to the Laotians." America's armed forces were ready to show the Laotians

how to properly maintain their neutrality, although this could be risky, considering the country's common border with Red China. Korea had taught lessons about military involvement in nations on the Chinese rim. In any case, said The Nation, an immediate decision wasn't all that necessary. Any solution would be likely be highly unstable."[13]

DIEM: THE DUBIOUS ALLY

As stated earlier, Laos drew most of the attention from the liberal opinion press during 1961, with conditions in South Vietnman being described in a few long "think pieces." Reporters in the area and editorial writers at home, usually had opinions on the need to support, or not support, neutralization of Laos. As far as South Vietnam was concerned, most suggestions encompassed four themes:

1. The situation in South Vietnam was perilous.
2. Diem was doing a terrible job and his government desperately needed reforms.
3. Fighting the guerrilla movement would be costly to the Vietnamese, and therefore to the Americans.
4. South Vietnam should be saved from Communism, preferably with Ngo Dinh Diem, but without him if necessary.

Articles in the liberal opinion press adhered to these themes throughout the year 1961, from January, when Stanley Karnow declared in The Reporter that Diem "defeats his own best troops," to December, when The Nation announced that America's "protege, Ngo Dinh Diem, appears to be on the skids."

In that time, as has been noted, President Kennedy had a number of assessments made of the situation in South Vietnam, all of them overlooked in reportage appearing in the opinion journals, conservative and liberal.

The liberal opinion press seemed to have little concern for the intricacies of Vietnam planning. Their major focus in 1961, and in subsequent years of the Kennedy Administration, was Ngo Dinh Diem. The questions for the liberal journals was not whether the U.S. should remain committed to preservation of South Vietnam as an anti-Communist state. That seemed to be a foregone conclusion. These publications simply weren't sure whether to pursue this objective with Diem running South Vietnam. The question lingered until Diem was assassinated. In this respect, more than any other, thinking in the liberal opinion press differed from the conservative views of The National Review.

Stanley Karnow, writing in the January 19, 1961 issue of The Reporter, saw an omen of Diem's potential collapse in the November, 1960, coup attempt by the President's paratroopers. These rebellious soldiers had emphasized at the time that they weren't trying to initiate a Communist overthrow of the country. Rather, they wanted reforms from Diem and more efficiency in the fight against the Communist insurgents. To Karnow's dismay, Diem had instead become more intransigent in his opposition to reform of his tattered government. "He seems to have survived the revolt with his ego unscathed and his faith in his own infallibility renewed."[14]

Members of Diem's family ran the country with an iron hand. Moreover, they were corrupt and almost totally lacking in respect from the populace. "One way or the other . . . everyone believes that the Nhus are corrupt (everyone, that is, but Diem himself, who will not even listen to charges against his family.)" This situation was especially hazardous to the country because such misconduct was taking place at a time when Communist terrorism was on the increase. Diem's

attempt at relocation of much of the Mekong Delta population, the Agroville Program so lavishly praised by Wesley Fischel months earlier in The New Leader, was being strongly resisted by the traditional peasantry. The Agroville Program "ran directly counter to traditional social patterns in the region . . . The swift and ruthless manner in which the Agrovilles were created not only disrupted ancient customs, it also alienated more peasants that it could ever protect."[15]

Diem's resistance to pressure for reform compounded U.S. problems in South Vietnam. In all, Karnow wrote, the situation in South Vietnam was bleak. Even American insurance companies were wary of the place. "No premium, no matter how high, is worth the risk."[16] In Karnow's estimation, the only way out for South Vietnam and for U.S. policy there, was for the country to "survive and progress simultaneously, as Malaya did throughout the years of its emergency." Karnow, like other liberal press writers, didn't flinch at the prospect of using military power to accomplish this purpose. Such objectives would require "rational use of force accompanied by long-term economic planning and efforts to arouse popular enthusiasm." Diem was unlikely to provide these necessities. If he should fail "the Communists are ready to fill the vacuum."[17]

Denis Warner, an Australian journalist and a frequent New Republic and Reporter contributor, declared in The New Republic in late January that South Vietnam was a "castle built on sand," where American policies were "certain to be heavily tested in the lifetime of the new Administration." Diem may have implemented some impressive improvements in his country--rehabilitation of the rice industry, control of inflation, and so on--but these were "temporary expedients." They weren't sufficient to save South Vietnam from Communist

take-over. Warner's question: In light of this risk, what was the United States to do? His answer was built on the assumption that the U.S. goal should be salvation of South Vietnam from the Communists. Under these circumstances, U.S. policy should first be to convince the South Vietnamese populace that relocation would improve their lives and make them safe from Communist terrorism. Second, the U.S. should join with other Western powers in subsidizing economic development for the country.

But what about Diem? He was a problem. Diem was fighting a "one-man war, or a one-family war, against Communism; and that is not good enough." Diem equated political opposition with treason, threw his political opponents in prison, denied free elections, and generally alienated thousands of Vietnamese who could help him in his fight against the Communists. To Warner, the threat wasn't from North Vietnam but rather from forces within South Vietnam itself . . .[18]

In February, The Nation published an indictment of Diem by one of his own people, exiled opposition party member Huynh Sanh Tong. In the early days of his presidency, said Thong, Diem's police state tactics in crushing political opposition had saved the Vietminh a lot of effort. "The Vietminh, lying low and letting Diem do their dirty work for them and rid them of their own enemies, had done nothing to cramp his style." American supporters of Diem had interepreted the Communist inactivity as a sign that Diem had indeed brought the insurgency under control. His supporters in Washington "had glorified him as a Saint George who had slain more than one dragon." A principal speaker in support of Diem's early achievements in those days, Thong recalled, had been Senator John F. Kennedy, who declared

South Vietnam to be an Asian experiment in democracy, one that could not be allowed to fail. As far as Thong was concerned "no 'democratic experiment' has ever been tried there since the day the United States decided to give all-out support to Diem and his clan in 1955." Unless the new Kennedy Administration brought change to government in South Vietnam, the country "may well go against America and all the she stands for."[19]

The Nation criticized the U.S. press for its blind editorial acceptance of political news from Vietnam, particularly regarding information on the April 9, 1961, presidential elections. American newspapers were calling Diem's overwhelming victory a great defeat for Communism. In reality, said The Nation, the Vietnamese elections were rigged--Diem's most serious opponent had been jailed and one of his two remaining opponents had been a 75-year-old practitioner of Chinese herb medicine who, though virtually unknown, still managed to win 26 percent of the vote. Diem had gained his largest majorities in areas reported to be largely dominated by Communists. "Despite these and other suspicious circumstances, the press insists on interpreting the results as a pro-Western triumph." The journal saw this as part of the stagecraft used by anti-Communist dictatorships in getting abundant American aid.[20]

Adrian Jaffee and Milton C. Taylor, both faculty members at Michigan State University, declared South Vietnam a "crumbling bastion" in a June 19, 1961, article in The New Republic. The two men each had spent brief tours as advisers to the South Vietnamese government. In their estimation, conditions in the country had deteriorated severely under Diem's leadership, especially through the influence of Diem's brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, and Nhu's wife. If members of Diem's

inner circle were listed, said the authors, it would "set a modern-day record for nepotism."[21]

The two men took strong exception to Lyndon Johnson's claim that Diem was "the Churchill of today." U.S. hopes to make South Vietnam a stable, viable and democratic bastion of the Free World were being dashed. "It must be said that Vietnam is not stable, not viable, not democratic and not a bastion." They laid much of the blame for this on visiting U.S. advisers, including academics like themselves from American universities who had been well paid and well entertained by their Asian hosts. "Never in the history of our foreign affairs have we received more misinformation from a more qualified group."[22]

But these disgruntled academics were convinced that South Vietnam should be saved and could be saved if U.S. policymakers would straighten out their thinking. "We must use our resources not to support lies and fakery, but to push forward a steady democratization of the nation. And we must do it. (emphasis the authors') It is idle to say that Vietnam is independent. It is not. If history has catapulted us into a position of power, we should use the power to further democratic aims, not only because these aims are worthwhile in themselves, but because it is only through their realization that Communism can be kept in check."[23]

The articles cited here, including the one by Jaffee and Taylor, display a number of patterns worth noting in regard to liberal attitudes toward Vietnam during the Kennedy years. A basic assumption seemed to be that the United States had the ability to successfully intervene in the affairs of South Vietnam. Here, too, was the belief that it was America's responsibilty, to itself and to the Free World, to practice such intervention, even if we had to do it without the help of

other Free World countries. The problem, for the liberal journals, was Diem, not the assumption. Members of the liberal opinion press uniformly detested Diem's form of government. He violated their inherent sense of principle. He was blind to the corruption around him, especially that of his immediate family. He was incompetent, autocratic, wasteful of material and human resources and generally unwilling to abide by the recommendations of his high-priced advisers, including more than a few traveling university professors. America had a mission in South Vienam. On this the liberal and the conservative writers could agree. With Diem either harnassed to a higher set of principles and procedures, or just simply eliminated, and with U.S. military power directed toward clean, uplifting objectives, South Vietnam could indeed become a bastion of democracy. Jaffee and Taylor listed four fundamental reforms that Diem must carry out:

--dissolve the family oligarchy.

--release political prisoners and tolerate opposition.

--assure basic freedoms, such as freedom of the press, free elections and freedom to travel.

--initiated economic reform that included policies of self-help by the Vietnamese themselves.

In the event that Diem resisted these changes, he should lose U.S. support. The U.S. would have nothing to gain by dealing with him further under prevailing conditions.[24] In this respect, it appeared that preservation of democratic principles among our client states was more important than simply halting the spread of Communism. Whether this was the intended meaning of the authors is unclear.

THE HAZARDS OF GUERRILLA WARFARE

Walt Rostrow wasn't the only liberal thinker who pondered the implications of a guerrilla war in Southeast Asia. The New Republic and The Reporter took long, hard looks at the kind of warfare required if the U.S. was to complete its mission of democratizing South Vietnam and saving it from the Communists. Here, as elsewhere, the emphasis was on pragmatism, on examining not whether the job was worth doing or could be done, but rather, what it would take to pull it off. The Kennedy men received no small measure of warning from the hard-headed military analysts of the liberal opinion press. These writers coldly and skillfully looked at numbers, quoted military officers and examined strength ratios between guerrillas and conventional forces.

For example, Col. George M. Jones, Commandant of the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, was the source of what The New Republic called on May 22 "some almost unbelieveable statistical generalizations concerning the high cost of effective anti-guerrilla operations." One guerrilla, said the Army's chief green beret, could tie down 10 conventional fighters and could kill 15 conventional soldiers before being killed himself. Moreover, said the colonel, the guerrilla could do his damage with only 20 percent of the ammunition of an ordinary soldier. The New Republic editors applied these "statistical generalizations" to current events in Southeast Asia, particularly Laos and South Vietnam. They concluded that 80,000 Royal Laotian solders would have been needed to control only 8,000 Laotians rebels, a tall order for the financially strapped little kingdom. Statistics weren't so alarming for South Vietnam, whose standing army of 170,000 had "at least a numerical chance to hold out indefinitely against

an estimated 7,000 to 15,000 Viet Cong guerrillas." But, said The New Republic, for the Diem government to sustain the popular support needed for such a holding action "presupposes a U.S. commitment of a size the Administration has not begun to sketch out for the American people." Viewed against this background of instability, the Kennedy decision to send 100 "specialists in irregular warfare" to South Vietnam "may prove to be a most fateful one." The New Republic was concerned with the potential outcome of casualites among these specialists. "Once there are a few well-publicized casualties, the prestige of the U.S. will have been for all practical purposes committed irrevocably to the Diem cause. The choice will then be humiliating withdrawal as the size of the challenge grows clear or progressively deeper involvement in a stalemate which may not admit of a conclusive 'victory' in anything less than a decade--some experts say even longer."

There, for all intents and purposes, was an accurate description of what was indeed to take place as first the Kennedy and then the Johnson Administrations were drawn deeper and deeper into a stalemate policy in Vietnam. The New Republic had accurately predicted history. What it didn't do was suggest that United States interests might be best served by avoiding this policy bind. In its editorial, the magazine was content to publish two pages of highly compelling reasons why U.S. efforts in Vietnam would be extremely difficult. No attempt was made to distill policy recommendations from this list of awesome potential adversities.[26] The article is significant, however, because it represents the first consideration by The New Republic of a potential military quagmire in Vietnam. The journal was beginning to move toward the skepticism of The Nation.

The New Republic counselled its readers, and presumably

high-ranking members of the Kennedy Administration, twice more in 1961 on the dire implications of guerrilla warfare and the perils of sending Americans to fight under such conditions in South Vietnam. In neither of these lengthy and detailed editorials did The New Republic recommend what the Kennedy Administration should do about the problem. But the magazine's editors, quick to suggest who should be nominated for President and how U.S. dollars should be allocated in the defense budget, were reluctant to say whether or not the U.S. should take on the perils of an extremely risky Asian land war. It apparently seemed sufficient for The New Republic to simply list the perils, and let the Administration do what it saw fit with the information.

But clearly the editors of The New Republic were becoming wary of Vietnam. This was evident in an editorial in September that attempted to educate readers on the realities of guerrilla warfare. The journal described what might likely occur as South Vietnamese guerrilla fighters, trained by Americans, began making commando raids against North Vietnam. The Viet Cong were perceived by the South Vietnamese as an indigenous movement, while the South Vietnamese in the North would be clearly foreign invaders and likely to be treated as such by the native population. "To succeed in these regions," the magazine counselled, "a guerrilla revolt must give the appearance of being an indigenous product. And to give this fiction the appearance of fact in South Vietnam has taken the Communists years of careful preparation." True to the cold war assumption that those living under Communism were eager to revolt, the magazine declared that "the opportunity certainly exists in North Vietnam to set the countryside alight with revolution." But such a spontaneous combustion would not

occur unless it came from within the North Vietnamese society. It could not be successfully instigated by invaders from the South. So should the incrusions from the South be allowed to continue? The magazine didn't say.[26]

The New Republic's final Vietnamese catalogue of gloom for 1961 was published on Nov. 6, apparently in response to the return from Southeast Asia of Presidential military adviser Maxwell Taylor. (apparently, because the magazine said only "Again, an American General returns from Vietnam to report to the President on what might still be done to prevent the 'miracle of Vietnam' from becoming the debacle that is being prophesied.")

Again the magazine was willing to outline the monumental problems confronting the United States in attempting to preserve South Vietnam from Communist aggression. And again editors of the magazine failed to say what they thought should be done about the concerns they raised. In their editorial, the editors described three courses the U.S. could follow in dealing with the Vietnam situation. One was gradual disengagement, a position favored, said the journal, by those who "say things have deteriorated beyond repair, that there is nothing solid to build on, that the Diem regime has dissipated whatever leadership it once had." Opposing this view were advocates of the domino theory. These individuals alleged that abandonment of Vietnam would only delay the eventual confrontation with a Communist movement voracious for additional territory. By standing fast in South Vietnam, the U.S. would demonstrate to other countries in Southeast Asia its commitment to principles of freedom and self-determination. "Such intervention--so say the 'hard-boiled'--would show Asians that we really mean business and are prepared to take grave risks." This

approach, The New Republic pointed out, was dependent on use of "a sizeable number of presently-available U.S. troops, transport and military equipment." It also was built on the assumption that such a commitment would have to be sustained for many years. Prophetically, the magazine warned that such a large-scale intervention would involve the U.S. in "a war unlike any that we have ever fought." Americans had been in Indian wars, banana wars and conventional wars. "Vietnam would be a vexing combination of all of them."

And then there was alternative number three, "the one most likely to be adopted," the magazine predicted. This approach entailed giving the Vietnamese additional "aid and advice," but no additional U.S. solidiers "other than technical advisers." The magazine labeled this a policy of "more, but better." Would this turn the tide? That depended, said The New Republic. Would the Kennedy Administration really get tough, would it show the resolve needed to do the job. Would it, in other words, straighten out Diem and put him on a proper course toward democracy and administrative reasonableness?" "No rescue operation can be brought off unless there is an overhaul of the administrative machinery and a new sense of national purpose within Vietnam itself." There must be an end to Diem's "personal rule." The government must "become a wide political union making use of many talents."[27]

DIEM: SOME SOLUTIONS

Here, then, was a basic Vietnam theme that was to prevail in the liberal opinion press during the Kennedy years. Vietnam was a problem bequeathed to Kennedy by the Eisenhower Administration. Kennedy had come to office promising action, inlcuding an assertive foreign

policy that would make up ground lost to the Communists during the Eisenhower years. Vietnam was a vexing, complicated and potentially costly problem, primarily because Diem wasn't doing the things necessary to save his country from internal Communist insurrection and external Communist aggression. Vietnam must be saved from the Communist menance, with or without Diem, but preferably with him.

The Reporter continued to publish articles favoring the use of military force, if necessary, to preserve Southeast Asia from Communist domination.

William H. Hessler declared in the June 8 issue of The Reporter that, as bad as things might be in Southeast Asia, "The Seventh Fleet is ready." The U.S. might not be able to make democratic leaders out of Asian autocrats like Chiang Kai-shek and Ngo Dinh Diem. But that being the case, the Communists, Chinese or North Vietnamese were still loathe to invade their neighbors so long as U.S. military might was floating nearby. "Small countries cannot always afford to be brave. Their policies are geared to their appraisals of what help they really can expect from stronger allies," Hessler wrote from aboard the USS Coral Sea. Having the United States Seventh Fleet in the region "tends to hearten hesitant allies and to impress nervous neutrals." Even airplanes parked on the deck of a docked aircraft carrier served a political purpose. In Hessler's estimation, such a benign display of U.S. military might, before the eyes of our timid Asian allies, "may given more encouragement than words uttered in a press conference ten thousand miles away in Washington." The U.S. may fail in trying to reform its dictator allies. "But these shortcomings are compensated for in some measure by our having in the Seventh Fleet a remarkably versatile instrument of foreign policy."[28]

For this hard-headed commentator of the liberal opinion press, it was best for the U.S. to support truly democratic and progressive countries in the Third World. But in lieu of such demonstrable progress toward adopting an American approach to politics, there was always the Seventh Fleet.

Frank Childs, a member of the Michigan State University Advisory Group in Vietnam, came close to actually recommending a policy for the United States in handling its problem in Southeast Asia. Writing in the New Republic in December, he declared South Vietnam a "police state with all the normal accounterments of a police state--secret police, arbitrary arrest and policy brutality, political prisons, economic favoritism, government-sponsored and controlled social organizations, and authority and power based upon personal loyalty." Diem, in other words, was everything that made the Communists so distasteful to America. That could be overlooked, to a certain extent, though. In Childs' eyes the real problem was not Diem's politics. "From the standpoint of stated U.S. policy, the shortcoming of Diem's regime is not that it is undemocratic; it is that it is a failure." For Childs, Diem's government had "neither of the two saving graces of an 'acceptable' dictatorship: it is neither benevolent nor efficient."

There were men in Vietnam, other than Diem, who could apply more acceptable administrative skills to the problems of their country. Childs didn't specifiy precisely what those skills were, or whether they would culminate in a more competent form of dictatorship. His assessment of the future: "A military coup may be the only means by which this leadership could be brought to the fore."[29]

In summary, then, this is how the liberal opinion press portrayed the situation in Vietnam during Kennedy's first year in office. In the

first place, the problem was largely ignored. Only 11 articles or editorials dealing specifically with the country could be found in the four publications examined here. By comparison, 21 articles and editorials were published by these journals in 1961 on Laos, and nearly a dozen additional pieces appeared on affairs in Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and other Southeast Asian nations. As stated earlier, in terms of emphasis South Vietnam was just another difficult trouble spot. The real news was in Berlin, Cuba, the Congo and in the emerging overall foreign policy of John F. Kennedy. Moreover, in reporting on conditions in South Vietnam, the issue was not America's ability to protect the country from internal and external Communist aggression, but rather what to do about Diem. The question wasn't whether the U.S. could do the job. The only question seemed to be whether the U.S. leadership, meaning the Kennedy team, the new men who had swept into the White House vowing to make things happen, would finally have the resolve to straighten out this difficult and recalcitrant Asian leader. Diem was the problem, not South Vietnam or U.S. assumptions about its role and capabilities there. The liberal pressure on Kennedy was not to get out of South Vietnam when such departure would have been comparatively easy (amounting to removal of several hundred military men, and a few college professors.) The liberal pressure on Kennedy was instead to do something about Diem.

This theme would begin to change in 1962. Diem would still be a prime target of criticism. But the liberal journals would also begin examining the myriad hazards and complications posed by Vietnam and America's deepening military involvement there. What had seemed such a simple task, straightening out a few thousand misguided South Vietnamese insurgents through will, resolve and economic aid, would

start to take on greater complexity in the liberal mind. In their examination of expanding American difficulties in Vietnam, difficulties that transcended the mere autocracy and shortsightedness of an Asian dictator, the liberal journals would begin looking at the dim prospect that there might be limits to what America might could achieve abroad. In the year 1962, the liberal journals began examining some of the components of those limitations and suggesting that, in the aggregate, they might have decisive influence over the outcome of a prolonged military confrontation with the Communists in Southeast Asia. That being the case, the suggestions began to be made in The Nation and The New Republic that a negotiated peace, leading to a neutral South Vietnam, might be the best objective for U.S. policy planners. This would represent a significant departure from demands during the year 1961 that Communism be stopped in Vietnam at all costs.

CHAPTER III NOTES:

[1]"Treadmill," Editorial, The National Review, 14 January 1961, p. 7.

[2]James Burnham, "Laos and Containment," The National Review, 8 April 1961, p. 213.

[3]W.W. Rostow, "Countering Guerrilla Warfare," The New Leader, 31 July-7 August 1961, p. 12.

[4]Rostow, p. 13.

[5]Rostow, p. 14.

[6]"The Care and Feeding of Neutralism," Editorial, The National Review, 11 February 1961, p. 70.

[7]Robert S. Elegant, "A Primer on Southeast Asia," The New Leader, 4-11 September 1961, p. 6.

[8]Elegant, p. 8.

[9]William Henderson, "Defending Southeast Asia," The New Leader, 16 October 1961, p. 3.

[10]Henderson, p. 4.

[11]Henderson, p. 4.

[12]Max Ascoli, "The One and Only Alliance," Editorial, The Reporter, 13 April 1961, p. 15.

[13]"The Uncivilized Laotians," Editorial, The Nation, 1 April 1961, p. 12.

[14]Stanley Karnow, "Diem Defeats His Own Best Troups," The Reporter, 19 January 1961, p. 24.

[15]Karnow, p. 26.

[16]Karnow, p. 29.

[17]Karnow, p. 30

[18]Denis Warner, "Diem's One-Family War," The New Republic, 30 January 1961, p. 8-9.

[19]Huynh Sanh Thong, "Greatest Little Man in Asia," The Nation, 18 February, 1961, p. 140-142.

[20]"The Illusion of Consent," Editorial, The Nation, 22 April 1961, p. 335.

[21]Adrian Jaffee and Milton C. Taylor, "Crumbling Bastion," The New Republic, 19 June 1961, p. 17.

[22]Jaffee and Taylor, p. 20.

[23]Jaffee and Taylor, p. 20.

[24]Jaffee and Taylor, p. 20.

[25]"Commitment in Saigon," Editorial, The New Republic, 22 May 1961, p. 3.

[26]"Guerilla Warfare," Editorial, The New Republic, 25 September 1961, p. 7.

[27]"Going But Not Gone," Editorial, The New Republic, 6 November 1961, p. 3.

[28]William H. Hessler, "The Seventh Fleet is Ready," The Reporter, 8 Juen 1961, p. 30-31.

[29]Frank Childs, The New Republic, 4 December 1961, p.

CHAPTER IV: 1962 - THE ATTITUDES CHANGE

In the last days of 1961 President John F. Kennedy made the decision that would more fully commit his Administration to military defense of South Vietnam. Based in part on information provided by his senior military adviser, General Maxwell Taylor, Kennedy decided to significantly increase U.S. support for the government of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem. In early 1962 additional U.S. military advisers began arriving in the country, including two U.S. Army air-support companies totaling 300 men. This raised U.S. strength in South Vietnam to 4,000 men by February. The figure continued to climb throughout the year.

Kennedy authorized the increased aid without getting firm agreements from Diem to reform his autocratic government. This further angered a liberal opinion press already revolted by Diem's past dictatorial practices. Vietnam coverage in the liberal opinion press during the Kennedy years consistently criticized Diem and his ruling family. As was established earlier, liberal editors of The New Republic, The Reporter, The New Leader, and The Nation could abide by the notion that South Vietnam and Southeast Asia had to be salvaged from Communist domination. But these publications consistently balked at the idea of U.S. resources, prestige and lives being committed to a regime barely distinguishable in its governing style from the most iron-fisted Communist dictatorships. The quantity and serverity of this criticism increased significantly after the U.S. military buildups of early 1962.

But something else happened as well during this period. The liberal opinion journals, especially The Nation and The New Republic, began looking at the various components of the deepening Vietnam conflict. Of course, Diem and his inept government were major concerns. But there were other things about the Vietnam situation that began to worry writers for these journals. They examined the nature of the Viet Cong, for example, and found not a rag-tag little guerrilla army that would turn and run at the first sign of American resistance. Rather, they saw clever, tough and deeply committed jungle fighters. They began to find flaws in basic American strategy assumptions. Perhaps, the agrovilles weren't the best sanctuaries for the Vietnamese citizenry. And what about the nature of guerrilla warfare in an unfriendly environment such as Southeast Asia? Perhaps Americans would be truly threatened there. Perhaps this was not the kind of war for U.S. soldiers to fight. And the popular Malaya mode of guerrilla containment, the concept of moving people to safe havens, was questioned. Carefully training native soldiers, while starving out the guerrillas had worked for the British in Malaya and for the Americans in the Philippines. But would it work in Southeast Asia, with its unstable governments and its long borders with hostile nations such as China? And what about recollections of Korea and China? Were the Americans maneuvering themselves into a similar thankless, grueling contest of wills with Asians in Vietnam? And with Laos neturalized and a virtual Communist portal to Vietnam, could America hope to defeat the guerrillas who were opposing the Diem government? And what about the affect of the war on American politics and society? Korea had been a wrenching experience at home. Vietnam had the potential to be a far more trying contest of wills with the Communists.

Should the Kennedy Administration risk so much in such a small, far away place? Or would it be better to seek a negotiated settlement with the dominant power in the area--North Vietnam--cut American losses and withdraw from the area? Some of the liberal opinion press writers began in 1962 to see negotiation and the prospect of neutralization for Vietnam as highly preferable to a tumultuous and dangerous struggle with no end in sight. The desire of these writers to deny further gains to the Communist movement remained intact. And they were still in favor of transplanting American liberal values to the emerging nations of the post-colonial world. But in 1962 the liberal journals began taking the first measure of the cost of this objective and asked whether, in Vietnam, this cost would be too high.

By way of comparison, the conservatives writing for The National Review had no such forebodings. Their somewhat limited range of concern remained consistent throughout 1962. They demanded greater American effort against the Viet Cong and other insurgent movements in Southeast Asia. It was almost as if the realities of Asian politics and society were insignificant. Their real focus seemed to be on Washington and on the reluctance of American policy makers to fight the Communists with unrestrained zeal. James Burnham, The National Review's specialist on the Third World, even went so far as to remind his readers in the February 13, 1962 issue that in fact, as far as real U.S. interests were concerned, the Third World was indeed insignificant. "What do Togoland plus Somalia plus Yemen plus Y and Z--and throw in Indonesia to make sure you're not setting up a straw question: what does such a sum weigh against Britain?. . . In every such case, the geopolitical weight of the major Western power is so much greater than that of the neutralists combined that the pointer drops

below the end of the table."[1]

Interestingly, though, it was this same inconsequential Third World, with its Togolands and Indonesias, that took on global significance two weeks later in an editorial in The National Review. Here the journal was turning its guns on American policy makers again, accusing them of appeasement. As members of the Kennedy Administration talked with senior Soviet diplomats, warfare continued in Laos and South Vietnam. While the Russians and the Americans talked of peace, the Russians supplied their Communist allies in Southeast Asia. "In both countries the local guerrillas are supplied and reinforced by North Vietnam, Communist China and Russia." Such talk of peace in one place combined with war in another, was a contradiction. There was seeming sweetness in the West and the grim fighting in the East. The combination follows the rules worked out long ago by Lenin, Stalin and Mao."

A firm position had to be taken in Southeast Asia. Did American leaders have the resolve for this task? "Are we ready to make a stand without allies in Southeast Asia and to pay the price that a stand there may cost? If we are not ready, the enemy will be taking control of all of Southeast Asia, quite soon now."[2]

During a period when liberal writers were finding more and more appeal in creation of a neutral South Vietnam, The National Review was continuing its criticisms such policies in the Third World. In fact, neutralism was seen as virtually the same as joining the Communist camp. In Burnham's estimation, American leaders were holding back our allies--such committed anti-Communists as Diem in South Vietnam and Chiang in Free China. "Vietnam's poor President Diem has practically got to abdicate before we will allow him to fight the Communist

guerrillas." Adlai Stevenson and other Kennedy advisers were forcing such countries to become neutralist. "The transformation of the entire underdeveloped region into a 'genuinely neutralist' mishmash--which is the inevitable outcome fo the Stevenson-Cleveland-Rostow line--merely processes it for Communist digestion."[3]

Traces of similar anti-Communist thinking were to be found in the liberal journals before 1962. But the realities of American involvement began to take up more of their attention during 1962 and after. In articles filed from Southeast Asia and in editorial commentary fashioned in their New York offices, these liberal journals started losing what anti-Communist fervor they might have displayed earlier. Even the staunchly anti-Communist New Leader began publishing articles questioning the practicality of deepening U.S. military involvement in Vietnam.

Such questioning was taking place against a backdrop of continuous efforts by the Americans to shore up the Diem regime. On February 24, 1962, Communist China made ominous threats about its security being threatned as a result of the undeclared war by the United States in South Vietnam. Withdrawal of U.S. personnel and equipment was demanded.

On February 27 the Presidential Palace in Saigon was bombed and strafed by two South Vietnamese fighter planes. Mme. Nhu was slightly injured. "Operation Sunrise," a comprehensive plan to eliminate the Viet Cong from South Vietnam, was launched in late March. Its results were of questionable substance and were certainly far short of the intended objective. The Viet Cong lived to fight again.

Defense Secretary Robert McNamara acknowledged in July that total victory over the Viet Cong insurgency was, indeed, several years

away. But he said he was optimistic that the South Vietnamese, with American aid, would be up to the task. His announcement came two months after the South Vietnamese military had engaged in what was to be a number of armed conflicts with Buddhist demonstrators in Hue. Diem, it seemed, had started fighting on two fronts--one against the Viet Cong and one against the Buddhists.

Despite demands for reform from American leaders, democracy made little headway in South Vietnam during 1962. In June the South Vietnam National Assembly voted to extend its term of office by a year, citing the inability to conduct elections when troops to guard the polling places were needed to fight the Communists. In October the National Assembly extended President Diem's emergency powers, including his power to rule the country by decree.

During 1962, the Viet Cong increased its military activities and Kennedy countered with a strategy of slow but steady expansion of U.S. military support for Diem. This intensified U.S. involvement in the country, coming on the heels of a dubious settlement in Laos, brought greater attention to Vietnam from all segments of the U.S. media, including the liberal opinion journals. Twenty-eight editorials and articles dealing exclusively with Vietnam were printed in the liberal journals in 1962, as compared with only 11 the year before. Virtually all of these 1962 articles made some reference to the ineptitude, ineffectiveness and autocratic methods of the Diem regime. In addition, though, they also began looking at the task the U.S. was inflicting on itself in fighting a deepening war in Southeast Asia. The liberals weren't as comfortable as the conservatives at The National Review about expanding the conflict to Laos, Cambodia, or about pursuit of total victory over the Communists. The liberal writers were

willing to expend American lives and treasure, but not in a lost cause and not at the price of provoking World War III in the jungles of Southeast Asia. The emergence of this more skeptical attitude toward the potential realities of military conflict in Vietnam makes 1962 significant to a study of liberal press reaction to Vietnam during the Kennedy years. Attitudes began to change in the liberal opinion press that year.

Four major themes regarding Vietnam were of significant concern in the liberal journal during 1962. Aggravations at the behavior of Ngo Dinh Diem deepened, for reasons that were apparent in 1961 and earlier. Diem's increasingly dictatorial policies were morally and socially intolerable. Moreover, they weren't stopping Communist gains in the countryside. But in 1962 also there emerged three additional themes that were indicative of liberal journal apprehension about widening U.S. military involvement in the Vietnamese civil war. These themes related to the apparent political commitment and fighting skill of the Viet Cong, the lessons of the past including the potential of a second Korea and the prospects for anti-Vietnam upheaval in the United States.

As is demonstrated in this chapter, the combined weight of these new Vietnam concerns led The Nation to still greater skepticism about U.S. policy objectives in the underdeveloped world. The New Republic, leery but tolerant of Vietnam policy in the past, began by 1962 to recommend negotiation with the Communists. The other two journals, The New Leader and The Reporter, continued publishing articles optimistic about stemming Communism in Vietnam, with the proper good sense and resolve by U.S. leaders. It was in 1962, though, that The New Leader published an article by theologian Reinhold Niebuhr

calling for a thorough reassessment by the United States of its policies and objectives in the developing nations of Asia and Africa. So even The New Leader was becoming somewhat receptive to new thinking about Vietnam policy.

Each of the dominant Vietnam themes of 1962 will be examined in detail in this chapter as evidence that the year was indeed important to the thinking of writers for The Nation, The New Republic and, to some extent, The New Leader. The Reporter had comparatively little to say about the Vietnam conflict, even in 1962, and what was said remained largely unchanged from earlier years of the Kennedy Administration.

The other three journals didn't go so far as to declar that the U.S. should unilaterally withdraw from Southeast Asia and let events there run their course. But they did demonstrate growing concern about the ability of the U.S. to achieve liberal, democratic government in South Vietnam through military means. In this respect, the liberal opinion press was again showing its capacity to anticipate the social and political views of the mass media. The liberal writers were seeing ominous trends unfolding in Vietnam, trends that would not emerge in the bulk of the U.S. press, including television, for several years.

NGO DINH DIEM: STILL THE PROBLEM

The liberal complaint against Diem was demonstrated in detail by Gerald W. Johnson in his New Republic column of June 18, 1962. Diem had deported a U.S. college professor who taught political science at Saigon University as a part of a U.S. educational aid program. Diem had accused the man of being a "nebulous intellectual," a phrase Johnson found not only redundant but also offensive to the reason for intellectuals to exist. "Intellectuals are by definition a class committed to the theory that reason is, in the long run, a more powerful persuader than a bull whip."[4]

When U.S. leaders send Americans to teach Western democratic principles to people in other countries "and at the same time supply their oppressors with bull-whips to prevent the same people from practicing our political science, on which side to we stand?"[5] In a sense, Johnson had asked the question that probably went to the heart of what was most disturbing to American intellectuals about the Cold War. Communism, they seemed to have determined, was by its nature oppressive and therefore bad. But then, too often so was its antidote.

There was a sense of betrayal, a sense that something was fundamentally wrong with a nation that professed to be exporting peace and human enlightenment, but in actuality was committing far more lives and resources to exporting military hardware and fighting men. It vexed these pragmatic, some would say hard-boiled, liberals and was further evidence that Kennedy's interventionist policies weren't working any better than had Eisenhower's policies of inaction. It even appeared, in fact, that they were getting less results and costing far more money. Communism seemed to be gaining ground in Southeast Asia no matter what was done. How could the new, activist,

liberal President halt the Communist advance on South Vietnam when he couldn't even get his client dictator, Ngo Dinh Diem, to listen to reason?

The Nation, for example, noted how hard Gen. Maxwell Taylor and U.S. Ambassador Frederick Nolting had tried to pressure Diem into reforming his autocratic regime--for his own good. The two men had wanted Diem "to institute political and organizational reforms in order to fight the Communist Viet Cong more effectively." To the humiliation of the United States, though, the wrong arm was twisted. "It is Uncle Sam who has capitulated. The United States is now actively engaged in the South Vietnamese war with troops, helicopters and transport aircraft, military dogs and all the other accounterments of guerrilla fight." Meanwhile Diem was continuing to arrest political opponents, including anti-Communist activists who might be useful in pursuing the fight against a common enemy. Diem was promising America, in exchange for its life-saving military aid, "Democracy in the sweet by and by, if ever." The Nation demanded a reconsideration of our Vietnam policy. Significantly, though, this didn't include reassessing the validity of America's anti-guerrilla effort in South Vietnam with the option of letting Asian politics seek its own level of stability in the area. The Nation wanted a reassessment of America's relationship with the Diem government.[6]

New Leader contributor Robert S. Elegant spelled out the shortcomings of the Diem government in early January, 1962. Elegant had few of Johnson's concerns about the philosophical flaws in the Diem regime. He operated on a more practical level. Diem was no longer perceived by the South Vietnamese people as serving their interests or embodying their aspirations. For this reason, Diem was "constantly

forced to further extremes to preserve his power." The U.S. had, in Elegant's estimation, mistakenly allowed its own anti-Communist interests to be caught up in this spiral of futility and oppression. If continued repression led to the fall of Diem, the resulting political instability could provide a fatal opportunity to the Communists. Even if Communist aggression was halted at the Laos border, the Diem regime might still prove too fragile to survive the domestic discontent. Ironically, Elegant criticized the Kennedy Administration for adopting a tactic reminiscent of the Eisenhower years--doing too little. The U.S. should be forcing Diem to "mend his ways," while acting decisively to seal off the Laotian border to Communist invaders. Instead "Washington has increased its material and technical aid to South Vietnam to a greater but still inadequate degree, and is vainly urging Diem to mend his ways. Meanwhile, the access routes remain open and Ngo Dinh Diem remains arbitrary and isolated."[7]

Denis Warner was an Australian correspondent, a regular contributor to The Reporter and The New Republic, and a man consistently sympathetic to the problems faced by the Diem government. In a discussion of the military situation in South Vietnam in mid-September, Warner pointed out the many advances being made by Diem's armed forces. New U.S. equipment, including helicopters and armored personnel-carriers, was helping take the war to the Viet Cong hideouts. Warner described government efforts to increase popular loyalty toward the government. How were they doing this? By adopting a British approach. South Vietnamese leaders "had borrowed British Field Marshall Sir Gerald Templers Logan from Malaya." The South Vietnamese leaders were repeatedly saying "that this is a battle for the hearts and minds of the people." In Warner's view, much progress was being

made in accomplishing this task. But then there was that nagging problem of politics. Things might be going well militarily, "but, as always, the political uncertainties remain . . . (Diem) will not broaden his government by including those he descries as 'political amateurs.' He will not change his advisers. He is not amenable to outside advice." Warner, like Elegant, was viewing the situation from a practical, rather than a theoretical standpoint. Diem's rigidity was undermining the job of fighting Communists. Political probelms were diluting the overall effort. Diem's rigidity was "aiding those who think in terms of a coup and, even more dangerously, those who are misled by the Communists' call for 'peace.'"[8]

"Z," an anonymous New Republic contributor described as a man who has "for some years closely followed and written about the struggle in Vietnam," bitterly criticized Kennedy for supporting Diem while abiding the Vietnam leader's police tactics against political opposition. The country's elections were ludicrous. Ninety-eight percent majorities were obtained "even in areas which were patently outside government control." Such anomolies seemed of little concern to Washington, "even when Diem's storm troopers, armed with Tommy-guns, entered the country's National Assembly and threw out bodily Dr. Phan Quan Dan." Dan was a medical doctor and Yale-trained Ph.D. who had won considerable support as a Diem opponent. Accused as a participant in the November, 1960, coup attempt against Diem, Dan had been imprisoned without trial. Others possibly as many as 150,000 persons met similar fates in what "Z" called Diem's "concentration camps." Kennedy, like his predecessor, was accepting the myth of progress under Diem and attempting to sell it to the American people. South Vietnam was being promoted as a "sort of Southeast

Asian counterpart of the West German wirtshaftswunder, marching happily toward full democracy under an enlightened leadership. If anyone thinks this is a gross oversimplification of official thinking in the sophisticated Kennedy era, then he better start reading the State Department's 'White Paper' on guerrilla warfare in Vietnam." From this document, "Z" quoted the declaration that "the years 1956 to 1960 produced something close to an economic miracle." In reality, said "Z," South Vietnam had been deeply dependent on U.S. economic aid for its survival during those years.[9]

The Nation, on Sept. 29, questioned the whole cold war concept of supporting any "miscreant as long as he was anti-Communist," and then supplying him with "munificent subsidies and military and propaganda services." By doing this, the U.S. only increased military tension in already troubled regions of the world. "What the future holds in Southeast Asia no man can say." But The Nation predicted that "the sowing of the dragon's teeth will continue, and the American taxpayer will continue to pay."[10]

THE VIET CONG: A GROWING MENACE

The liberal opinion press took a number of hard looks during 1962 at the Viet Cong and problems the U.S. might have in fighting this guerrilla force on its home territory. The same magazines that had a few months earlier so strongly advocated diversification of U.S. military capabilities, including creation of anti-guerrilla units, didn't flinch when it came to describing how such warfare was waged in the field.

In mid-April, 1962, Robert S. Elegant provided New Leader readers an evaluation of the Viet Cong's potential for ascendency in South Vietnam. These were skilled, determined fighters, men capable of living on small amounts of food, attacking with captured weapons, and thriving on Communist doctrine. "Georgraphical, political, economic and physiological circumstances in Southeast Asia was undeniably ideal for guerrillas."[11] The U.S. could counter these advantages, but only by encouraging improved relations between Diem and his people and by denying the Communists access to South Vietnam by way of Laos. It would be hard, but it could be done. "There is no easy way. Even if the political climate changed radically, the United States must be prepared to fight a protracted war. And it will take many grueling years of direct United States involvement before that war is won."[12]

Reporter contributor Jerry Rose, a Time magazine correspondent in Vietnam, saw hope in Diem's "Strategic Hamlet" program again if the South Vietnamese and their U.S. backers had sufficient resolve to continue a long fight against the Communists. The guerrilla movement in South Vietnam had a great deal on its side, Rose declared. The Viet Cong operated at night, lived off the land and the peasants, moved fast and with stealth, and were hard to pin down and fight with

conventional forces. The Americans were taking a more active role in anti-guerrilla operations, a good sign to Rose. But the outcome of these measures was by no means certain. Much depended on the will of the South Vietnamese soldiers. They were showing signs of aggressiveness against their Communist opponents, but there were still problems with leadership, especially the requirement that the senior Vietnamese officers await orders from President Diem before taking to the field.[13]

"Z," the anonymous New Republic writer in Saigon, described South Vietnam as a nation of beseiged fortifications surrounded by "a population that is either deliberately hostile or at least terrorized by an efficient network of Communist guerrillas into cooperating with them." A government effort to counter Viet Cong effectiveness had included creation of a para-military group called the Cong-Hoa (Republican Youth). Included in this organization were young Vietnamese women who sported tight slacks and blouses, wore ten-gallon hats, carried Colt .45 pistols and bore the apt nickname "gun girls." The Viet Cong was not impressed with the Asian "Belle Starrs." A guerrilla detachment easily captured 100 gun girls in a single raid and threatened to ambush a train carrying gun girls on home leave.[14]

The gun girls represented one of the few frivilous segments of an otherwise relentless guerrilla struggle against the Saigon government. The liberal opinion press dwelt most often on the difficulties inherent in trying to neturalize the Viet Cong threat in South Vietnam.

The Reporter took an especially keen interest in the grim realities of combat against the Viet Cong. One writer for The Reporter, S.L.A. "Slam" Marshall, was a semi-retired Army Brigadier General, military historian, former World War II correspondent and a definite member of

the "old school" of journalistic team players. Apparently was in his military correspondent's element in providing an inside look at the world of counter-insurgency operations in South Vietnam. Writing in The Reporter's June 7, 1962 issue, Marshall described his experiences in military operations against the Viet Cong as having ethereal qualities. "Up north, as in Saigon, operations have the same feeling of unreality and elusiveness, as of men contending with phantoms." Marshall noted the absence of front or rear lines common to conventional military land encounters. A U.S. major described for him the inventiveness of the "Congs" in setting booby traps for unwary pursuers. Special favorites were pits lined with sharp bamboo spikes dipped in human excrement, garlic juice or other unpleasant material. 'The points," the major had said, "cut the upper of a GI boot to ribbons." Defense against these traps consisted of nothing more sophisticated than to drive a water buffalo ahead of a column of men.[15]

Denis Warner charged the Viet Cong with commission of "fearful atrocities," including murder and mutilation of government officials, teachers and their families. The Viet Cong "uses terror for the sake of terror, but with discrimination." As part of its battle for the hearts and minds of the people, the Viet Cong would spare the ordinary peasants, provided they engaged in minimally acceptable activities.[16]

The guerrilla fighters described by Jerry Rose were men who fought at night, operating out of jungle hideouts or forests beside rice fields. "Organized in small bands, they move fast and are difficult to locate. In daytime they hide or mingle with the population." Because the Viet Cong hit hard, fast and with surprise, they maintained the

initiative of attack. Rose, too, described the Communist use of terrorism, with a few details not supplied by Warner. Rose told Reporter readers about the ritual aspect of Viet Cong executions. Warning was always given to an intended victim. Then the Viet Cong would carry out the deed in as public a manner as possible. Once an execution was completed, the Viet Cong "pin the verdict to the shirt of the victim. After the execution, the people are told they can leave, for 'the Viet Cong has nothing against the people, and the people have nothing to fear.'"[17]

Robert Elegant provided an especially descriptive account of actual guerrilla combat. His article in the April 16 issue of The New Leader narrated how:

> The black figures slipped through the evening mist into the village just two miles from II Corps Headquaters in Plekhu, on South Vietnam's High Plateau. Shivering in their breechclouts and course blankets, a few mountain tribesmen came forward with smiles and offerings of rice, while others ran off to hide in thatched huts set high on stilts. Their visitors were the Viet Cong, the Communist guerrillas who rule half of South Vietnam.
>
> The guerrillas wanted rice, venison, wild boar meat and hearera . . . Coming on foot stealthily in the dark, the Viet Cong were lean, wore thin faded clothes, and carried their belongings in shiny black hammocks. Except for their leaders' Czech sub-machine guns, they possessed only old rifles and ancient fowling pieces patched with wire . . . and yet the Viet Cong, at once ruthless and persuasive, got what they wanted from the mountain people.[18]

For that reporter, the Viet Cong were taking on mythical proportions. These were no ordinary reluctant soldiers. They were, if anything, reminiscent of the rag-tag patriotic troops mythologized in America's tales of its own Revolutionary War. The Viet Cong represented the wily underdog against the lethargic forces of entrenched government bureaucracy. The Viet Cong might be part of the hated Communist movement. But reporters such as Elegant and Marshall paid

them the respect due to tough military fighters. In Elegant's estimation, the Viet Cong soldier was part of a "new force" in Asia, with a "will to endure--and to triumph--sustained by a doctrine perfectly adapted to his circumstances."[19]

REMEMBERING THE PAST: MALAYA, KOREA AND CHINA

Beginning in 1962, the liberal journals also begin questioning some of the wisdom of applying cold war containment thinking to the Vietnam situation. Fundamental to this questioning were previous Western experiences in Malaya, Korea and China.

Britain's combatting of a Communist uprising in Malaya was referred to on several occasions by the liberal opinion press during the Kennedy years in evaluating American chances in South Vietnam. These references were especially frequent during 1962. The struggles in Malaya and South Vietnam involved guerrilla warfare, practiced amid a population sympathetic to the rebel forces. And both governments initiated massive movements of their native populations to fortified villages. Members of the liberal opinion press didn't hesitate to point out, though, that there were a number of fundamental differences between Malaya and South Vietnam that seemed likely to assure failure of Diem's strategic hamlet program.

"There may be places in the world where the new counter-guerrilla squads now in training can be profitably fielded," said The New Republic on March 12, 1962. "Vietnam isn't one of them, for the North can literally carry on the war forever." The "active santuary" provided by North Vietnam "exposed Saigon in a manner quite without precedent in the Malaya, Greek, and Filipino cases."[20]

Malaya and Greece, two countries where Communist insurgencies had been contained, were peninsulas that allowed considerable interdiction of enemy supplies and reinforcements at sea. The Philippines was an island republic, which allowed even more control of access by Communist supporters. South Vietnam had long borders with North Vietnam, which was openly hostile, and with Laos, which had become a

neutral nation as a result of negotiations in early 1962. Laos was making little effort to halt passage of Viet Cong manpower and supplies.

According to "Z" in The New Republic, mythmakers in the U.S. Vietnam lobby and in policy-making circles in Washington and Saigon were promoting the Malaya experience as a possible pattern for salvation of South Vietnam under Diem. That war, which lasted 12 years, was being recalled as a way "to prepare the American people for the kind of long 'bleeding war' operation which the French had to face in Indochina and Algeria." "Z" explained, though, that these mythmakers weren't including the fact that South Vietnam, unlike Malaya or the Philippines, provided extensive border sanctuaries. They were also failing to note that "both the Philippines and Malaya had the courage to change political horses in midstream. Magsaysay and Tangku Rahman became the leaders of reform administrations in the midst of a bitter guerrilla war and led their peoples to victory."[21]

Recollections of the Korean War, a fractuous conflict that helped spawn the McCarthy outrages, a war of prolonged, stalemated peace talks and Chinese hordes pouring across the Yalu River, hung heavy on the minds of liberal opinion press writers throughout the Kennedy years in Vietnam. References to the perils of provoking another "Korea" in South Vietnam began appearing in reports from Southeast Asia and in editorials fashioned in the journals' New York offices during 1962.

That year was a watershed period for American policy in the region. For the first time in 10 years, large contingencies of U.S. troops were landing on Asian soil, violating MacArthur's beseechment to Kennedy not to become involved in another Asian land war. No one

knew at the time where the extensive intervention U.S. troops would lead, but as a recent model, there was the ominous Korean experience.

"Z" criticized Washington policy planners for allowing themselves to be duped by Saigon and for using conventional warfare tactics in a politically based guerrilla conflict. In doing this, the U.S. was enhancing the prospect of a "second Korea." The U.S. was ignoring the need to either get rid of Diem or force him to reform. It was refusing, in other words, "to change horses, or even attempt to change the horse's manners." In "Z's" opinion, such horsemanship "is a dangerous piece of foolishness. In the explosive situation in Vietnam, it can lead directly to another Korea."[22]

T.R.B. shared concerns about the intentions of Red China and pondered the prospect of repeating the Korea experience, with its attendant fears of igniting World War III. By Mar. 5, when T.R.B. declared Vietnam an "Ugly Little War," the U.S. had 4,000 soldiers stationed in South Vietnam and had invested $1.5 billion, with no end in sight. T.R.B. admitted to being thoroughly confused. The one thing T.R.B. could say with certainty was that the U.S. was indeed at war, a reality he doubted had been made sufficiently apparent to the American public. China had made this discovery, though, and, said T.R.B., "is starting to react." What that reaction was, he didn't say. Presumably it was ominous.[23]

Sen. Mike Mansfield returned to the U.S. from a fact-finding mission in Vietnam in December, 1962. The New Republic suggested that his report might precipitate rethinking of the Kennedy policy in Southeast Asia, especially the policy of open-ended support of Diem. The journal considered it "absurd" to hope that Mansfield would recommend abandoning Diem. The New Republic saw peace and stability

resting with the North Vietnamese. If they would cease support of the Viet Cong the conflict could begin to wind down. But that would occur only if Hanoi were convinced that it could not prevail in the south. "But nothing that has happened in the past year indicates that such realization is imminent in Hanoi--or that it is justified." The U.S. could change Hanoi's attitude by "seizing the diplomatic as well as the military initiative." This the U.S. had been unwilling to do.

At the same time that the U.S. had been marking time in Vietnam, though, the Chinese had made impressive gains against India. This was bad news for the Vietnam situation. China, by the reasoning of The New Republic editors, had the option of significantly influencing events in Vietnam if it chose. "For all their economic troubles, the Chinese are quite capable of turning Indochina into 'another Korea,' at vast diplomatic and human expense to the U.S."[24]

The Reporter's anti-Communist tendencies prevailed over its sense of concern about the China threat, as indicated by its publication of "Slam" Marshall's June 7, 1962 assessment of the Vietnam situation. Marshall saw omens of a Korea-style Chinese intervention in South Vietnam, but only if the U.S. met the Viet Cong challenge with weakness instead of strong resolve. In his analysis of the military situation there for The Reporter, the general described a game South Vietnamese Army trying to contain an elusive Viet Cong force of about 20,000 men who had more or less free rein to melt into North Vietnam, Southern Laos or Cambodia when the going got tough. The fight was in Northern Laos. Not to take this area would allow Communist domination of routes to South Vietnam and provide a wide-open invitation to a territory-hungry Red China. It would be Korea all over again. Weakness and indecisiveness would just tempt the Communists. "The

Chinese struck in Korea because we made them a present of the main chance. Is it reasonable to believe they would not take a direct hand in the game in Laos if they saw that the guerrillas were on the verge of dominating the peninsula?"[25]

The Nation laid much of rationale of U.S. Vietnam involvement to an antiquated China policy that required pursuit of containment. "If Red China cannot be destroyed out of hand, at least it must be contained." This policy required the U.S. to maintain "outposts" in such faraway places as Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Okinawa and South Vietnam. It was this obsession with Chinese expansion that made it possible for U.S. policy makers to tolerate the tyrannies of Ngo Dinh Diem.[26]

As U.S. troop commitments increased, The Nation had grown increasingly concerned about possible Chinese reactions. Marshall had demanded a coordinated effort against the Communists, one involving all the interested states in the area. The Nation feared that just such a coordinated effort might take place, with the potential that it could provoke the military wrath of the Chinese.

U.S. DOMESTIC ISSUES

Elegant foresaw problems at home if the U.S. became deeply involved in the very military activity in South Vietnam that he was advocating. His approach was to note this potential, along with those existing in Vietnam, as considerations for the President and his strategy planners to keep in mind as they did the job that had to be done in Southeast Asia. In Elegant's estimation, efforts had to be made at home to convince the American citizenry that defense of Vietnam was worth the effort. America must think in the long run, and be prepared to stay as long as necessary, if political as well as military changes acceptable to U.S. interests were to take place.[27]

T.R.B., The New Republic's Washington columnist, lamented the indecisiveness of America's Vietnam involvement. Diem was a distasteful dictator--hardly someone worth the sacrifice of American lives and treasure. And yet the U.S. public was being told that Vietnam must be saved from Communism or the entire Southeast Asian region would "go over like falling dominoes . . ." There were no definite answers. "Is it wise, or unwise?--we don't know; it is a gamble. Furtherfore, it is probably only the first of such gambles we are going to take."[28]

Two writers took hard looks at how the Vietnam involvement might erode U.S. society if it were to continue over a long period or deepen significantly. The two men, Reinhold Niebuhr, in The New Leader, and Gerald W. Johnson, a columnist for The New Republic, both raised fundamental questions that had been neglected by other liberal opinion press writers in their zeal to analyze military strategies, political reform tactics or guerrilla warfare techniques as applied in the field in South Vietnam. Niebuhr and Johnson looked homeward, to their own people and asked, first, could America successfully halt Communist

expansion into South Vietnam, and second, should America attempt such a task. A basic assumption underlying other articles on Vietnam in the liberal opinion press of the Kennedy years was that, with sufficient resolve, the U.S. had the military capability to stop the Communist advance. A second assumption was that the problem lay with Diem, not with the people of South Vietnam. And a third assumption was that U.S. vital interests were indeed at stake in South Vietnam--that the fall of this unfortunate nation would somehow jeopardize the future of the United States.

The articles by Niebuhr and Johnson are important because they represent an early attempt by writers in the liberal opinion press during the Kennedy years to look beyond these assumptions. For that reason, they will be examined at length here.

Niebuhr, a religious scholar, had what might be called the "morals beat" on The New Leader during the early 1960s. While men like Robert Elegant and Hans Morgenthau looked at the "hard facts" and "realities" of U.S. foreign policy, Niebuhr pondered whether U.S. policy ultimately served the interests of mankind. On May 28 Niebuhr asked if, perhaps, it wasn't time for what he called an "agonizing reappraisal" of "our battlelines in Asia and Africa." Might it be possible, Niebuhr wondered, that America had been falsely assuming the rightness of "Western-style democracy as the alternative to Communism in non-European cultures." Perhaps, he suggested, democracy was simply a "luxury which only advanced nations can afford." Max Ascoli had discounted the emerging nations as premature impositions on the advanced nations, as problem areas to be dealt with only as incidental to the real problems in Europe. Niebuhr, on the other hand, seemed genuinely concerned about the ability of an essentially Western

political system, with its origins in ideas of the Enlightenment, to better conditions in societies totally untouched by Western democratic concepts. Client after client in these developing areas had behaved in ways hardly superior to those of the so-called Communist oppressors. Diem, in South Vietnam, was no exception. So "grave" was the political situation in South Vietnam, in fact, that Niebuhr asked if it "has not been a mistake to commit our prestige unqualifiedly to the defense of this nation." The Diem government was becoming "increasingly corrupt and repressive," filling jails with anti-Communists as well as Communists, expelling Western journalists who dared describe conditions in the country, and refusing implementation of even the most basic political reforms. Niebuhr acknowledged that the realitites of foreign policy often required support of unsavory rulers. In the words of FDR, he said, some questionable leaders "may be bastards, but (they) are at least our bastards." And Niebuhr agreed that the loss of South Vietnam would represent a considerable strategic setback. "But as it is now, the loss of moral prestige through the support of an unpopular and unviable regime is also a great hazard."[29]

Niebuhr ended his article with a call for re-examination of our interventionist policies in the developing world of Africa and Asia. From all indications, with the possible exception of Jimmy Carter, American Presidents still haven't taken up the challenge of initiating such an examination.

> Clearly, one of the most pressing issues in United States foreign affairs is to determine when we must and can support the less than ideal democracies scattered throughout the world. And where the U.S. does decide to support such nations, it has to determine how much it can interfere in their internal life in order to create economic and social conditions which will make democracy viable.[30]

Johnson's assessment of the situation in Vietnam was much more

pragmatic. He asked what our continued, ever-deepening involvement there would do to the Presidency and to American confidence in the office and in its occupants. Death and pain and suffering were realities of the battlefield in Vietnam, just as they had been at Omaha Beach or Heartbreak Ridge. "To the man who stops a bullet, this affair in Vietnam is just as big as the Battle of the Bulge; and to his family and friends the pain is as keen, the desolation as complete." In those few lines, Johnson captured the essential component of eventual domestic opposition to the Vietnam War. Americans would weary of the deaths and the maimings in a far-off war that seemed unlikely to end for years. Kennedy was spared this destructive domestic reaction. It was to hit Lyndon Johnson, and to some extent, Richard Nixon, full force. The columnist made an accurate assessment of future events when he observed that "to this outside observer it seems that the President tends to ignore this aspect of the situation." He was referring to the personal pain of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam and the personal pain of their families at home. "It is no cause for wonder if, busy with the conflagation in front, (the President) tends to ignore the possibility that the woods may take fire beind him." Johnson recalled that just such a thing happened to Truman, with the result that the White House went to a Republican in 1952.

Vietnam was far more dangerous to Kennedy than Korea had been to Truman, if only because the issues in Korea, while murky at best, were still reasonably comprehensible to the average American. But Johnson still paid deference to the cold war. Niebuhr was ready to scrap the assumptions of containment. Johnson wasn't at that point. He still granted that there might be logical reasons for the U.S. to be militarily involved in Southeast Asia. But Kennedy, like Truman,

wasn't being candid with the Amiercan people about why such an involvement was necesary. The President wasn't opening the issue up to debate, he wasn't having fireside chats with the American people about our Vietnam commitment. "If we must pour thousands of men and billions of dollars into Vietnam, we will do so; but that will not prevent us from highly resolving to take an axe to the party that seems to have dragged us into the mess, and that at the earliest opportunity. Unjust? Certainly; but it's politics."[31]

U.S. POLICY: THE QUESTIONS DEEPEN

Commentary on U.S. policy in Vietnam ranged during 1962 from basic commitment to the anti-Communist cause in Southeast Asia by S.L.A. Marshall, to deep questioning of U.S. capabilities by William Hunter, a former naval attache who knew Ho Chi Minh during the immediate post-war years. Considered together, these assessments of the deepening U.S. involvement in Vietnam form a tapestry of concern about the nature of the conflict unfolding in a strange and far-away land.

Marshall entered the discussion of U.S. strategy in Vietnam in his June 7, 1962, article in The Reporter. In it, Marshall foresaw severe military problems unless the Laotian border was sealed to Communist guerrilla traffic. In other words, Marshall recommended a swift, decisive widening of the conflict in Vietnam to include assault on the guerrilla sanctuaries. The American soliders were eager to fight.[40]

Such an optimistic assessment of American morale and ability concentrated on the attitudes of U.S. soldiers in a new, and as yet questionable situation. In fact, American range of activity was limited. Those writers who looked beyond the morale of American military units, and the optimistic prognostications of the career officers leading them, tended to see a more threatening prospect. For many liberal writers in 1962 showed a growing awareness of severe problems associated with American intervention in an Asian civil war. The U.S., much of their criticism went, was capable of prevailing in South Vietnam from a military standpoint. But U.S. strategy seemed unlikely to accomplish this objective in a reasonable amount of time so long as the U.S. attempted to work through the Diem government.

Robert S. Elegant, one of the more pragmatic and bellicose of the

regular liberal press commentators, wanted to see far more aggressive pursuit of American objectives by the Kennedy Administration, especially in forcing political reforms in South Vietnam. Elegant was ready to get tough with Diem, to the point of withdrawing support from him if he didn't change his methods. America must take up the hard task of achieving Southeast Asia's "political redemption." If Diem could not do the job "we must be prepared to withdraw our protection from him and allow other anti-Communists to achieve power."[32]

To Elegant, withdrawing from the anti-Communist struggle in Southeast Asia was out of the question. Intervention in the affairs of countries there was not subject to debate.[43]

A former naval attache in post-war Bangkok, a man who had gone on to become a California real estate developer, was among the first liberal opinion press writers to finally suggest that there might be more to the Vietnam civil war than just an American squabble with an autocratic client dictator and a few Communist guerrillas. The article, by William Hunter, appeared the April 16, 1962, issue of The New Republic. It was one of the first studies of the Vietnam situation in which the possibility was raised that the U.S. might be wisest to cut its losses and work for a negotiated settlement with the North Vietnamese. For these reasons, the article deserves extended examination.

Hunter had been a naval attache with the U.S. embassy in Bangkok from 1946 to 1950, as Ho Chi Minh was beginning his battle with the French for control of Indochina. Hunter's job had taken him on frequent intelligence missions to Saigon, Hue and Hanoi during that period. Drawing on this background, Hunter outlined in The New Republic a long list of things the U.S. was doing wrong in its struggle to subdue the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. One mistake,

he suggested, was to assume that Ho was a Communist ideologue like Walter Ulbrecht or Janos Kadar, trying to force an alien political system on a rebellious people. To many Vietnamese, Hunter said, Ho had the "aura of a George Washington, with Dien Bien Phu as his Yorktown." Assuming that Ho would be overthown by his people was largely wishful thinking, in Hunter's estimation. To eliminate his control of North Vietnam, the U.S. would have to directly attack him.[33]

Another U.S. mistake, said Hunter, was to pursue a policy of containment in South Vietnam, under the erroneous belief that we could create a "bulwark against the further advance of Communism, and a working demonstration of the advantages of freedom and benefits of American assistance." Hunter questioned the wisdom of this policy, largely on the basis of one simple fact: it wasn't working . . . Diem was fading and the Communists were prevailing, despite increasing U.S. military assistance. Hunter then made what has to be one of the more enlightened observations to emerge from the liberal opinion press during these early stages of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Hunter suggested that one reason for lack of U.S. success in South Vietnam was racism: not ours, but theirs. Americans couldn't speak the language, for one thing, a reality that almost entirely excluded them from awareness of Vietnamese cultural values. Moreover, Americans were the wrong color in a country where most of the native inhabitants "are as race conscious as Orville Faubus. If you can imagine a Chinese sheriff speaking Cantonese and trying to keep order in Tombstone, Arizona, in its heyday, you will begin to see the problem."[34]

So what was the U.S. to do? Hunter, like other liberal opinion press writers, accepted the assumption that the U.S. couldn't simply

pack up and leave Southeast Asia. Direct invasion of North Vietnam was impractical because of the effort required and the unknown forces it might unleash. Using anti-guerrilla warfare on a limited basis was unwise. Vietnam was apparently becoming a "kind of proving ground for anti-guerrilla tactics and gadgetry on a rather limited scale." For Hunter, the struggle deserved more serious treatment from the American strategists than that. Somewhere else, such experimenting might work. But not in Vietnam, with its treacherous terrain and its tough Viet Cong jungle fighters. In Hunter's estimation, the way out was a political solution. Ho was not a puppet for Peking or Moscow. He had his problems and the war int the South was one of them. Unofficial peace feelers to Hanoi could potentially yeild useful results. For the U.S. to struggle on as it was doing would lead only to "another Dien Bien Phu, or a series of lesser defeats, in which we and our allies are the victims."[35]

New Republic editors were no more satisfied than Hunter with the course of U.S. policy in Vietnam under Kennedy, especially military policy. As had been demonstrated earlier, the prevailing belief in the liberal opinion press during 1961 was that American had a basic responsibility to halt the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia. The concern had not been with the validity of this assumption, but rather with methods being employed to pursue anti-Communist objectives. The New Republic declared on March 12, 1962, though, that U.S. policy makers were needlessly risking American lives in trying to work with Diem. In Indochina, the Communists had a number of sanctuaries, including Red China and North Vietnam. Considering these realities, said The New Republic, the U.S. should totally re-examine its objectives in South Vietnam. And what were the alternatives? One

was

general war with China, another a "last-ditch stand in Saigon ending in Communist encirclement." The third was for the U.S. to seek a diplomatic settlement leading to neutralization of South Vietnam. And which of these did The New Republic favor? It didn't say, although subsequent editorials recommended a policy that would lead to a neutral South Vietnam.[36]

On July 28, The Nation declared the conflict in South Vietnam to be a "dirty war." Atrocities were common practice among Vietnamese on both sides of the struggle. U.S. tactics, including the provision of heavy, slow-moving equipment to the South Vietnamese forces, was senseless in light of the opponent's proven agility. "Moveover, said the magazine, "as the weather worsens, U.S. air transport, napalm bombings and other amenities will be less available to defend against the Viet Cong attacks." All in all, said The Nation, the Vietnam War could not reach a peaceful solution, not, that is, with Diem remaining in power. Here, as elsewhere, Diem was the major barrier to attainment of U.S. objectives, including the objective of sitting down with the North Vietnamese to negotiate a settlement. With the U.S. fighting to preserve Diem, "Americans who die do not even have the consolation of giving their lives in a good cause.[37]

The Nation, along with The New Republic, had clearly grown skeptical of U.S. ability to prevail in Vietnam. The two journals were also beginning to wonder, during the important year of 1962, whether the effort to prevail was in fact worthwhile. Their concerns along these lines were to increase after 1962, as the Diem regime continued to decline.

CHAPTER IV NOTES:

[1]James Burnham, "Western, Yes, but Hard," The National Review, 13 February, 1962, p. 94.

[2]"War in Southeast Asia," editorial, The National Review, 27 February, 1962, p. 16.

[3]James Burnham, "No Friends Allowed," The National Review, 30 January, 1962, p. 60.

[4]Gerald W. Johnson, "The Nebulous Intellectuals," The New Republic, 18 June, 1962, p. 10.

[5]Johnson, p. 10.

[6]"Mandarins vs. Communists," editorial, The Nation, 6 January, 1962, p. 52.

[7]Robert S. Elegant, "Agonizing Opportunity in Southeast Asia," The New Leader, 22 January, 1962, p. 18. Elegant made similar comments in The New Leader of April 16, 1962.

[8]Denis Warner, "The Many-Fronted War in South Vietnam," The Reporter, 13 September, 1962, p. 33-35.

[9]"Z," "The War in Vietnam: We Have Not Been Told the Whole Truth," 12 March, 1962, p. 21.

[10]"Dragon's Teeth," editorial, The Nation, 29 September, 1962, p. 169-170.

[11]Robert S. Elegant, "South Vietnam: The Theory," The New Leader, 16 April 1962, p. 8, 10. Elegant made similar comments about Viet Cong abilities in The New Leader on June 25, 1962.

[12]Elegant, p. 9.

[13]Jerry A. Rose, "Our Undeclared War in Vietnam," The Reporter, 10 May, 1962, p. 30-32.

[14]"Z," p. 21-22.

[15]S.L.A. Marshall, "An Exposed Flank in South Vietnam," The Reporter, 7 June 1962, p. 26-27.

[16]Denis Warner, "The Many-Fronted War in South Vietnam," The Reporter, 13 September 1962, p. 35.

[17]Rose, 10 May 1962, p. 31.

[18]Elegant, 16 April 1962, p. 8.

[19]Elegant, p. 8.

[20]"Engagement in Saigon," editorial, The New Republic, 12 March 1962, p. 4.

[21]"Z," p. 26.

[22]"Z," p. 25.

[23]T.R.B., "Ugly Little War," The New Republic, 5 March 1962, p. 2.

[24]"Vietnam Again," editorial, The New Republic, 15 December 1962, p. 5.

[25]Marshall, 7 June 1962, p. 29.

[26]"The Vietnam Booby Trap," The Nation, 10 March 1962, p. 23.

[27]Elegant, 22 January 1962, p. 20.

[28]T.R.B., 5 March 1962, p. 2.

[29]Reinhold Niebuhr, "Can Democracy Work," The New Leader, 28 May 1962, p. 9.

[30]Niebuhr, p. 9.

[31]Gerald W. Johnson, "Our Need to Know," The New Republic, 5 March 1962, p. 16.

[32]Elegant, 22 January 1962, p. 20.

[33]William H. Hunter, "A Way Toward Peace in Indochina," The New Republic, 16 April 1962, p. 11.

[34]Hunter, p. 11.

[35]Hunter, p. 12.

[36]"Engagement in Saigon," editorial, The New Republic, 12 March, 1962, p. 3.

[37]"The Dirty War," editorial, The Nation, 28 July 1962, p. 23.

CHAPTER V: "DOWN THE SLOPE" - THE LIBERAL OPINION PRESS AND THE FALL OF DIEM

Ngo Dihn Diem's hold on power continued to erode during 1963, until on November 1, he was overthrown and killed in a coup. U.S. policy planners had continued supporting the Vietnamese dictator during that period, despite seemingly unending turmoil. The Viet Cong showed progressively greater strength against the South Vietnamese Army and the Buddhists showed progressively greater inclination to oppose Diem's Catholic-dominated government.

The year began poorly from a military standpoint. On January 2, more than 2,000 Vietnamese troops, with extensive support from helicopters, airplanes and tanks, were held at bay in the Mekong Delta village of Ap-Bac by an estimated 200 Viet Cong. The enemy shot down five helicopters and killed three American advisers in the first "stand-and-fight" battle of what was becoming known as the Second Indochina War.

In mid-April, in an effort to win with kindness what wasn't being won on the battlefield, Diem announced an "open arms" campaign for Viet Cong soldiers who turned themselves in. They would be allowed to give up their weapons and join the South Vietnamese forces.

Long-standing irritation between South Vietnam's Buddhist majority and the ruling Catholics erupted into violence in Hue on May 8. During a celebration of Buddha's birth, government forces attacked a crowd of Buddhists. Twelve persons were killed, including several

children. Leaders of the Buddhists claimed government forces fired into the crowd. Government officials blamed Communists circulating among the Buddhist celebrants for the violence. Less than a month later further violence broken out in Hue as Buddhists protested what they called harsh treatment at the hand of the government. In further anger against Diem's handling of the situation, Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc committed suicide on June 11 in Saigon by igniting his gasoline-soaked robes. Government troops had to use force to quell Buddhist riots that followed an agreement on June 16 between Buddhist leaders and government officials.

Conflict between Diem and the Buddhists continued through the summer, until, on August 21, Diem declared martial law throughout the country. This came after hundreds of state police and military personnel assaulted the Xa Loi pagoda in Saigon, the center of Buddhist activities in the city.

On August 22, in response to the deteriorating situation, and to Diem's continuing attacks on the Buddhists, foreign minister Vu Van Mau, a Buddhist, resigned from the Diem government. The same day, Tran Van Chuong, South Vietnamese ambassador to the United States and the father of Mme. Ngo Dinh Nhu, also resigned his post in protest against Diem's Buddhist policies.

Throughout this troubling period, senior U.S. officials were issuing optimistic statements on progress in fighting the Viet Cong and on improving political conditions in South Vietnam. Admiral Harry D. Felt, commander in chief of U.S. forces in the Pacific, told reporters after a January 11 meeting in Saigon with MACV commander, General Paul D. Harkins, that defeat of the Viet Cong was "inevitable." Felt followed this statement with a prediction on January 30 that "the South

Vietnamese should achieve victory in three years."

A month later, on March 5, Harkins declared that "the South Vietnamese Armed Forces have now attained the experience, training and necessary equipment required for victory."

In late June, President Kennedy announced that he was sending Henry Cabot Lodge to South Vietnam as the American ambassador. Departing ambassador Frederick Nolting warned on a visit to the United States on July 11 that "unity of purpose and purpose in action" should not be undermined by "internal dissention."

Optimistic statements continued to pour from U.S. military headquarters in Saigon throughout the worsening Buddhist crisis. The New York Herald Tribune quoted a senior MACV officer on August 28 as saying "there is no evidence of any increase in the number of Viet Cong units in the Mekong Delta. . . the Delta area under our control is increasing."

Four days later, President Kennedy issued a veiled warning to Diem in a statement in which he said that "the war cannot be won unless the people support the effort." The President said little had occurred in South Vietnam during the previous two months to indicate that the government was in touch with the people. The potential gloom of this statement was overshadowed, two weeks later, by a column in the Washington Post in which Marquis Childs cited "confidential reports from high American authorities in Saigon" declaring that "the war can be won in nine months."

One week later, on September 21, President Kennedy ordered Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to go to Saigon and review progress by the South Vietnamese in their fight against the Viet Cong.

The two men remained in Saigon from September 24 to October 1. In a statement on their trip, released by the White House on October 2, the two American officials pronounced the "major part of the United States military task can be completed by the end of 1965." And they said that by the end of 1963, 1,000 U.S. military personnel in South Vietnam could be sent home.

On November 1, the day Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, were deposed and killed in a coup by senior military officers, General Harkins told Pacific Stars and Stripes that "victory in the sense it would apply to this kind of war is just months away and the reduction of American advisers can begin any time now."

A further announcement on the potential reduction of U.S. forces in South Vietnam was made by military officials in Saigon on November 15. President Kennedy was assassinated on November 22 and his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, announced that the United States would continue its support of South Vietnam.

U.S. military involvement in South Vietnam had continued to creep upward during 1962 until, by the beginning of 1963, the U.S. had an estimated 12,000 soldiers in the country. And yet, conditions there were becoming worse instead of better.

At home, conservatives writing in The National Review were becoming as frustrated as the liberals writing in The Reporter, The New Leader, The New Republic and The Nation, but for different reasons. Conservatives blamed the Kennedy Administration for not giving Diem enough military support and for not driving to total victory over the Communists in Indochina, and, if necessary, in China itself. The liberals, on the other hand, were still in favor of denying South Vietnam to the Communists, but not at the price of endless

support for the discredited Diem regime and potentially endless military involvement in the Indochina war.

The National Review had almost entirely ignored the Vietnam situation until the Fall of 1963, when the Buddhist conflicts threatened to topple the Diem government. Articles appearing in that journal during the months preceding 1963 were generally critical of Kennedy policy makers for not marching to total victory over the Communists in Southeast Asia in general.

James Burnham, The National Review's specialist on the Third World, declared on January 29, 1963, that the U.S. was on its way to losing another war, "this time in Vietnam." He didn't say what the other wars were that the U.S. had lost. His imagery about South Vietnam and the conflict there was consistently distasteful. The country was a "steaming land of reed-covered marshes, rice paddies, mapless forests and bewildering jungles." Lurking in this ominous terrain were the "swarming brown termites of the Viet Cong." These insect-like creatures would be "frightened by the weird sight and rasping sound of our great whirlybirds." Confronted with these devices of modern warfare, the Viet Cong would fire "a few random rifle shots" and the scuttle away. Led by undaunted Communist commanders, though, the Viet Cong had become less easily cowed. These "serious and determined captains" had "cured the panic of their followers, devised new tactics, brought in or captured new, heavier weapons: and now the formerly invincible helicopters are becoming targets instead of birds of prey." He saw North Vietnam as a "harsh and hungry police state" anxious to take over the rice-producing capabilities of South Vietnam.

The National Review met North Vietnamese charges that the U.S.

was using poison gas against the Viet Cong with a March 26, 1963 editorial suggesting use of even more harsh devices of modern war. The U.S. should have admitted using poison gas as a jungle defoliant "to track down the hit-and-run Communist bandits." Then U.S. officials should have gone on to say that "we promise you we've got other trumps to play. Out in the forest, up in the hills, far from dense population, we could quite easily--and mercifully, for that matter-use some of our stock of nerve gas, and so paralyze a whole area, or strip of country, bringing peace once more, and save Vietnam from Communist tyranny." To the conservative mind of National Review writers, paralysis induced by nerve gas was preferable to life under Communist rule. Better deadened than red. In succumbing to pressure to ban "objectionable weapons," of the atomic, biological and chemical variety, American leaders were missing the main point of the East-West confrontation, which was to win a battle to the death with the Communist demon. "As to banning, the Administration might well ban one thing, unilaterally: its own balderdash. Then it might settle down to the task of the common defense, and find that the so-called agonizing problems of the present age are reducible to a simple formula, the answer to which is clear enough in most situations: To win or to lose."[2]

The Buddhist uprisings resembled another "Bay of Pigs" to National Review commentator "Cato." Writing in his column "From Washington Straight," "Cato" charged that bureaucrats in Washington were looking for scapegoats to blame for the deplorable political situation in South Vietnam. The likely candidate for blame would be the CIA, "which cannot defend itself publicly." As in the Cuban invasion fiasco of 1961, the State Department would give contradictory signals

regarding our intention to support "freedom fighters." "are we or are we not supporting Diem? was the question on which CIA and State obviously had different answers."[3]

The same "Cato," along with commentator Clare Boothe Luce, both saw evidence of potentially conspiratorial behavior among the dissident American press corps in Saigon. These reporters' unflattering treatment of the Diem regime in late 1963 was reminiscent of similar testiness among members of the liberal establishment press toward Chiang Kai-shek a few years earlier. Marguerite Higgins, the globe-trotting reporter of the New York Herald-Tribune had made a tour of South Vietnam and found conditions there must less dismal than was being reported by "the horde of pressmen who have gone off to fight the good fight against President Diem." For Cato, the obvious parallel was the "memorable tarring given Chiang Kai-shek by the press which so greatly aided the Red takeover of China." Madam Nhu was seen as a vicitm of the same kind of press lambasting that was given Madam Chiang after the fall of mainland China. "They've given her everything they gave Mme Chiang, except the pink silk sheets."[4]

In her November 5, 1963, article Mrs. Luce gushed praise for Mme Nhu, who had gained some degree of notoriety in the United States by referring to the self-immolation of Buddhist priests as a "barbeque." Mrs. Luce called Mme. Nhu "beautiful, dynamic, courageous and intelligent." She was a "militant Catholic, mother of four, a devoted and fiercely loyal (if not subservient) wife." She also had immense political power in the Diem regime in Saigon, a fact that made her important to America. "For a moment, however brief, in history, some part of America's prestige if not securtiy, seems to lie the pale pink palm of her exquisite little hand." Mrs. Luce, like "Cato," saw

the makings of a liberal establishment brewing against the Diem government, a sell-out resembling the one allowed to prevail in Chiang's loss of mainland China. "What seems to be happening to the government in Vietnam is remarkably like what happened to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and Madam Chiang in China when the Department of State pulled the rug out from under them, and Mao Tse-tung took over China."[5]

By the time these articles hit the newsstands, Diem and Nhu were dead, and Mme. Nhu was stranded in Los Angeles in the midst of her American speaking tour. National Review commentary on the death of the Nhu brothers was uniformly critical of Washington and full of hints that their demise was part of a pattern of disloyalty to American interests and appeasement of the Communists. American officials were described as "dancing . . . in the corridors of New York and Washington" at news of the assassinations. The magazine wondered if American policy makers were ever really after a "unified effort against the Communists." How could this be when James Reston had used his column in the New York Times to suggest that a negotiated settlement with the Communists might be called for in Vietnam. The editorial referred readers to James Burnham's column for particulars on why this course of action would be uniformly unacceptable. (To Burnham, negotiation and neutrality equalled a sellout to the Communists and capitulation to their plan for subjugating all of Asia). Diem may have been "a man of integrity," and "a great patriot." But, said the National Review editorial, "that is not enough these days in the court of public opinon. He was something else again, quite utterly disqualifying him. He was a relentless, undeviating, active, fighting anti-Communist. That is the besetting sin of our time and few can survive

it."[6]

It is apparent, on the basis of these articles in one of the nation's leading conservative opinion journals, that attitudes hadn't changed much at The National Review during the Kennedy years regarding U.S. methods and objectives in Vietnam. For this journal, U.S. objectives remained far too limited, concentrated as they were to attempting to assist the Diem regime without seriously enmeshing the U.S. in a major Asian land war, instead of going all out to rid the continent of Communists. Instead of giving Diem the unconditional support he needed, military and economic, U.S. policy makers were trying to make him liberalize his administration. That deviated from the true task, which was to kill Communists. In allowing the Nhu brothers to die, the conservatives charged, the Kennedy Administration had lost the services of one of the only true anti-Communists left in Asia.

Members of the liberal opinion press, on the other hand, was displaying continuous concern about the practical, and even moral, basis for further support of Diem's corrupt, incompetent and insensitive government. Their objectives, though, were similar to those of the conservative commentors: Elimination of Communism from South Vietnam. The differences, as has been stated earlier, were in matters of execution. More and more, the liberal journals began to advocate elimination of Diem and his followers from leadership of the anti-Communist effort, with consideration being given to a negotiated settlement with the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. The conservatives consistently saw such accommodation to at least some of the objectives of the Communists as appeasement and capitulation to the Communist menace. According to their basic beliefs, neutralism and negotiated

peace were no substitute to total victory over the Communist evil. To negotiate with the Communists was to lose to them. Communists never kept their word. The liberals, as will be shown in this chapter, were willing to take that chance if it would help end America's increasing military involvement in South Vietnam's destiny.

LIBERAL DISAPPOINTMENT

Kennedy's policies of anti-Communism in Southeast Aia were a disappointment to many of the liberal writers. The Vietnam involvement was continuing, but without success. The liberals were getting impatient. At the same time, they were showing alarm at the growing size of the U.S. military commitment in South Vietnam.

Attitudes toward Diem grew continually more critical in 1963, especially after the Vietnamese leader's harsh and inept handling of the Buddhist crisis during the Spring and Summer months. Robert S. Elegant, The New Leader correspondent, maintained support for Diem; other liberal journal writers considered only how Diem might properly be deposed.

The Reporter, long an advocate of forceful U.S. intervention in the affairs of nations threatened by Communism, finally had to admit confusion at the nature of the struggle in South Vietnam. This concern was directed partly at the complexity of events in Southeast Asia. But it was also directed to U.S. leaders, who were charged with release of inaccurate and misleading information.

After Diem had been assassinated, the liberal journals called for careful reassessment of the U.S. situation. The change of governments provided an ideal opportunity for U.S. leaders to explore major new directions in its policy toward Vietnam and the developing world in general.

All was not well for the liberal journals as the year 1963 wore on. This general malaise was reflected in a May, 1963 column by T.R.B., The New Republic columnist who had been so impressed with Kennedy's "patrician" presence during a 1960 campaign speech at the National Press Club. T.R.B. admitted a degree of disappointment with the

President and his highly educated team of senior advisers. "Washington under Kennedy, somehow, isn't the way we thought it would be," T.R.B. lamented. Kennedy himself shared this sense of disappointment. Congress was blocking progressive legislation. The Right was making an issue out of Cuba. And Kennedy's Administration was dead in the water. "Mr. Kennedy campaigned in 1960 as a crisis candidate, who would make full use of Presidential power. He would bring a sense of urgency to Washington. So far as we can see the country has little more sense of urgency now than in 1960."[7]

In this context of lingering woe, Vietnam emerged in the liberal journals during 1963 as a trouble-spot of continuing concern and vexation. The Nation saw U.S. military involvement deepening there, with the prospect that matters would get worse before they got better. With every increase in U.S. supplies and military personnel, the Communists increased their supplies and military personnel. "This war has an escalator logic of its own," the journal declared in January, 1963. The upward spiral couldn't go on forever. "In war, if you don't win, you are in progressively increasing danger of losing, and this applies particularly to the side which, in manpower and equipment, is the stronger." The Nation saw the United States maneuvering into a "something-must-be-done situation." U.S. military leaders were suggesting that the requisite action should be to put South Vietnamese troops under the command of American officers. The Nation suggested that this predictable logic ought to be evaluated very carefully before a decision was made. Otherwise, next would come introduction of U.S. combat troops. "The time to discuss the wisdom of this predictable next step is now--not after it has been taken, as it surely will be if the issue is allowed to go by default."[8]

Peter Worthington, a correspondent in Vietnam for The Telegram of Toronto, reviewed in The Nation a few of the reasons that might justify the increased U.S. involvement in such a potentially losing cause as the Vietnam War. It had become commonplace for the U.S. to back unpopular dictators in backward countries. So much so that it was becoming an "international cliche." Vietnam was an especially glaring example of the pattern. "When you visit South Vietnam, you are quickly forced to the conclusion that, incredible as it may seem, America is involved in an undeclared but all-out war to save the unpopular South Vietnam Government from an inevitable overthrow." Worthington probed for reasons that might explain such American behavior. There were the usual rationales: "We are holding the line against creeping Communism," was the typical response. In Worthington's estimation, America seemed "more concerned with opposing Communism than it is with sponsoring a better system that coincides with the desires of the people." All of this effort was futile, though, because the U.S. seemed to be fighting a losing cause in South Vietnam. "The odds are that the Communists will eventually win in South Vietnam--their patience is more durable than America's enthusiasm for an expensive, futile war."[9]

The New Republic vision of the war, at the outset of 1963, was equally as dismal, especially with Diem still in office. Senator Mike Mansfield had issued a report on Feb. 24 outlining his impressions of conditions in South Vietnam. He was not optimistic. "After two years of self-deluding reassurances and phophecies, the facts are being faced and stated for the first time by a man in the inner circle of the Kennedy Administration," The New Republic said on Mar. 9. "The Senate Majority leader sees no end in sight." Mansfield reported on a

Diem regime growing "more, not less authoritarian." Such statements were all the more telling, the journal said, because two years earlier Mansfield was known as "Diem's godfather."[10]

And yet the U.S. military commitment was increasing, a reality The New Republic found alarming not so much because the U.S. had no business meddling in another country's affairs, but that it was supporting such a despicable politician as Ngo Dinh Diem. The stubborn Vietnamese leader wouldn't reform his government, and he wouldn't improve his methods of fighting the Viet Cong. The U.S. was having to do the dirty work, and Diem was making matters worse, instead of better. "In the long run," the journal predicted, "the danger of supporting Diem is that the Western influence will become more and more suspect."[11]

Diem, the problem was always Diem. With a new man running South Vietnam, perhaps the country could be saved. The U.S. was getting in deeper and deeper. And this increased commitment brought halting, carefully worded suggestions that maybe the U.S. should examime its basic policies toward support of professed anti-Communist dictators in Asia. The liberal journals recognized that U.S. prestige was on the line in South Vietnam. And they recognized that to withdraw from combat against the Viet Cong would jeopardize that prestige. The great problem of 1963, and throughout the Kennedy years in general, was whether continued backing of Diem was also threatening U.S. prestige and whether operating without Diem would be an improvement. Diem had been abhorrent enough to the liberals in 1962, and to an extent in 1961. But considering the U.S. mission in Vietnam--salvation of Southeast Asia from the Communist cancer--the South Vietnamese dictator could be stomached. In 1963, though, Diem was

becoming simply unacceptable. Not only were his politics objectionable, but worse, so was his record against the Viet Cong. His government just wasn't doing the job, and to the tough-minded liberals writing for the liberal opinion press during the Kennedy years, incompetence was highly suspect. When The New Republic saw a war without end in Vietnam in early March, 1963, it turned out to be a "war without end" so long as the U.S. continued backing Diem. Soon U.S. military leaders, frustrated in their attempts to defeat the Viet Cong in South Vietnam under Diem, would seek permission to root out the Communists at their source, in Hanoi. The war would be widened, bringing with it the specter of Korea and the perils of war with Red China. If Kennedy gave in to the voices that wanted to "take the war to the enemy, as in Korea . . . the risk that another Sino-American confrontation would follow is obvious."[12]

Robert S. Elegant made one of the few arguments in the liberal opinion press during 1963 for continued support of Diem, regardless of his ineptitude. "I have been startled by the different attitudes toward a conflict to which this country is currently committing one million dollars a day and at least one life a week," Elegant wrote in evaluating U.S. public response to the war. He was especially concerned about reluctance to assist Diem if his Republic could not solve its own problems. "What, one is promoted to ask, would be the need for assistance if it could?"[13]

Elegant had two suggestions for U.S. policy palnners, suggestions given in the cool tone of someone advising a nation with a firm lock on power and options. If Diem didn't become more effective in his war against the Viet Cong and continued interfering with U.S. efforts along those lines "the U.S. may be forced to permit a change

of government." Elegant also had no hesitation about sending "counter-guerrilla forces" on combat missions into North Vietnam. These measures may be distasteful and "fraught with peril, but either would be preferable to losing the struggle."[14]

Elegant's attitudes, in other words, had changed little since 1961. The same could not be said for Jerry Rose, the former Time far eastern correspondent and by late 1963 a Hong Kong-based freeland writer. He declared in the October 12, 1963, issue of The New Republic that "the war in South Vietnam cannot be won." Rose based his assessment on the "on-the-spot opinions of numerous Vietnamese, American and foreign experts." He added his own experienced eye to that group. "After four years of closely observing the situation, I concur." Rose had a plan to help ease the impact of this pending defeat. He would allow U.S. military power to deal with the Diem problem. North Vietnam needed food from the South. Moreover, the Vietnamese had a traditional dislike for the Chinese. A good way to sever Ho Chi Minh's dependence on Red China was for North and South Vietnam to make peace with one another on the basis of negotiated trade agreements. North Vietnam would become a "sort of Asian Yugoslavia." There was a hook here, but not nearly the fatal gaff envisioned by the conservative writers whenever the subject of negotiation with Communists emerged. In Rose's estimation, the North would have to be convinced that "an outright victory could not be gained in the South within a reasonable length of time." The United States military would assure this. But first, a better leader than Diem had to be seated in the President's palace, and the efficiency of the South Vietnamese Army had to be improved.[15]

DIEM, THE DISPENSIBLE DICTATOR

The liberal opinion press assessments of the Vietnam situation became darker as 1963 wore on. These journals weren't calling for immediate U.S. withdrawal from the country; in some cases they were actually prescribing greater U.S. involvement. But there was one thing everyone agreed on: Diem was definitely a liability. Vietnam was major news in the liberal journals by this time. In 1961, only 11 articles and editorials had been devoted exclusively to the situation there. In 1962, this figure had increased to 28. During 1963, the total reached 46. Virtually all these articles dealt, in one form or the other, with the problem of Diem, to the point where it began to appear that he and his family were more of an enemy than the Viet Cong. The eyes of the liberal reporters and editors were seldom on the Communists in 1963. They seemed to be taken for granted, almost like part of the Vietnamese landscape. The news was Diem, the dictator gone sour, who was taking from the U.S. with both hands, and then not producing results.

The New Republic devoted its lead editorial on April 20 to the subject of the "Dispensible Diem," listing his sins against deomcratic principles and his possible successors. If President Kennedy was looking for support in the eventual authorization of a coup against Diem, he had it among members of the liberal opinion press. They brought the full weight of their criticism down on the South Vietnamese rulers throughout the year. The New Republic editorial of April 20 was an example of the genre.

Military efforts against the Viet Cong, operations with such "tantalizing" names as "Sunrise," "Delta," and "Waves of Love," were getting nowhere. And yet the Administration was "grimly" hanging

on, fearful of criticism that it "gave away" Laos and might lose Northern Thailand. U.S. intentions were "defensible," the journal said. "Neither the U.S. nor its allies can take a military defeat on the Southeast Asian mainland without imperiling the fragile edifices of non-Communist states there and dangerously jeopardizing the major prize in Asia, or perhaps in the world: India." What the U.S. had to do was to reconsider its relationship with Diem, for the "legitimate concern" of preserving Southeast Asia from Communist domination had "unfortunately, become confused with the maintenance in power, no matter how high the moral and material price, of the South Vietnamese regime of Ngo Dinh Diem." Plenty of more worthy Vietnamese were available to assume the mantel of leadership. "There are alternatives to going down with Diem," The New Republic concluded.[16]

The New Republic followed on May 4 with a seven-page article by Jerry Rose, describing the miserable performance of South Vietnamese soldiers in the field, and the ineptitude of the South Vietnamese leadership in Saigon. The soldiers wouldn't fight and the leaders wouldn't lead, and meanwhile the Viet Cong were becoming stronger. Rose quoted at length from the writings of North Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap, the victor of Dien Bien Phu, on the proper conduct of an Army and its relationship with the people. In Rose's estimation, Diem was violating most of Giap's tenets, in ways that were inexorably ceding the war to the Communists. Diem was inadequate. "Vietnam needs a Magsaysay," Rose declared, referring to Ramon Magsaysay, leader of the Philippine government's successful battle against the Communist Hukbalahap insurgency in the 1950s.[17]

Six weeks later, The New Republic published a bitter article by Nguyen Thai, a former news official in the Diem government who was

studying as a Nieman fellow at Harvard. Thai marveled at the gullibility of the Americans, who were being taken in by "Diem's bluff." Diem was serving himself and his family, not the interests of the Vietnamese or American people. "In the minds of most Vietnamese there is now no doubt that Diem places the Ngo family's interest above the survival of South Vietnam as a non-Communist state, and by shrewdly playing the anti-Communist game he has succeeded in blackmailing the American's and the Vietnamese into supporting him."[18]

America, because it had provided so much aid to Diem, was "in large part responsible for the direction of events." So it was America's responsibility to deal with Diem. Reformers could not emerge to improve conditions "unless the United States convinces the Vietnamese people that it will no longer 'sink or swim with Diem.'"[19]

Helen Lamb, an economic analyst at M.I.T. and a Vietnam scholar, interviewed Vietnamese exiles in Paris for an article in the Aug. 10 issue of The Nation. There she found a number of exiles who were baffled at the reluctance of the U.S. government to topple Diem and replace him with a more effective leader. A coup d'etat was needed, the exiles said, followed by establishment of a "new provisional government representing a coalition of all non-Communist parties." The new government would empty the South Vietnamese jails of the "thousands of political prisoners; proclaim an amnesty for all fighting rebels who lay down their arms; promise future elections once peace has been restored," and generally assure freedom of speech, association and the press.[20]

These and other articles illustrated the level of discontent in the liberal opinon press regarding the Diem regime. The South Vietnamese dictator was a liability to U.S. policy and a menace to his own people.

President Kennedy was remiss, not in failing to rid South Vietnam of Communist insurgents or to bring peace to the region. That was seen as the ultimate objective by the liberal journals, and had been for many years. The objective hadn't changed, only the means deemed favorable to the liberal journals in attaining it. In the past Diem had been objectionable, but potentially capable of reform, if only Kennedy and his men would apply enough pressure, show enough resolve, and strive more vigorously for democratic reforms by this Asian client state. By early 1963, Diem was becoming more than objectionable. He was becoming intolerable. With his heavy-handed response to the Buddhist revolts of May through August, Diem and his family lost all collateral with the liberal opinion press. Calls for reform turned to calls for removal. The Buddhist crisis marked the end of any liberal opinion press tolerance for Diem and his madarin government.

THE BUDDHIST REVOLT

The Buddhist crisis of 1963 shocked and distressed a liberal opinion press already disdainful of Diem and his autocratic policies. The crisis began at Hue on May 8, as Buddhists, flying colorful flags, began celebrating the anniversary of the birth of Buddha. Government forces attempted to disband the celebrations. Fighting erupted and 12 persons were killed, including some children. The Buddhist leaders claimed government troops fired into crowds of civilians. Government officials said the Buddhist groups were infiltrated with Communists and were hostile to government policies. Diem met with Buddhist leaders on May 15 and promised to allow their demands for religious freedom, compensation for victims of the clash in Hue, and permission to fly Buddhist flags. Demonstrations broke out in Hue on June 3 and Diem quickly placed the city under martial law. On June 11 the world was shocked at reports and photos of Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc committing suicide in a Saigon street by igniting his gasoline-soaked robes. Diem signed an agreement with the Buddhists on June 16, on the same day government troops used force against Buddhist rioters in Saigon. On July 30 an estimated 60,000 Buddhists joined antigovernment demonstrations in Saigon and other parts of South Vietnam. On Aug. 18, 15,000 Buddhists announced they would stage a hunger strike as a protest against the government. By this time five persons had burned themselves to death as part of the growing Buddhist rebellion against the Saigon leaders. The situation became so bad that on Aug. 21 Diem proclaimed martial law throughout South Vietnam, as government troops and armed police attacked pagodas and arrested more than 100 monks. Among the Buddhists arrested was Thich Tinh Khiet, the supreme Buddhist leader in South Vietnam. Foreign minister

Vu Van Mau, a Buddhist, resigned in protest the next day, as did South Vietnam's ambassador to the United States, Tran Van Chuong, father of Mme. Ngo Dinh Nhu.

In the midst of this crisis, on June 27, President Kennedy announced appointment of Henry Cabot Lodge as next ambassador to Saigon. On Aug. 26, with the country still in turmoil over the Buddhist rebellions, Lodge presented his credentials at the Presidential Palace in Saigon.

Through the tumultuous summer months, the sense of outrage in the liberal opinion press continued to grow. The Buddhist monk who lit himself on fire in Saigon may have "put a match to the funeral pyre of the Diem regime," The New Republic grimly predicted. The potential for religious war in South Vietnam was as ominous as the potential for protracted political war with the Viet Cong. Catholic priests in the country often had their own armies, many of which had shown considerable aggressiveness in dealing with the Viet Cong. But these armies were also viewed with trepidation by the nation's Buddhists.[21]

The New Republic was disgusted by reports of Diem's troops, equipped and trained by Americans, shooting into crowds of Buddhists celebrating what would be the equivalent of Christmas in the United States. The crime committed by these people "had been that, in a country in which they represent about 70 percent of the population, they had run afoul of the particular prejudices of the chief of state and his relatives and associates, who are Catholics."[22] The editors declared themselves astounded by the "sheer idiocy of the Diem regime . . . here is a government which, by the accounts of its most naive supports, 'controls' ("whatever that word means in a guerrilla war) only one-half of its own population and can count on the full loyalty of

perhaps ten percent--precisely the 1.3 million Catholics." With so much riding on the success of Diem's "strategic hamlet" program, the magazine marvelled at his stupidity in handing a "ready-made" issue to the Communists.[23]

The Nation saw in news of the Buddhist protests the "same old Diem." Here was a Catholic President tenously clinging to office in the face of a massive Communist insurrection, senselessly provoking practitioners of a religion followed by most of the country's population. The magazine agreed that there must be more painful ways to commit suicide than by setting one's clothes on fire, but that they were hard to imagine. The fact that a Buddhist monk in South Vietnam had chosen this particularly gruesome way to protest the Diem government's repression "bespeaks . . . the greatness of the provocation." What was new was U.S. reluctance to support Diem's insensitivity. "Almost for the first time in the long history of Diem's clashes with his own people, Washington is not giving him any support." The Nation's conclusion: "Diem hasn't changed; but maybe Washington is changing--however slowly and reluctantly."[24]

Robert Karr McCabe, Newsweek's correspondent in Southeast Asia, took readers of The New Leader through the "swamps of Saigon," in an Aug. 19 article that saw Diem's handling of the Buddhist uprising as the final breach between the President and his people. According to McCabe's Buddhist sources, America had created the Diem government and kept it in power. As a result, only America could effectively remove the government. McCabe saw little future for any kind of uprising, popular or American-engineered. Diem's government would have to be removed. "Even the most determinedly optimistic Americans in Saigon see little hope for genuine victory in Vietnam

under present conditions." In guerrilla war, where the struggle was for "popular allegiance," Diem and his family had "forfeited whatever claim they had on mass esteem." McCabe saw the Diem regime growing "older, more rigid, more fearful of change." The Buddhist revolt had quickly gone beyond merely a religious protest and become "a channel for protest on a truly national scale."[25]

Denis Warner described the Buddhist crisis as a result of conflict within the Diem government itself, and more specifically between Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu and his wife, Mme. Nhu. The Nhus had grown impatient with Diem's "weakness" in dealing with the Buddhists, he told readers of The Reporter. The government was attempting to blame the Viet Cong for disrupting the Buddhist demonstrations and ceremonies and was accusing the Buddhist groups of being infiltrated by Communists. This approach was only widening the breach between the Government and the Buddhist leadership.[26]

THE COUP

Patience with Diem was growing short, indeed. The cries in the liberal opinion press for elimination of his government were growing more and more emphatic through the months of September and October. The Nation, on Sept. 14, described South Vietnam as a "booby trap for the U.S.," that unless, policies in Washington changed, could soon involve "not thousands, but hundreds of thousands men, and maybe even nuclear weapons." The magazine saw Vietnam as a carry over of the Eisenhower years. Continued U.S. support was intended to keep the country from being overrun by Communists. Newsmen were estimating U.S. troop strength in Vietnam as 12,000, a figure that jumped to between 14,500 and 15,000 as the Buddhist rebellion gained strength. "A country, however small, cannot be kept in permanent subjection by a gang like the Ngos, with what amounts to an SS of their own and an Army supplied and supervised by a foreign power." The Nation pointed out that the Soviets weren't even trying such an undertaking in their Eastern European satellites. They had to find some kind of government that was at least moderately acceptable to the people.[27]

A week later, The Nation unleashed a volley of charges against Washington for its self-serving and deadly cold war policies in the former colonial world, charges that damned American leaders for making as many problems as they solved in the pursuit of anti-Communism.

> A good many South Vietnamese may regard us as the interlopers. The Indo-Chinese war ended ten years ago and the bitterness has died down. It is we who have sprayed the countryside with napalm and herbicides, shot peasants from helicopters on the chance that they might be Viet-Cong soldiers, helped herd the rural population into protected hamlets which bear an odd resemblance to concentration camps, and kept the Ngo family in power. When Kennedy speaks, the Vietnamese remember these incidents in the struggle to preserve Southeast Asia for the free world.[28]

The New Republic was angered by the news that the Central Intelligence Agency was providing $250,000-per-month subsidies to "those SS-like brutes of the Diem Regime who have been conducting the anti-Buddhist and anti-student raids in Vietnam." Here was a case of the American government "working against itself." The Vietnamese "Special Forces," with their CIA backing weren't being used to overcome the Viet Cong cause, but were instead "discrediting the anti-Communist cause." American officials in Washington and Saigon, in particular John McCone, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, were backing the Diem regime at the same time that President Kennedy was appearing on television and in the press denouncing the suppression of the Buddhists.[29]

The Reporter was concerned about efforts by the Justice Department to extend provisions of the 1917 Sedition Act to Americans overseas who were making statements critical of the United States. This could stifle needed reporting from places such as South Vietnam, a country where events were hard enough to understand as it was, without applying further controls on the flow of information. "Does anyone know what is happening there," The Reporter asked. "What are the fine points of sedition when we are militarily involved with a government notorious for spreading false reports to our own correspondents?" The Reporter wondered why the Kennedy Administration wasn't more anxious to get reasonably factual information from such a confusing place." Max Ascoli and other editors at The Reporter admitted to being confused "from day to day" about who the enemy was.[30]

Angry as these publications were about the situation in Saigon and about Kennedy's persistence in supporting Diem, The Nation and The New Republic still held out hope for a solution to the Vietnam

problem that would avoid abandoning the country to the Communists. The Nation summarized the alternatives available to the U.S. in Vietnam, at a time when the government America had been supporting was on the verge of collapse. One was to do nothing, the "sink or swim with Diem" approach. Another called for elimination of the Nhus, who had engineered the anti-Buddhist campaign, but keeping Diem. A third was to get out of Vietnam - period, a choice The Nation said had been proposed by the Young Democrats of California. "They were jumped on as if they had committed a public obscenity--or worse, as if they were a bunch of Reds." A fourth choice was to add a series of "unlesses" to U.S. demands on Diem. "Get out, unless . . . Or stop aid, unless . . . Or reduce aid selectively, unless. . . " Variations on this approach had been attempted in the past, and the Diem regime hadn't been moved. None of these propositions had much chance of improving the situation, but there was one further possibility, a five-step plan that would also take into consideration the reality of China. President Kennedy had recently sketched out on television the domino-theory scenario in which Red China overran Southeast Asia "right down to the tip of Malaysia," if South Vietnam should fall. With this in mind, The Nation suggested that the President first make "private overtures to the Red Chinese via Warsaw, proposing terms for a mutual hands-off policy in Vietnam." Then the President could join with France in proposing a truce with North Vietnam and information of a federation of North and South Vietnam, with the South remaining capitalist. "Free intercourse" would be allowed between the two areas, under U.N. supervision. Third, the President should urge Hanoi to help in stabilizing Laos. This done, the U.S. should provide economic assistance to North and South Vietnam, in the belief that this would be

better "than pouring $500 million a year, and Vietnamese and American lives, down a perpetual rathole." And finally, the Ngos should be gotten rid of, "Part and parcel," but without withdrawing American forces needed to protect the Catholic population. "Politically impossible?" said the magazine. "Perhaps, but if the present situation of thinking continues to prevail World War III might well start in Southeast Asia, as World War II started in Asia."[31]

By mid-October, The New Republic had exhausted all tolerance with Diem, and was growing daily more impatient with President Kennedy's seemingly voracious appetite for facts about South Vietnam. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor were in Vietnam on another of their fact-finding missions on Oct. 12, when The New Republic printed an editorial entitled "No-Win in Vietnam." Matters no longer needed study, the editors said. "As for the President's needing more facts," they said, "there isn't another country in the world that has as many Americans per square inch gathering information than South Vietnam. It is crawling with military officers, intelligence agents, AID officials, State Department employees, and journalists--the numbers creep up and up."

As always, the problem was not the war, or U.S. policy in pursuing anti-Communist activities at the doorstep of Red China. Rather, the problem was Diem. With Diem gone, perhaps there would be some way to patch together a peace between North and South in Vietnam. The New Republic's position is worth noting in full, because it demonstrates a continuing attitude toward U.S. involvement in Vietnam on the eve of the coup against the Diem-Nhu government:

> The New Republic does not counsel a policy of disengagement from South Asia, but a policy of disengagement from

> the dictatorship of the Diem family, plus a positive search, in concert with others (including France, for de Gaulle has some wisdom on the subject) for ways of ending the war in Vietnam on terms other than unconditional surrender of either side.[32]

The event for which the liberal opinion press had been clamoring finally occurred on November 1. Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu were assassinated. Diem was out--perhaps with a finality that liberal journals found distasteful--but out nonetheless. With the dictator's fall, there were retrospectives to fashion, suggestions for future policy to float. Kennedy had a new, fresh group of leaders in South Vietnam. It was time for fresh, imaginative thinking. How should the President handle the situation?

The Nation suggested that the President use the coup, with its attendant change in personnel, to take a long, hard look at precisely what American objectives were in South Vietnam. The journal provided an extensive list of questions the President and his advisers might pose for themselves in determining America's next move regarding its Asian client. The country's reasons for involvement had never been properly spelled out, at least to the The Nation's satisfaction. Now seemed like a good time to perform this task.

For example, said the journal, the reason for American presence had been vaguely stated as being "to win the war." What war? Was it the South Vietnamese civil war? If so, history was against the United States. Outside interference in civil wars was traditionally thankless and frustrating, what The Nation called "the kiss of death." Was it to contain Red China? But China was having its own internal problems, along with a running conflict with the Russians. And besides, the Chinese and the Vietnamese "have been hereditary enemies over a much longer period than the existence of the American

Republic." North and South Vietnam, working together, "might serve as a bulwark against the great bogy." Were Americans in Vietnam to refine their counter-insurgency skills? If so, such experimenting was getting expensive and complicated. Were we trying to establish "democracy in the rice paddies," and make life better for the Vietnamese? Such "far-out" altruism, costing $1.5 million a day and 100 American lives up to that time, had never been approved by U.S. taxpayers, while making "the people of both Vietnams wretched." The coup, by itself, wouldn't improve matters in terms of the questions raised by The Nation. What the coup had done, said the journal, was to make the U.S. more responsible than ever for events in South Vietnam. The Nation suggested that, if Kennedy wanted to avoid being hung politically with the Vietnam War, he might heed deGaulle's suggestion of talks with Ho Chi Minh as a step toward possible free intercourse between the two Vietnams.[33]

The New Republic described conditions in South Vietnam after the coup as "a new start." The "House of Ngo . . . died as it had lived--by violence and treachery." In analyzing the assassinations, The New Republic again revealed its simultaneous revulsion at the war and at the idea of losing more territory to Asian Communists.

"The coup opens the way for a reappraisal of when and how the U.S. can disengage militarily without abandoning South Vietnam to the Communists." The New Republic, too, wanted to see talks opened with Hanoi as a step toward stabilization of affairs in Southeast Asia. The alternative, the journal said, was "fighting on and on in the elusive pursuit of military 'victory' at any cost."[34]

Max Ascoli, writing in the "Reporter's Notes" column of his magazine, displayed a degree of sympathy for Diem, who was pictured as a

victim of U.S. maneuvering. In the early days of Diem's regime, Ascoli recalled, Diem, "even in the presence of strangers, . . . would burst into tears when discussing the enormous problems that beset him." Diem had made impressive strides in improving conditions in his country, Ascoli said. But somewhere along the way, no one knew where, he "started on the journey down." The U.S. must "share some of the responsibility for his ruin and downfall." The U.S. had violated a fundamental "precept of diplomacy--to keep a proper distance."[35]

SOLUTIONS

Editors and writers in the liberal journals recognized the opportunities raised by the Diem coup. They had disliked Diem's regime and they disliked the war that seemed, more and more, to embroil the U.S. The coup offered time for reassessment, for recasting U.S. foreign policy into more appropriate form. Communism was no more acceptable in Southeast Asia than it had been earlier. So simple withdrawal, leaving Vietnam to its own devices, was not proposed as a viable alternative. Instead, there came proposals involving a variety of accommodations with North Vietnam that would assure, at least for the time being, the continued existence of South Vietnam. Most called for rethinking of immediate and long-term American objectives in Vietnam, along with reconsideration of the world-wide applicability of our containment policy.

Irving Kristol provided an example of such concerns in the September 30, 1963 New Leader. America's containment policy had led to the "blind alley" of Vietnam. The concept had been born out of necessity during the post-war years in Europe. It worked rather well there, even though other, more productive approaches, might have been discovered with more "vigorous effort" by U.S. officials. There was no reason to assume that "what works in Western Europe" would necessarily work in Southeast Asia. "Containment is only a policy, not a panacea, not even a useful ideology." And yet members of the Kennedy Administration were making containment sound like an ideology. "They seem to have a history according to which 'containment' becomes a form of progressive, if occasionally stern, education for political juvenile delinquents." Kristol's grudging conclusion was that "we are stuck with Vietnam." After all, there was the domino effect to con-

sider. We couldn't "write off" South Vietnam.

> Those who urge us to do so will, in the next breath, urge us to give all possible aid to India to help it withstand the Chinese threat. But can anyone seriously believe that India's will to resist could survive a major American debacle in Southeast Asia? If Vietnam and Laos and Thailand and Burma fall within the Chinese Communist sphere of influence, is India likely to remain invulnerable and immune? To believe that is to carry the idea of containment to the point of mysticism.

Kristol, like most liberal opinion press writers of the time, had completed a kind of "circle of toughness," in his analysis of future U.S. policy in Vietnam. He lashed the Kennedy Administration for blindly adhering to the old containment policy and suggested that it might not be appropriate for South Vietnam. He advised the Administration to rethink its assumptions for Southeast Asia, agreed that there probably were no "progressive, enlightened leaders" waiting to take over from Diem in South Vietnam and described democracy in South Vietnam as mostly wishful thinking. But he then suggested that the Administration accept a Korea-like solution which would leave South Vietnam intact as a potential bulwark against Communism.[36]

Something on the order of President Richard M. Nixon's "Vietnamization" policy was proposed by The New Republic as a possible solution to the Vietnam dilemma. By 1963, senior U.S. policy makers were seldom speaking in terms of "winning" the war in South Vietnam. The New Republic inferred from recent White House statements and reports on South Vietnam that U.S. planners were rather looking for ways to "disengage as rapidly as the requirements of security and 'face' will permit." Rober McNamara and Maxwell Taylor had just returned from another tour of Vietnam and declared that U.S. forces could be out of the country by 1965, with withdrawals to begin immediatley. "We interpret this to mean that the U.S. will do all it can

between now and 1965 to equip and train a Vietnamese army that can maintain order, contain subversion and carry forward a program of economic and social development through which the loyalty of the Vietnamese people may be kept. The magazine foresaw establishment of a military regime to supercede Diem, and suggested that this new leadership might "negotiate peace with the Communists in the North." From such a settlement would come a "federated or unified" country that was independent and not a "satellite of China, nor the Soviet Union, nor the United States." The New Republic welcomed such a "blueprint," if it were indeed what the Administration had in mind," as a welcome change in policy, as a sign that "common sense had won a victory."[37]

The Nation reaffirmed its belief in the need for a negotiated peace in its year-end assessment of the Vietnam situation. President Kennedy was dead by the time the editorial was published. Suggestions were being made to the new President. The Nation's suggestion in regard to South Vietnam was to heed the advice of foreign-policy analyst George Kennan. Ho Chi Minh knew he could at best get only a stand-off in South Vietnam, as could the Americans. Under such circumstances, Kennan had advised that a negotiated peace with Ho would lead to establishment of a kind of Yugoslavian compromise, in which a Communist country traded freely with its non-Communist neighbor. Conservative Congressmen might get some short-term political mileage out of such a settlement. But, said The Nation, that would be better than continued war.[38]

The Diem coup provided an opportunity for new ideas, new approaches and new policies in South Vietnam. The death of John F. Kennedy, provided still further chance for reconsideration of U.S.

involvement. Would U.S. leaders seize the chance? The liberal opinion press didn't want to see South Vietnam become a Communist state, and especially not a satellite of China or Russia. By the same token, at the time of Kennedy's death it had also had enough of a seemingly endless war in Southeast Asia. For most of the Kennedy years, Diem had been the problem in the eyes of the liberal journals. He had been the lightning rod for liberal anger at the situation in South Vietnam. It was potentially a new game by the end of 1963, with all new players. At last it would be possible to plan for an end to the great liberal dilemma of Vietnam--finding peace there while also stopping the advance of Communism.

CHAPTER V NOTES:

[1]James Burnham, "Toujours, la Sale Guerre," The National Review, 29 January 1963, p. 60.

[2]"Ban the . . ." editorial, The National Review, 26 March 1963, p. 225.

[3]"Cato," "From Washington Straight," The National Review, 22 October 1963, p. 338.

[4]"Cato," "From Washington Straight," The National Review, 5 November 1963, p. 385.

[5]Clare Boothe Luce, "The Lady Is for Burning: The Seven Deadly Sins of Madame Nhu," The National Review, 5 November 1963, p. 395.

[6]"The American Way of Death," editorial, The National Review, 19 November 1963, p. 424.

[7]T.R.B. "Criticisms of Kennedy," The New Republic, 18 May 1963, p. 2.

[8]"Down the Slope," editorial, The Nation, 26 January 1963, p. 62.

[9]Peter Worthington, "Vietnam: School for U.S. Guerrillas," The Nation, 2 March 1963, p. 179.

[10]"War Without End," editorial, The New Republic, 9 March 1963, p. 3.

[11]Ibid., p. 4.

[12]Ibid., p. 4.

[13]Robert S. Elegant, "The Realities of Southeast Asia," The New Leader, 27 May 1963, p. 11.

[14]Elegant, 27 May 1963, p. 12.

[15]Jerry A. Rose, "Dead End in Vietnam: We Can't Win, But We Need Not Lose," The New Republic, 12 October 1963, p. 17-18.

[16]"Dispensible Diem," editorial, The New Republic, 20 April 1963, p. 3.

[17]Jerry Rose, "The Elusive Viet Cong: 25,000 Guerrillas, 300,000 Sympathizers," The New Republic, 4 May 1963, p. 25.

[18]Nguyen Thai, "A Vietnamese Speaks Out," The New Republic, 18 June 1963, p. 15.

[19]Thai, p. 16-17.

[20]Helen Lamb, "The Paris Exiles," The Nation, 10 August 1963, p. 66.

[21]"South Vietnam: Whose Funeral Pyre?," editorial, The New Republic, 29 Juen 1963, p. 9-10.

[22]"Diem's Other Crusade," editorial, The New Republic, 22 June 1963, p. 5.

[23]Ibid., p. 6.

[24]"Same Old Diem," editorial, The Nation, 29 June 1963, p. 538.

[25]Robert Karr McCabe, "The Swamps of Saigon," The New Leader, 19 August 1963, p. 3-5.

[26]Denis Warner, "Vietnam: A Dynasty in Disorder," The Reporter, 12 September 1963, p. 34-35.

[27]"Booby Trap," editorial, The Nation, 14 September 1963, p. 122.

[28]"Why the Brush-Off?" editorial, The Nation, 21 September 1963, p. 150.

[29]"Folly in Vietnam," editorial, The New Republic, 21 September 1963, p. 6-7.

[30]"Assorted Enemies," editorial, The Reporter, 26 September 1963, p. 16-17.

[31]"Get Down to Cases," editorial, The Nation, 28 September 1963, p. 171.

[32]"No-Win in Vietnam," editorial, The New Republic, 12 October 1963, p. 6.

[33]"Change in Personnel," editorial, The Nation, 23 November 1963, p. 337.

[34]"Vietnam--New Start," editorial, The New Republic, 16 November 1963, p. 3.

[35]Max Ascoli, "On Playing God," editorial, The Reporter, 21 November 1963, p. 14-15.

[36]Irving Kristol, "Facing the Facts in Vietnam," The New Leader, 30 September 1963, p. 7-8.

[37]"Out by 1965," editorial, The New Republic, 19 October 1963, p. 3.

[38]"What Now in Vietnam?" editorial, The Nation, 21 December 1963, p. 425.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a close examination of a small but influential segment of the American media during a period that is coming under increasingly critical scrutiny. The Kennedy years had until recently been viewed with undue nostalgia as a time when Camelot descended on the banks of the Potomac. Kennedy has been seen as the martyred president, somehow elevated above the ordinary examination of history because of his murder at a young age. Now books such as Garry Wills' The Kennedy Imprisonment are beginning to emerge--books that describe the late President as a skilled but flawed, and altogether human politician.

In addition, books such as Why Vietnam? by Archemides L.A. Patti, are taking close, scholarly looks at the fundamental dynamics of U.S. involvement in the Vietnamese civil war. These and other recent volumes are slowly providing a mosaic of behavior by post-war American leaders. That behavior contributed to massive U.S. military commitment involvement in a struggle the U.S. couldn't win through conventional methods.

This study has shown that even the most scholarly segments of the U.S. media were ambiguous on the courses American policymakers should take regarding Vietnam during the early 1960s. It has demonstrated that the liberal journals were divided in their attitudes toward Communist expansion in Southeast Asia and in their attitudes about what should be done to halt this expansion. The New Leader and

The Reporter were rigid in their belief, throughout the Kennedy years, that Communism in all its forms was a plague on the earth, one that must be stopped and if possible, eliminated. In this respect, these two journals were similar to The National Review, a devotedly anti-Communist organ of conservatism. And, like The National Review, these magazines were firm in their belief that military intervention should be considered a valid policy option. It wasn't until late 1963 that New Leader contributor Reinhold Neibuhr, a theologian, suggested that perhaps U.S. policy planners should reconsider their assumptions regarding the cold war and U.S. activities in the underdeveloped world.

The Nation and The New Republic, on the other hand, were displeased with the totalitarian qualities of most Communist regimes. But they were capable of accepting Communism as a reality in certain regions of the world, especially those once governed as colonies. The Nation, and later The New Republic, saw distinct and highly pragmatic advantages in the fashioning of a negotiated peace in South Vietnam along the lines of that which was finally reached in Korea. They were willing to accept the idea of limitations on U.S. power. It is useful to note that The New Republic, like The New Leader and The Reporter, began the Kennedy years with considerable belief in the ability of sound U.S. policy to prevail in the trouble spots of the world. This belief was consistent with the magazine's origins in the Progressive movement of the early twentieth century. Its confidence was severely shaken by the harsh government of South Vietnamese president Ngo Dinh Diem and by the inability of U.S. forces to squelch the Viet Cong rebellion. The magazine began the 1960s with calls for more conventional-warfare flexibility in the U.S. military. The maga-

zine's editors and contributors ended the Kennedy years with much greater skepticism regarding overall U.S. military wisdom.

It is apparent from this study that the schisms of the next decade, ones that would rip apart the post-war liberal consensus on U.S. foreign policy, were beginning to reveal themselves in the liberal opinion journals of the Kennedy period. The conflict over U.S. policy in Vietnam would, in fact, become so trying to Max Ascoli of The Reporter that in 1968 he would close his magazine in despair over the sad state of an American society violently divided over the war.

This study, in other words, reveals the early fault lines along which portions of U.S. society were to fragment in the Johnson and Nixon years. The lines were detectable in the troubled commentary and reportage on Vietnam in the liberal opinion journals published from 1960 to 1963. Writers such as those so often found in The Reporter and The New Leader would, with some regularity, be labeled "hawks" on the war. Those writers appearing in such journals as The Nation and The New Republic would soon work under the label "doves." So it can be said that during the Kennedy years the liberal opinion press lived up to its reputation for anticipating the larger issues of American society. The war that was to trouble all of America after 1965, when the first battalions of U.S. ground forces poured ashore at Danang, began to trouble members of the liberal opinion press years before--during the mythically remembered, Elysian days of John F. Kennedy in the White House.

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