

AMERICAN POLICY TOWARD VIETNAM,
1954-1963

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ABSTRACT

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by Alan F. Arcuri

The principal objective of American policy towards South Vietnam between 1954 and early 1963, the period covered in this study, has been to prevent Communist expansion into this country. The United States has been concerned with the loss to the Communists of South Vietnam in itself; it has also been concerned with the consequent Communist threat to all the rest of Southeast Asia. Thus, American aims in South Vietnam have been mainly military. In addition, American means of attaining these aims have been largely military: the bulk of American support for the government of South Vietnam has been for military and security related purposes.

The United States replaced France as the dominant foreign influence in South Vietnam following the Geneva Agreements of July, 1954. In the first year of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime, extending from the time of the Agreements, American support for the regime was, at certain critical junctures, indispensable for Diem's survival in office.

Between 1956 and 1959, American policy-makers took pride in their Vietnam policy: Communism had apparently been contained north of the 17th parallel--the partition line between South Vietnam and the Communist regime of North Vietnam; economic rehabilitation was progressing at a satisfactory rate; the Diem regime appeared to have established itself firmly in power and political stability existed in the country. Communist activities within South Vietnam attracted international attention in late 1959, when they began taking significant military form. By 1961, the Communist-led National Liberation Front had extended its military and political power across the Vietnamese countryside on such a scale that it posed a serious danger to the Ngo Dinh Diem government--and to America's key objective in South Vietnam. It was then that the United States reappraised its policy towards South Vietnam. The outcome of this examination was a great increase in military and other assistance to the Diem government and a reaffirmation of American support for Diem.

The United States has sought a military solution to the guerrilla warfare mounted against the Vietnamese government. It has, in the period under review, viewed Ngo Dinh Diem as the best, the only means of effecting this solution. It is a conclusion of this study that the United States erred in putting such great emphasis on the military aspect of security, to the detriment of political considerations, and in committing itself so thoroughly to the support of Ngo Dinh Diem.

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By

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PREFACE

This study examines American policy toward Vietnam during the short period of Vietnamese independence. Thus, it covers the years between 1954 and 1963, but includes some material on American policy towards that country during the final years of France's hegemony there. The study focuses on America's political and diplomatic relations with the Vietnamese government and therefore largely excludes from consideration American military, economic, and technical assistance efforts. The main interests of the study are the several critical junctures of Washington's relations with the Saigon regime and how American policy-makers met, or failed to meet, the problems posed at these times.

Two purposes run through American policy toward Vietnam during the period studied: an attempt to stop the spread of Communism and an attempt to establish a viable political order. Since 1961, the United States has been increasingly concerned with inducing the Vietnamese government to pursue the path of political and social reform as a means of strengthening itself and of quelling the guerrilla warfare being carried out by a Communist-led National Liberation Front.

American policy has vacillated between considering reforms a necessary precondition for peace and stability and regarding peace and stability a necessary precondition for reforms. This inconsistency, it seems to the writer, coupled with the fact that the Communists have attempted reforms while carrying out their "war of liberation," seems to suggest a need for a re-examination of a fundamental tenet of Washington's policy.

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I

INTRODUCTION

The United States in World Affairs

After World War II the United States reluctantly assumed the role as leader of the non-communist world. The principal goals of American policy were to stop communist expansion and to encourage free, if not democratic, governments. America's postwar strategy from 1945 to 1952 was never officially formulated. The policy of containment grew out of an awareness that the Red Army was not going to evacuate Eastern Europe. Indeed, the Soviet Union seemed bent on world conquest.

The containment doctrine was best stated by George Kennan, the Foreign Service's foremost expert on the Soviet Union. According to Kennan, a permanent feature in the cold war would be Soviet "pressure, increasing constant pressure, toward the desired goal" of overthrowing capitalism. His answer to the Kremlin's expansionist goals was an American policy of "long-term, patient, but firm and vigilant containment."¹

¹X [George F. Kennan], "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," Foreign Affairs, 25 (July, 1947), p. 575.

In 1952, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles announced a new military strategy called massive retaliation, sometimes referred to by critics as brinkmanship. Simply stated, massive retaliation warned a potential enemy that aggression against the United States or an ally, would spell atomic destruction for the aggressor's homeland.² Dulles also briefly flirted with a moral crusade called liberation. Liberation was intended to reverse the containment policy of the Truman administration, which Dulles condemned as "negative, futile and immoral."³ Its purpose was to roll back Soviet ascendancy.

On August 30, 1952, shortly after the policy of liberation was first proclaimed, the London Economist stated: "Unhappily 'liberation' applied to Eastern Europe - and Asia - means either the risk of war or it means nothing. . . ."

² John Foster Dulles, "A Policy of Boldness," Life, 32 (May 19, 1952), p. 146.

³ Ibid., p. 152. An insight into Dulles' foreign policy is found in his spiritual dedication to a "righteous and dynamic" faith in Christian morality transcending expediency in the conduct of international affairs. In other words, if American policy is just and the Communists' is unjust, any middle ground or compromise would be "nonmoral diplomacy." See John Foster Dulles, "Principle Versus Expediency in Foreign Policy," in Henry P. Van Dusen (ed.), The Spiritual Legacy of John Foster Dulles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), pp. 121-127. See also John Foster Dulles "The Foreign Policies and National Security," Vital Speeches, 20 (February 1, 1954), pp. 332-335; John Foster Dulles, "The Threat of a Red Asia," Department of State Bulletin 31 (April 12, 1954), pp. 539-541; John Foster Dulles, "Policy for Security and Peace," Foreign Affairs, 32 (April, 1954), pp. 353-364.

'Liberation' entails no risk of war only when it means nothing."⁴ American inaction in the anti-Communist revolts in East Berlin and other East German cities in June, 1953, and during the bloody uprising in Hungary in late 1956 upheld the Economist's contention.⁵

America could not risk war to liberate Eastern Europe. Washington's monopoly on atomic weapons had been broken and replaced by a stalemate with the Soviet Union. Sir Winston Churchill succinctly heralded the contemporary era in world politics as the "balance of terror": either side could destroy the other, and bring destruction upon itself.

The focus of this study is American policy toward Vietnam between 1954 and 1963. In its broader context, this is a case study of American policy in the postwar period. Washington's policy toward Saigon has passed through several phases of cold war strategy: containment, massive retaliation and "balance of terror." The study seeks to uncover the

⁴Quoted in Hans J. Morgenthau, "The American Tradition in Foreign Policy," Roy C. Macridis (ed.), Foreign Policy in World Politics (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962) p. 212.

⁵Idem. Ironically America's liberation policy gave the Soviet Union an excuse to maintain and strengthen its military forces in Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, it led the peoples of several Communist countries to believe that liberation was something other than a campaign slogan. See Norman A. Graebner, The New Isolationism: A Study in Politics and Foreign Policy Since 1950 (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1956), pp. 146-148.

continuing strands of American policy through changes in cold war strategy.

Vietnam: Background

Vietnam belongs to the southeast extremity of the Asian mainland, referred to by French geographers as the Indochinese peninsula. It is bordered by China to the north, Laos and Cambodia to the west, and the South China Sea to the south and east. Vietnam has an unusual shape. It has been graphically described by comparing Vietnam's two large fertile deltas, the Red River in the north and the Mekong in the south, and the long narrow coastline connecting them, with two baskets of rice attached to a bamboo pole used by the peasant to carry his load. The analogy is particularly fitting because rice is such an integral part of the peasants' existence. The great majority of Vietnam's 32 million people make their home in the deltas or along the lowland rim of Central Vietnam and 75 per cent of them make their living from agriculture.

Vietnam lost its independence in a series of colonial wars with France between 1858 and 1883. In order to facilitate conquest, France denied the existence of Vietnam as a nation and divided it into three parts: Tonkin in the north, Annam in the central region and Cochinchina in the south. France also subjugated Laos and Cambodia during this period. Added to Vietnam's three "separate" peoples, Laos and Cambodia

formed the five parts of the French Indochinese Union. Cochinchina was made a French colony, the other four French conquests became protectorates.

The conquest of Indochina added a rich source of wealth to France's empire. For the next 80 years, France's mercantilistic policy exploited the Indochinese people. The Vietnamese accepted French rule no more equably than they had accepted that of the Chinese centuries earlier. They resisted the French colonial design, first through revolts led by the traditional mandarins, then, after the opening of the twentieth century, by revolts inspired by the rise of Japan as a world power and by the Chinese revolution of Sun Yat Sen. In the 1920's, some groups, led by French-educated Vietnamese intellectuals, sought moderate concessions from the colonial power. France rebuffed all attempts, forceful and conciliatory, to loosen its hold over the country, and extremist groups came to play more and more of a prominent role in Vietnamese political agitation during the 1930's. One of these, the Indochinese Communist Party, led from outside Vietnam by a brilliant Vietnamese intellectual, Nguyen Ai Quoc--later to become better known as Ho Chi Minh--gained ascendancy over the others, and it was later to emerge from the Second World War as a dominant force in Vietnam.⁶

⁶Ellen J Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1954), Chap. 3.

The French did not emerge from the war in nearly as satisfactory a condition. They were compelled to accept Japanese military occupation of their Indochinese preserve in 1940, and then had their colonial administration shunted aside by the Japanese in the spring of 1945. Shortly before their own collapse, in August, 1945, the Japanese strongly encouraged indigenous groups in all three countries of Indochina to assume control. In Vietnam, the group best prepared to do this was the Communist Party, through the instrumentality of a front organization called the Vietnamese Independence League, or, in a shortened version of its Vietnamese name, the Viet Minh. The Viet Minh proclaimed a Democratic Republic of Vietnam, in September, 1945, and established itself firmly in Hanoi. The French reoccupied the southern half of Vietnam during the fall of that year, and drawn-out negotiations were entered into between the French and Viet Minh to reach some kind of accommodation. Attempts to reconcile French and Viet Minh designs over Vietnam failed, amidst mutual recriminations, and fighting broke out between the two sides in December, 1946.⁷

Peace was not restored to Vietnam until July, 1954, when, at Geneva, Switzerland, French and Viet Minh representatives agreed to a cease-fire arrangement that divided Vietnam at the 38th parallel and provided for the withdrawal

⁷ Donald Lancaster, The Emancipation of French Indochina (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 166-178.

of French and Viet Minh forces to the south and north of the parallel, respectively. The Geneva Agreements not only marked France's acknowledgement that it could not subdue the Viet Minh movement by military means, but also its acquiescence in the extension of Viet Minh control over all of Vietnam: the Agreements promised reunification elections for no later than July, 1956. It was commonly accepted that a majority of the Vietnamese would vote to reunify the country under Viet Minh authority.

Vietnam is both a new and old country. As an old state, the kingdom of Nam Viet was flourishing several centuries before the birth of Christ. As a new state Vietnam was formed as a result of the Geneva partition of 1954 which split Vietnam at the 17th parallel into the Republic of Vietnam and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The latter is a Communist state and was officially proclaimed on September 2, 1945. The Republic of Vietnam, also referred to as South Vietnam and Vietnam was a creation of the Geneva partition of July 20, 1954. The Republic of Vietnam received slightly less than half of Vietnam's 127,000 square miles and retained approximately 11,900,000 of its population (since increased to about 15,200,000).

It is from the Geneva Agreements that the re-emergence of Vietnam to independence can be dated. The Viet Minh, as we have noted, were given the northern half of Vietnam. In the South, a new government, headed by Ngo Dinh Diem, a

long-standing opponent of French colonialism, was installed, on July 7, 1954. Although Diem was nominally under the control of His Majesty Bao Dai, the Chief of the truncated State of Vietnam, he was given full civil and military powers and he was, little over a year later, to depose of his superior in a national referendum in which the Vietnamese people opted for a republic under Diem's direction. In 1956, a republican constitution for South Vietnam was promulgated, providing for an elective president, vice-president, and National Assembly, an independent judiciary, and a series of rights and freedoms similar to those found in constitutions of Western nations. A written constitution does not, of course, necessarily correspond to political realities and, in the case of Vietnam, the political realities consisted of a highly centralized government directed by Ngo Dinh Diem with the increasing help of close members of his family.

It is the brief period of modern Vietnamese independence--from 1954 to the beginning of 1963--that furnishes the backdrop of this study of American policy towards Vietnam. Before turning to an examination of American policy during this period, however, some attention should be given to the growing American involvement in Vietnamese affairs during the final years of French control over Vietnam's destiny.

The United States, France, and
Vietnam: 1950-1954

The United States became interested in France's relations with Vietnam during World War II, in connection with its own efforts to beat back the Japanese extension into Southeast Asia. American weapons and other material were parachuted to Vietnamese resistance forces within Vietnam--mainly, because they were the organized, to the Viet Minh--in return for which the United States and its Chinese ally were provided with intelligence about Japanese military activities within the country. In 1944, President Franklin Roosevelt directed his attention to policy towards this region. He remarked on one occasion that:

France has had the country - thirty million inhabitants - for nearly one hundred years, and the people are worse off than they were at the beginning. . . . France has milked it for one hundred years. The people of Indochina are entitled to something better than that.⁸

Again, in 1945, Roosevelt spoke his mind about Vietnam's future. The French, he reiterated, had done nothing to improve the lot of the Indochinese people, and he suggested to both Premier Stalin and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek that the area be placed under an international trusteeship until it should be ready for self-government.⁹

⁸ Quoted in Hammer, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

⁹ Allan B. Cole (ed.), Conflict in Indochina and International Repercussions: A Documentary History, 1945-1955 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1956), pp. 47-48. In December, 1947, William C. Bullitt, former ambassador to

But neither Roosevelt nor his successor in office was willing to push any such scheme in the face of British and French hostility. Washington followed largely a hands-off policy toward Vietnam until the victory of the Chinese Communists in late 1949. The establishment of Communist authority over the great Chinese mainland changed radically the balance of power; China not only undertook to acquire the economic and social bases of a modern world power through a forced march, but, in addition, posed itself as an arch-enemy of American policies in Asia.¹⁰ The struggle between the French and the Viet Minh thus took on a highly important aspect to American policy-makers.

In late January, 1950, the French National Assembly ratified agreements that gave Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos the status of Associate States within the French Union. This gave the cloak of legitimacy to the regime of His Majesty Bao Dai, which had been installed in Vietnam nearly a year before as a means of drawing off support from Viet Minh. (Bao Dai had resigned as hereditary ruler of Vietnam in 1945 on the heels of the Viet Minh proclamation of a

Russia and France, seemed to express Washington's attitude toward la sale guerre. "The nub of the problem is . . . the establishment of cooperation between the French and the Annamite Vietnamese nationalists for the elimination of the Communists. That is not impossible because there is no vital conflict between the real interests of the French and those of the Annamites." Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁰ See J. H. Brimmell, Communism in South East Asia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 391-401.

Democratic Republic, and had spent much of the time between then and 1949 negotiating with the French over the conditions for his return to power.) The United States acted quickly upon the French action by extending recognition to all three of the Indochinese states; a total of 32 other nations also gave the Bao Dai regime their diplomatic recognition.

The American action came in response to the actions of Communist-bloc nations, which had, only the month before, given their recognition to the resistance forces under Ho Chi Minh. To Secretary of State Dean Acheson, the Communist recognition of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (which at that time was in firm control only of the back country of Tonkin) was proof that the Viet Minh regime was Communist and a "mortal enemy" of independence and nationalism.¹¹

American recognition of the Associate State of Vietnam was predicated on "our fundamental policy of giving support to the peaceful and democratic evolution of dependent peoples toward self-government and independence."¹² The American explanation appeared more as a rationalization to calm the American anti-colonialist conscience than an accurate reflection of the new state of affairs in Vietnam.

¹¹Brookings Institution, Major Problems of United States Foreign Policy 1950 (Menasha, Wis.: George Banta Publishing Company, 1950), p. 313.

¹²Department of State, Bulletin, 22 (February 20, 1950), pp. 291-292.

After February, 1950, France continued to be the guardian of Vietnam's foreign policy; it maintained key political and economic controls over the domestic life of the country; and it continued to furnish the army that kept the war against the Viet Minh going. Indeed, the American aid that poured into Vietnam after the diplomatic recognition of the Bao Dai regime was channeled through French, not indigenous, authorities.

On March 8, 1950, the United States agreed to send economic and military equipment "to the states of Indochina and to France in order to assist them in restoring stability and permitting these states to pursue their peaceful and democratic development."¹³ After the outbreak of the Korean War, in June of that year, President Truman ordered a heavy increase in military assistance to Indochina,¹⁴ and in October it was announced that a Military Assistance Advisory Group would be established in Saigon under the command of a brigadier general in order to handle the receipt and distribution of military equipment and supplies sent to Vietnam.¹⁵ It is interesting to trace, through the monetary value of aid provided to France for the Indochina War, the growing involvement of the United States in Vietnamese affairs. For the

¹³Department of State, Bulletin, 22 (June 12, 1950), pp. 977-978.

¹⁴Hammer, op. cit., p. 271.

¹⁵New York Times, October 5, 1950, p. 4.

one-year period extending from July 1, 1950, American military aid in Indochina--practically all of which was used in Vietnam--totaled \$119,000,000; for the succeeding year, it totaled more than \$1,000,000,000. The total American allocation to Indochina for the four year period 1950-1954 came to about \$2,600,000.¹⁶

By associating itself with the French military effort in Vietnam, the United States necessarily associated itself with French colonialism in that country, albeit a colonialism that was being rapidly dissipated as France, under the urgency of countering the Viet Minh appeal, transferred an increasing number of functions to Vietnamese hands. The United States regularly urged France to grant greater independence to its Indochinese states, but it was not strongly positioned to force French assent to its views. Writing for the New York Times, in June, 1950, James Reston depicted the difficulty of the American Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, in the following terms:

He may want the French to be more liberal in Indochina, but it is the French who have the 170,000 troops in that country, and these troops are the main protection of the whole of Southeast Asia.

The French were still loath to fight for French Indochina in order to set it free. Moreover, Mr. Acheson is in no position to put much pressure on

¹⁶William B. Dunn, "America and the Crisis in Vietnam," (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1960), p. 140. See New York Times, April 7, 1954, p. 1. Ibid., August 2, 1954, p. 2.

them to do so, for the last thing he can stand at this moment is another major defeat in Asia.¹⁷

America's difficulty in its Vietnam policy ran deeper. The United States was deeply committed to a strategy of containing Communist expansion. It viewed Vietnam, and the rest of Indochina, as of key importance to the political stability of all of Southeast Asia. This meant, as the Indochina War became more serious, that the United States leaned more and more heavily upon military means to achieve success and, inasmuch as France was providing these means, it meant that it leaned more and more heavily upon France as the agency by means of which the containment of communism might be achieved.

The irony of the American dependence upon a colonial power to accomplish its ends began to appear in 1953. In April of that year, France put forth the suggestion that a settlement in Indochina be a condition for a settlement of the Korean War. In the French National Assembly, in June, 1953, Pierre Mendes-France spoke of the grave necessity for France to lighten its Indochina burden. This burden, Mendes-France said, "is a crushing weight on our shoulders and it gnaws away the vital forces of the nation."¹⁸ The United States was, by 1954, paying about 80 percent of the

¹⁷ New York Times, May 7, 1950, Section IV, p. 3.

¹⁸ Quoted in Dunn, op. cit., p. 153.

French costs for conducting the war, but, for France, this was not enough.¹⁹ The French economy was still being strained by France's own expenditures in Indochina, and the French government was demanding that even a greater proportion of the military expenses be borne by the United States. But France's problems were more than financial: it was engaged in a war whose prospects for victory were becoming increasingly dim; and, win or lose, it appeared that France's days in Vietnam were numbered, for the nationalists in Vietnam no less than the Communists were opposed to their country's subordination to France. Added to these unhappy prospects was the growing opposition to the war among the French people and the mounting attacks upon its continuation in the French National Assembly. In short, as the United States became more committed to France's cause in Indochina, the French became less interested in pursuing it.²⁰ As one American diplomat in Saigon wryly remarked of his country's paradoxical position: "We are the last French colonialists in Indochina."²¹

¹⁹ Hammer, op. cit., p. 313. Dunn states, "[America's] program of economic and technical assistance for Southeast Asia was continuously expanded, that for military aid grew from massive to monstrous." Dunn, op. cit., p. 138.

²⁰ New York Times, April 23, 1953, p. 7.

²¹ Hammer, op. cit., p. 319.

Questionable Assumptions of
American Policy, 1950-1954

Ellen J. Hammer, a keen student of contemporary Vietnamese political affairs, has criticized United States policy toward Vietnam between 1950 and 1954 for acting under three false assumptions: that the French would grant complete sovereignty to the Associated States of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in the event of a victory over the Viet Minh; that Bao Dai had substantial popular support and that his government was gaining in vitality; and lastly, that the French military position was constantly improving.²² The first indictment seems to be validated by France's persistent unwillingness to grant complete independence to Vietnam. Not until immediately before the Geneva Conference when all seemed lost did France offer complete independence. Bao Dai's reputation as a collaborator with the French, and his life of leisure in a critical period, when many Vietnamese vehemently disliked the French, are sufficient to give credence to Hammer's second observation. Lastly, for a brief period in 1950, before his death, General de Lattre de Tassigny, Commander in Chief of the French Expeditionary Forces, had grasped the offensive and won several important engagements. Nevertheless the rebel forces increased in number and

²²Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina Continues (Palo Alto, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1956), pp. 1-2.

matured in combat skill.²³

Early in 1954 John F. Kennedy, at the time Senator from Massachusetts, succinctly stated that the United States had been misled by the French:

Every year we are given three sets of assurances; first, that the independence of the Associated States is now complete; second, that the independence of the Associated States will soon be complete under steps "now" being taken; third, that military victory for the French Union forces in Indochina is assured, or is just around the corner.²⁴

Both the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations optimistically appraised the French military position in Indochina. In June, 1952, Dean Acheson spoke optimistically of victory by the Associated States since the Communist aggression had been checked and the three states had assumed a "constantly greater role" in their own self-government. "I do not think it is generally realized," Acheson said, "to what extent these new states in fact control their own affairs. Only a limited number of services related to the necessities of the war remain temporarily in French hands."²⁵ General Walter Bedell Smith, Under Secretary of State, declared in a speech made on February 23, 1954, that "the

²³Anthony Eden, Full Circle: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Vol. I (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), pp. 90-91.

²⁴John F. Kennedy, The Strategy of Peace (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 60.

²⁵Department of State Bulletin, 26 (June 30, 1952), pp. 1009.

military situation in Indochina is favorable and the Viet Minh advances are largely 'real estate' operations without any military significance."²⁶

From the beginning of its pre-1954 involvement, the United States neglected to take cognizance of the outstanding world phenomenon of the last two decades: the rise of Asian nationalism.²⁷ It seriously underestimated the nationalistic appeal of Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh,²⁸ the only effective force in Vietnam fighting for independence.²⁹ This Asian ferment was seen by American policy-makers in the context of an East-West conflict. To the many Indochinese, however, the struggle was between independence and colonialism.³⁰ America's approach to Asian nationalism has been in terms of vehement anti-Communism and military force. It would only be a slight exaggeration to say that in Vietnam, the American policy of aiding the French prevented the development of a strong independence movement that was at the same time

²⁶Ngo Ton Dat, "The Geneva Partition of Vietnam and the Question of Reunification During the First Two Years, August, 1954, to July, 1956" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1963), pp. 59-60.

²⁷Victor Purcell, "Indochina and the Prospect in South-East Asia," Yearbook of World Affairs, 1955 George W. Keeton (ed.) (London: Stevens and Sons Limited, 1955), p. 126.

²⁸New York Times, May 2, 1954, Section IV, p. 8.

²⁹Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina Continues, p. 1.

³⁰Brookings Institution, Major Problems of United States Foreign Policy 1954 (Menasha, Wis.: George Banta Publishing Company, 1954), p. 299.

free of Communist direction. The significance of neglecting nationalism and acting under questionable assumptions in formulating and implementing foreign policy is that the United States had chosen to "oppose Vietnamese Communism almost entirely by military means" and thereby possibly "failed to win the confidence of the Vietnamese people."³¹

It seems evident that from 1945 to 1954 the pre-eminent characteristic of France's relations with Indochina was the French incapacity to frame a policy for the successful conduct of the war.³² After four years of military assistance and financial support by France and the United States, the Bao Dai experiment failed to create a self-sustaining government. It did not have the support of the people, consequently it could not fulfill its primary mission of offering a positive alternative to the Viet Minh. On the contrary, Viet Minh strength increased. In early 1954, after an expenditure of over a billion dollars in United States aid, the military outlook in Vietnam was less hopeful than it was in early 1950, at the time Washington recognized the State of Vietnam.³³ "As American aid to the French increased so did the Chinese aid to the government of Ho Chi Minh. The Communist threat to Indochina, far from diminishing,

³¹Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina Continues, p. 2.

³²Lancaster, op. cit., p. 264.

³³Dunn, op. cit., p. 162.

had increased to the point where, by the spring of 1954, it seemed that only drastic measures could prevent a Viet Minh victory."³⁴

³⁴Miriam S. Farley, United States Relations with Southeast Asia: with Specific Reference to Indochina, 1950-1954, (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1955), p. 4.

II

THE UNITED STATES AT THE BRINK: 1954

At the beginning of 1954, the seriousness of the military situation in Vietnam became rudely apparent. The French were not, as had been predicted, gaining the ascendancy over the Viet Minh; they were rather losing greater stretches of the countryside to them. A serious situation turned to imminent disaster when, in March, it became clear that the Viet Minh had surrounded a large French garrison at the military fortress of Dien Bien Phu, located in the mountainous terrain of north-western Vietnam, near the Laotian border, and were threatening to overwhelm it.

The reaction of the Eisenhower Administration to the events of early 1954 deserve close scrutiny. These events are an important prelude to the Geneva Conference that began on April 26. The Conference was to deal with problems relating to Korea and Indochina; only the latter phase is germane to this study.

United Action and Allied Disunity

On February 9, 1954, Charles E. Wilson, Secretary of Defense, felt that the military situation was serious.

However, "a military victory would be perhaps both possible and probable."¹ On February 10, before the engagement of Dien Bien Phu began, President Eisenhower said he was "bitterly opposed" to sending American troops to Indochina.²

On March 10, Eisenhower promised that there would not be American involvement in war without a prior declaration from Congress.³ After a visit from General Paul Ely, French Chief of Staff, on March 20, the American view of the war began to change. Ely dissipated American optimism regarding a victory in Indochina.⁴ He drew Washington's attention to the seriousness of French military position at the beleaguered garrison at Dien Bien Phu. He told the Pentagon of the catastrophic implications of a defeat. Help was needed. Given increased American aid, Communist advances could be checked, as they had been in South Korea.⁵ Ely reported back

¹Quoted in New York Times, May 4, 1954, p. 4.

²New York Times, February 10, 1954, p. 1. For two reviews of official statements in the winter and spring of 1954, see New York Times, May 4, 1954, p. 4, and Chalmers M. Roberts, "The Day We Didn't Go to War," Reporter, 11 (September 14, 1954), pp. 31-35. See also Marquis Childs, The Ragged Edge: The Diary of a Crisis (Garden City, N Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1955), pp. 120-191; James Shepley, "How Dulles Averted War," Life, 40 (January 16, 1956), pp. 70-79.

³New York Times, May 4, 1954, p. 4.

⁴Jean Lacouture and Philippe Devillers, La fin d'une guerre; Indochine 1954 (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1960), p. 71.

⁵Ibid., p. 72.

to Paris that he recieved a "very definite impression" that Washington would be receptive to the idea of a massive air-strike to relieve the fortress at Dien Bien Phu.⁶ One reporter states that Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, proposed American intervention to General Ely at a meeting at the Pentagon without being asked.⁷

Statements by top-level officials made in the next several weeks seemed to reflect a new and sterner policy for Indochina. On March 22, Admiral Radford said, "the French are going to win. It is a fight that is going to be finished with our help."⁸ On March 24, President Eisenhower stressed the "transcendent importance" of Southeast Asia to the free world.⁹ A few days later the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs announced that the retention of Indochina was "just as critical as the retention of Korea."¹⁰

⁶Quoted in Donald Lancaster, The Emancipation of French Indochina (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 300.

⁷Roberts, op. cit., p. 32. It appears that someone who attended the April 3rd meeting "leaked" the story to Roberts. Mike Mansfield, a highly respected member of the Senate said, "I have a great deal of confidence/ in Mr. Chalmers M. Roberts" After checking the April 3rd account of the secret meeting, he said, "I gather, there is no substantial disagreement with it." Congressional Record, 100 (June 9, 1954), p. 7919 and Ibid., (July 9, 1954), p. 10137.

⁸Quoted in Congressional Record, 100 (July 8, 1954), p. 10001.

⁹New York Times, March 25, 1954, p. 1; Department of State, Bulletin, 30 (April 12, 1954), pp. 539-542.

¹⁰William B. Dunn, "America and the Crisis in Vietnam," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1960), p. 199.

Dulles was deeply concerned over the use of Chinese advisors and supplies in the siege of Dien Bien Phu. In a speech to the Overseas Press Club on March 29, he reiterated previous warnings designed to impress Communist China with the fact that aggression "might lead to action at places and by means of the free world's choosing, so that aggression would cost more than it would gain." Dulles called for the collective defense of Southeast Asia. Communism should be met with "united action" which involves "serious risks."¹¹ Eisenhower had called for "united action" as early as April, 1953,¹² but now the term took on a more precise meaning.

On April 3, the United States went to the brink of military intervention in Indochina. A top level policy meeting was held at the State Department. Eight prominent members of Congress attended along with three other high ranking government officials. Dulles and Radford led the discussion. The purpose of the secret meeting was to sound national leaders on a planned joint-Congressional resolution authorizing air-strikes to relieve Dien Bien Phu. Questions directed at Radford and Dulles revealed that air-strikes from American carriers would probably mean war; Radford was the only member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who approved

¹¹Quoted in New York Times, March 30, 1954, p. 4.

¹²"The free world . . . knows that aggressions in Korea and Southeast Asia are threats to the whole free community to be met only through united action. . . ." Quoted in New York Times, May 4, 1954, p. 4.

of this plan and it was revealed that America's Western allies had not been consulted in the plan. All eight members of Congress thought that Dulles should get the cooperation of those allies who might be asked to participate in any united action in Vietnam. Dulles spent the next three weeks intensively trying to gain allied support for American intervention in Vietnam.¹³

On April 10, Dulles flew to London on "a mission of peace through strength," the purpose of which was to obtain British support for his "united action" plan.¹⁴ This plan stipulated two preconditions for "united action." France must grant real independence to the Associated States within the French Union, and the allies, especially the Commonwealth nations, must share America's concern for Indochina and therefore take an active part in any intervention.¹⁵ The talks revealed that Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, disapproved of an immediate "united action"

¹³Roberts, op. cit., pp. 31-32. The high-ranking officials who attended the meeting were: Under Secretary of Defense Roger Keys, Navy Secretary Robert B. Anderson; Thurston B. Morton, Dulles' assistant; the eight prominent legislators were William Knowland, Eugene Millikin, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard B. Russell, Earle C. Clements, Joseph Martin, John W. McCormack and J. Percy Priest. For an interesting discussion of Dulles' diplomacy in 1954 and 1955, see Charles O. Lerche, "The United States, Great Britain and SEATO: A Case Study in the *Fait Accompli*," Journal of Politics, 18 (August, 1956), pp. 459-478.

¹⁴Quoted in Congressional Record, 100 (June 9, 1954), p. 7919.

¹⁵Roberts, op. cit., p. 34.

intervention. Dulles' plan for air-strikes had to be cancelled.¹⁶ Washington acknowledged the grave importance of Indochina, but felt it could not "go it alone." Over 30,000 American fighting men had been lost in the Korean War. The cost of an Indochinese war would probably be as great or greater, according to General Matthew Ridgeway;¹⁷ therefore, a strong prior allied commitment was considered essential.

At the conclusion of the talks in London a communiqué was issued saying, in part, that "we are ready" to examine the "possibility of establishing a collective defense. . . ." in Southeast Asia.¹⁸ Dulles thought that an ad hoc organization should be set up at once to give the allies a united front at the forthcoming Geneva Conference. He therefore called a meeting on April 20 of ten nations principally concerned with Indochina to begin talks on the formulation of a collective defense organization in Southeast Asia. Eden, upon hearing of the proposed drafting meeting, instructed England's Ambassador to the United States, Roger Makin, not to attend. Evidently there was a misunderstanding regarding the word "ready." Dulles thought Eden had reneged

¹⁶Anthony Eden, Full Circle: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Vol. I (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), pp. 107-108.

¹⁷Roscoe Drummond and Gaston Coblentz, Duel at the Brink (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1960), p. 119.

¹⁸Quoted in Eden, op. cit., p. 109.

on a commitment to form a Southeast Asian organization.¹⁹

The creation of a "united front" did not materialize. Dulles could not persuade Eden to join an immediate intervention, nor to agree to a collective defense organization, nor to agree to concur in an allied minatory declaration regarding Indochina. Eden would not consider a collective defense organization while the Geneva Conference was in session. He thought that such an organization would seriously prejudice the chances of a settlement at Geneva. The British Foreign Secretary further disagreed with Dulles' view that a "united front" would deter Communist China from supplying the Viet Minh.²⁰

During the month of April, the military situation at Dien Bien Phu had steadily deteriorated. The Eisenhower Administration continued to stress the strategic importance of Indochina. On April 7, Eisenhower likened Indochina to the first of a "row of dominoes": if it should fall all of Southeast Asia would be lost. A week later Radford said Indochina's loss "would be a prelude to the loss of all Southeast Asia and a threat to a far wider area."²¹ On April 16 in an "off the record" talk, Vice-President Richard M. Nixon spoke of the "futility of negotiation" with the

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 110-111; Roberts, loc. cit.

²⁰Eden, op. cit., pp. 104, 114; "A NATO for South East Asia," Economist, 171 (April 17, 1954), p. 165.

²¹Quoted in New York Times, May 4, 1954, p. 4.

Communists. Britain and France, he continued, should adopt Dulles' plan for "united action." A retreat in Asia must be avoided even if "the Administration should have to face up to the situation and dispatch forces."²²

On April 22, Dulles met again with Eden. Dulles still spoke of an ad hoc coalition of nations to be organized as soon as possible. On the following day a message came from General Henri-Eugene Navarre, then the Indochina commander, saying that the situation at Dien Bien Phu had become desperate. Navarre urgently requested a major United States air-strike within 72 hours; otherwise the fortress would be lost. The French General Staff thought that an air-strike would destroy a large part of the Viet Minh attacking force and thereby boost the defenders' morale.²³ The British General Staff disagreed. It thought that an air-intervention, at this time, could have no appreciable effect on the battle.²⁴ The American Joint Chiefs of Staff, except for Radford, thought that an intervention could not succeed without ground forces.²⁵

Eden thought an intervention might expand the war to international proportions. He predicted that ground troops

²²Quoted in Ibid., April 17, 1954, p. 1.

²³Eden, op. cit., pp. 111-112.

²⁴Ibid., p. 114.

²⁵New York Times, June 16, 1954, p.33.

would have to be called within 48 hours after the air-strikes.

On April 24, Dulles privately told Eden that France could not be kept in the fight unless the United States did what it could "within the President's Constitutional powers" to join French forces in the fight.²⁶ Neither Dulles nor Radford was explicit as to how the allies were to join the French in their fight. The British Government's decision came on April 24, and in effect, vetoed Dulles' "united action" plan for Indochina that was tentatively scheduled to go into operation on April 28th.²⁷

The following day brought a new note to an old melody. At a meeting at the Quai d'Orsay, Dulles acknowledged that it was too late to save Dien Bien Phu. Nevertheless, the United States would immediately organize the entire Indochina region if France would promise to remain in the war. If France and the other allies were amenable, the United States, according to Eden, planned to "move armed forces into Indochina" and internationalize the struggle in an attempt to protect Southeast Asia.²⁸

Neither France nor England was enthusiastic at the prospect of a world war. After Eden flew to London to consult

²⁶Quoted in Eden, op. cit., p. 114.

²⁷Ibid., p. 117.

²⁸Ibid., p. 116.

Prime Minister Winston Churchill, British support for any American intervention was flatly refused.

On April 27, Winston Churchill announced to a cheering House of Commons that the British Government was "not prepared to give any undertaking about United Kingdom military action in advance of the results of Geneva." Churchill felt that he was being asked to sanction a plan that would mislead Congress and, furthermore, might lead to a major war.²⁹

America's Role at the Geneva Conference

The Geneva Conference began on April 26. Eden has reported that the issue of "intervention continued to dog us." Dulles took a new tack. On May 1, his position was that British "moral support," not military assistance, was needed for "united action."³⁰ In other words, Dulles' original position in early April on "united action," had shifted. He had then asked England, and the other allies, for real participation; now he wanted moral support for his plan to intervene in Indochina. The exact type of action Dulles had in mind remained vague from Britain's perspective. Eden would not change his stand, and was still firmly set against intervention. Eden and Dulles were at loggerheads.

In April and May there was no allied policy with respect to the conditions for a settlement at Geneva. Rather

²⁹Ibid., p. 117.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 121, 126.

there were three separate policies: Washington wanted to seek a solution to the Indochina crisis outside the Conference via intervention; London wanted to negotiate a settlement; and Paris wanted an American intervention to save Dien Bien Phú but did not want to internationalize the conflict.³¹

It was no secret that many United States officials considered the Conference a waste of time. Eisenhower saw the Conference as a maneuver by the Communists in order that they might gain time to build-up their military strength.³² Dulles was not at all sanguine about an honorable peace and believed the battlefield rather than the conference table was the best solution. On May 4, he departed from Geneva. This unexpected move appeared to be a protest against the probability of a harsh settlement.

Dulles persisted in favoring a collective defense organization for Southeast Asia. He remained opposed to the partition of Vietnam until late June. He refused to negotiate with Chou-En-lai. Indeed, Dulles even refused to acknowledge his presence for fear of being attacked by right-wing Republicans for truckling with the enemy. In short, any settlement of the Indochina War, short of military defeat of the Viet Minh seemed unacceptable to the United States.³³

³¹"Mr. Dulles in Paris," Economist, 171 (April 17, 1954), p. 174.

³²Eden, op. cit., p. 144.

³³New York Times, May 2, 1954, p. 3.

On May 8, 1954, under the most unpropitious circumstances, the Indochina phase of the Geneva Conference began. The beleaguered and battered fortress at Dien Bien Phu had fallen on May 7 and with it any realistic hope of a French victory over the Viet Minh in Indochina.³⁴ The significance of Dien Bien Phu as a symbol of French strength was extremely important.³⁵ With its loss the symbol was shattered. The Viet Minh could negotiate from a position of strength since they had decisively beaten the cream of the French forces. The weak French government wanted peace and came to Geneva to try to find an acceptable political settlement to a military situation that seemed untenable. The Russians, Chinese and English wanted to prevent the internationalizing of the conflict in Indochina.

It was fundamental to United States over-all policy to negotiate from a "position of strength." Without overwhelming military superiority Dulles maintained that the Communists would exploit the West's inaction as a sign of disunity.³⁶ Dulles thought it necessary, at least until the latter part of June, for the allies to unite in some manner in order to indicate a readiness to take forceful action in Indochina should the Conference fail or should the

³⁴Lancaster, op. cit., p. 318.

³⁵Eden, op. cit., p. 126.

³⁶John Foster Dulles, "The Issues at Geneva," Department of State Press Release No. 238 (May 7, 1954), pp. 2,4.

Communists demand too much at the bargaining table. Only in this way, he felt, could the allies overcome their negotiating weakness at Geneva. If ten nations could unite, Dulles thought, the threat of a combined intervention would be a cogent reason for the Communists to temper their demands. The American delegation at Geneva was "deeply aggrieved," according to Eden, when England repeatedly refused to go along with Dulles' "united action" proposal.³⁷

In late May, the American delegation at Geneva acknowledged that concessions to the Communists would have to be made. American policy at the Conference was directed towards limiting the extent of the concessions. This new line ruled out any armistice that would give all of Indochina to the Communists.³⁸ In June, Mr. Dulles was still talking about a "united action." On June 9, he asserted that "united action" was just as practicable as it had been on April 16, 1953, when President Eisenhower first mentioned the term. Dulles thought the negotiations at Geneva were sufficiently "barren" that the British would now consider alternatives.³⁹ The outlook for a settlement looked dim. On June 20, Walter Bedell Smith, the head of the American delegation departed from the Conference leaving U. Alexis Johnson, United States

³⁷Eden, op. cit., p. 127.

³⁸New York Times, May 26, 1954, pp. 1-2; Ibid., June 24, 1954, p. 13.

³⁹Ibid., June 9, 1954, p. 1; Ibid., June 16, 1954, p. 2.

Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, in charge.

A visit to the United States by Prime Minister Churchill on June 24 improved Anglo-American relations. Following his visit, the British and American governments in a joint statement warned Communist China that "the international situation would be seriously aggravated" if the French were "confronted with demands which prevented an acceptable agreement regarding Indochina."⁴⁰ The two countries agreed to seven points essential to an acceptable settlement. For the first time since the beginning of the Conference the United States had a policy other than intervention or the formation of a Southeast Asian collective security organization. The joint memorandum which was not disclosed publicly at the time, is worth quoting in full since it corresponds closely to the final agreement at Geneva.

- 1) To preserve the integrity and independence of Laos and Cambodia by assuring the retreat of the Viet Minh forces from the two countries.
- 2) To preserve at least the southern half of Vietnam and, if possible, an enclave in the northern delta, the line of demarcation of which should not pass south of Dong-Hoi (to the north of the 17th parallel).
- 3) Not to impose any restrictions on Cambodia, Laos or the prereserved part of Vietnam to maintain stable non-communist regimes, especially on the right to maintain sufficient forces for internal security or on the right to import arms and call upon foreign advisors.

⁴⁰Quoted in Ibid., June 29, 1954, p. 1.

- 4) Not contain any political clause which might lead to the loss of the preserved zones to the benefit of the Communists.
- 5) Not to exclude the possibility of a later unification of Vietnam by peaceful means.
- 6) To permit the transfer under humane and peaceful conditions, and under international control, of all those who wish to pass from one zone of Vietnam into another.
- 7) To provide for an effective system of international control.⁴¹

Mendès-France had established a 30-day deadline for concluding an agreement when he became Premier of France on June 20. Dulles was fearful that this deadline would pressure France into accepting a bad bargain. Therefore, he had refused to return to Geneva, and it was only at Mendès-France's urgent request that he finally agreed to visit Paris on July 13. The French Premier never told Dulles that a satisfactory settlement would be facilitated if there was a high-ranking American delegate at Geneva. Dulles, however, maintained before Mendès-France that "in any case, the accord which you will sign at Geneva will be bad. We cannot be present without the appearance of favoring a new Yalta."⁴²

Mendès-France evidently dispelled Dulles' suspicions that France would seek "peace at any price" and depart from the 7-point United States-British memorandum of June 29.⁴³

⁴¹Quoted in Lacouture et Devillers, op. cit., pp. 244-245.

⁴²Quoted in Ibid., p. 249.

⁴³New York Times, July 20, 1954, p. 2.

The indefatigable Secretary of State returned to Washington on July 16 claiming that "a formula for Allied unity had been found" which would not compromise America's principles and which would have beneficial effect on the outcome of the Geneva Conference.⁴⁴ Walter Bedell Smith was sent back to Geneva. He arrived on July 17 for the final phase of the Conference.

The Final Agreement at Geneva,
July 20, 1954

On July 20, 1954, the armistice bringing peace to Indochina was signed by General Delteil representing France and by Ta Quang Buu representing the Viet Minh. The United States refused to sign the final agreement on the grounds that it had no "primary responsibility in the Indochina war."⁴⁵ More to the point, Dulles did not want to "sanctify" an agreement which placed millions of persons under Communist rule.⁴⁶ "We can accept such things as a fact," Dulles said, and he added:

We can accept them as something we do not consider it right to go to war about, as we have in North Korea, in East Berlin, in Austria, and in the satellites. But we cannot endorse it and guarantee to the Communists the enjoyment of the fruits of their aggression.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Quoted in Ibid., July 15, 1954, p. 1.

⁴⁵Dulles quoted in New York Times, July 15, 1954, p. 4.

⁴⁶Ibid., June 29, 1954, p. 3.

⁴⁷Quoted in John Robinson Beal, John Foster Dulles: 1888-1959 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), p. 216.

President Eisenhower conceded that the agreement "contained many features which we do not like."⁴⁸ Walter Bedell Smith, Special Ambassador to the Geneva Conference, made an official statement saying in part that the United States would:

refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb them [the agreements] . . . and it would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security.⁴⁹

Smith tersely summed-up the Conference when he said that "diplomacy has rarely been able to gain at the conference table what cannot be gained or held on the battlefield."⁵⁰

It seems as though Dulles' conduct during the Conference, as well as his decision not to underwrite the final agreement, was influenced by domestic considerations. He was aware that a Communist victory would raise a furor with a powerful group in Congress⁵¹ who saw any compromise

⁴⁸Department of State, Bulletin, 80 (August 2, 1954), pp. 162-163.

⁴⁹Quoted in Allan B. Cole (ed.), Conflict in Indochina and International Repercussions (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1956), p. 175.

⁵⁰Quoted in New York Times, July 24, 1954, p. 4.

⁵¹Senators Joseph McCarthy, William Knowland, William Jenner, Styles Bridges, Homer Ferguson, and H. Alexander Smith were members of this conservative Republican group. See James Reston, "Now Dulles Under Fire," New York Times, February 24, 1954, p. 2; Norman A. Graebner, The New Isolationism: A Study in Politics and Foreign Policy Since 1950 (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1956), pp. 166-167.

with the Communists as a defeat. The aggressive attitude of this impetuous group is best typified by the remarks of the Republican Senate leader, William F. Knowland, when he spoke of France and Britain as preparing to negotiate a Far Eastern "Munich." "When you yield to international blackmail," he said, "it is surrender on the installment plan."⁵² The Republican's policy at Geneva was also criticized by Democratic Senator Mansfield. He assailed the Eisenhower Administration for incurring a diplomatic defeat in Indochina in seeking a military answer to a political problem. Mansfield charged that the Conference was a failure in American policy because an "all or nothing" solution was sought. He claimed that the Chinese Communist regime gained a firm foothold in Southeast Asia and enhanced their international stature.⁵³

The settlement that split Vietnam at the 17th parallel was generous for the West, extending beyond what the military and political situation dictated.⁵⁴ Realistically, partition was probably the best solution that the Western powers could have hoped for. The armistice had succeeded in reducing the chances of an international crisis. Tensions had subsided as the Conference ended and as the United States

⁵²Quoted in New York Times, May 4, 1954, p. 4.

⁵³Congressional Record, 100 (July 8, 1954), pp. 9997-9998, 10001.

⁵⁴Hans J. Morgenthau, "Vietnam -- Another Korea?" Commentary, 33 (May, 1962), p. 370.

retreated from the brink of intervention. Ironically, the independence that the Vietnamese had fought for had been realized in a peace that ruptured the nation.

The Viet Minh achieved recognized control over half of Vietnam. If they had pushed too far or too hard the United States might well have intervened. There would also have been the risk of alienating the Colombo Powers.⁵⁵ Perhaps the Viet Minh calculated that the free elections to be held in the summer of 1956, as stipulated in the Geneva Agreements, would unite the country under the aegis of their celebrated leader, Ho Chi Minh. If so, they were naive. But few other delegates at Geneva seriously believed differently. A legal occupation of South Vietnam seemed inevitable.⁵⁶

The Great Powers, other than the United States, were reasonably pleased with the settlement. The French had finally ended an unpopular and costly war. They defended their action against Dulles' charges that it was a disaster to negotiate a peace with the Communists by replying that the United States had done the same thing in Korea.⁵⁷ Domestic political instability had weakened France's government

⁵⁵"The Balance Sheet of Geneva," New Statesman and Nation, 67 (July 24, 1954), p. 89. The Colombo Powers are India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma and Indonesia.

⁵⁶Beal, op. cit., p. 214.

⁵⁷New York Times, February 4, 1954, p. 1.

and almost mandated the decision to end the war. Premier Mendès-France had pledged that if a settlement was not reached by July 20 he would strongly urge reinforcing the Expeditionary Force in Indochina with French conscripts; previously only regular army officers, volunteers, and foreign legionnaires had been used. Then he would resign. The use of Frenchmen in Indochina would increase the size and the cost of the war of attrition. If Mendès-France had resigned, as he threatened to do, further disorder would be heaped on a government already beset by acute financial difficulties.⁵⁸ A "favorable and honorable" settlement for France was achieved.

Anthony Eden maintained that the partition was the least damaging solution and thought that America's persistent saber-rattling would lessen the possibility of a settlement at Geneva.⁵⁹ A "threat of intervention," seemed to be behind the repeated compromises of the Communist bloc. Eden said, "I was sharply conscious of the deterrent power of the hydrogen bomb . . . I do not believe that we should have got through the Geneva Conference and avoided a major war without it."⁶⁰

⁵⁸Ibid., July 18, 1954, p. 1.

⁵⁹Lancaster, op. cit., p. 321.

⁶⁰Eden, op. cit., p. 139. The Chinese, according to Eden, believed with some justification, that the Americans were on the brink of attacking them. Eden, op. cit., p. 135.

Molotov praised Anthony Eden's role at the Conference, which he said "cannot be exaggerated." Eden risked being called an appeaser⁶¹ when he acted as a conciliator and liaison between the Communist and American delegations. He skillfully used the lever of a third world war to move Chou En-lai and Molotov toward compromise. The main-spring in this level seemed to be the possible use of atomic weapons by the United States, if the Conference failed to reach an acceptable settlement.⁶²

⁶¹Quoted in George Glasgow, "War and the Method," Contemporary Review, 186 (September, 1954), p. 182.

⁶²The answer to two questions at a press conference inferentially supports the claim that atomic weapons would have been used if the Conference failed.

"Question: Mr. Secretary (Dulles), one of the points made here is a claim the Indochina settlement reached at Geneva was a victory for our policy of deterrence. I'd like to know, sir, in what respect did we put the Chinese Communists on notice or warning that, unless they accepted this settlement, which I recall we didn't like very well at the time, we would do all kinds of drastic things to them?"

"Answer: There was a program for 'united action' in the area and you will recall that I went first to London and then to Paris and reached what I thought was an agreement on 'united action.' We had hoped to get the united action into force promptly and before the Geneva Conference was held. However, later on it developed that the British and the French preferred to wait and see what came out of the Geneva armistice talks before agreeing to the 'united action' proposal. Therefore, it was a matter of common knowledge, all the world knew, that if there should be a breakdown of the Geneva talks then the British and French were prepared to go ahead with us on the program of 'united action' which we had announced in advance.

"Question: Mr. Secretary, did that program in any way imply the possible use of atomic bombardment of South China in the event they moved into Indochina with their troops?"

"Answer: It involved, if necessary a common military effort there with whatever weapons would be

Conclusions

Dulles' Indochina policy is explained when he stated, "I believe that in general most of our problems came from not making sufficiently clear in advance what the dangers are to a potential aggressor."⁶³ Dulles made it clear to the Chinese that there was a definite danger of total war. The chance of a Chinese miscalculation concerning the use of troops in Indochina or encouraging a harsh peace at Geneva was greatly lessened.

The weakness of peripheral containment of Communism by threatening massive retaliation did not (and has not) deterred Communist aggression in Indochina, even though it probably was a cause of a generous partition of Vietnam for the Western powers. Dulles' persistent quest for a collective security pact in Southeast Asia as a vehicle for intervention in Indochina exemplified the narrowing of policy alternatives. It was difficult for the Republicans to compromise at Geneva because of their strong election campaign castigating the Democrats for failing to hold the line against the implacable Communists. They charged the Democrats had "waged war in Korea without the will to victory . . . and by their

appropriate."

Quoted in New York Times, January 12, 1956, p. 10. To the writer's knowledge, England has never accepted Dulles' stand.

⁶³ Quoted in New York Times, April 1, 1954, p. 1.

hampering orders [had] produced stalemates and ignominious bartering with our enemies."⁶⁴ Perhaps these denunciations implicitly committed the Republicans to a strong, and inadvertently more rigid, foreign policy than the situation at Geneva dictated.⁶⁵ The "new look" in American cold war strategy of emphasizing massive retaliation and placing less reliance on local defenses did not seem to appreciate the means of combatting Communist irregular warfare nor could it reconcile the dilemma of supporting a strong military position in Vietnam while trying to foster a healthy independent government.⁶⁶

The United States did not want to fight another Korean-type war which in General Ridgeway's terms would be a "harebrained tactical scheme,"⁶⁷ costing thousands of American lives. Air-strikes on the jungle fortress at Dien Bien Phu quite possibly would have escalated the war to international proportions and quite probably would not have been decisive without a major landing of ground forces. In the final analysis, John Foster Dulles made the best of a

⁶⁴Quoted in Herbert Agar, The Price of Power: America Since 1945 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 164-165.

⁶⁵Farley, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 4.

⁶⁷Matthew B. Ridgeway, Soldier: The Memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgeway (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), p. 278.

bad situation at the Geneva Conference. He reluctantly balanced a basic principle of not yielding to Communism with French necessities of ending an agonizing war. This balance reduced world tensions and facilitated a generous peace for the Western powers.

III

AMERICAN POLICY TOWARD VIETNAM: PERIOD OF CONSOLIDATION, 1954-1956

The political situation in Vietnam immediately following the Geneva Conference consisted of a series of crises. Each crisis threatened Ngo Dinh Diem's position. His survival as Premier is due in part to his obstinacy and courage and in part to the support rendered him by the United States. This chapter examines American policy during this crucial period.

After the Geneva Conference, American policy-makers were confronted with a difficult situation. Geographically, Vietnam was truncated; economically, it was depressed. The viability of the infant government of Ngo Dinh Diem seemed uncertain. In June, 1954, Bao Dai, Chief of State had designated Diem as his premier, giving him "full powers" over governmental matters.¹ But Premier Diem's authority was in fact quite limited. He did not control the army; the militant Hao Hao and Cao Dai religious sects were

¹B. C., "Indochina: The Unfinished Struggle," World Today, 12 (January, 1956), p. 23.

threatening to overturn him, and a gangster-like organization called the Binh Xuyen was running Saigon.²

The problems confronting Ngo Dinh Diem seemed insurmountable. The guerrilla war that had been waged since 1946 was not transferred to the political plane. "Nothing short of a political genius," wrote Ellen Hammer, "would be enough to cope with the situation."³

It was against this troubled background that Senator Mansfield made his now well-known Report on Indochina, on October 15, 1954. After an analysis of the grave situation, Mansfield praised Diem for his "intense nationalism and equally intense incorruptibility. . . ."⁴ Diem's government, Mansfield said, was "based on sound principles of national independence, an end to corruption. . . ."⁵ The Senate's Southeast Asia expert concluded his report with a recommendation: "In the event that the Diem government falls . . .

²Francis J. Corley, "Vietnam Since Geneva," Thought, 33 (Winter, 1958-59), p. 534. See Bernard Fall, "The Political-Religious Sects of Vietnam," Pacific Affairs, 28 (September, 1955), pp. 235-523. Miriam S. Farley, "Vietnam Kaleidescope," Far Eastern Survey, 24 (May, 1955), pp. 77-78.

³Quoted by Joseph Buttinger, "The Miracle of Vietnam," in Richard W. Lindholm (ed.), Vietnam: The First Five Years, (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1959), p. 30.

⁴U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Senator Mike Mansfield, Report on Indochina, 83rd Cong., 2nd Sess., October, 1954, p. 10.

⁵Ibid., p. 14.

the United States should consider an immediate suspension of all aid, . . . except that of a humanitarian nature."⁶

Mansfield's report helped crystallize American policy toward Vietnam, and marks the beginning of determined American support for Ngo Dinh Diem. This support was based principally on two factors: Diem had a reputation for integrity and patriotism, and he seemed to be the best, if not the only, choice available.⁷

The first major internal threat Diem had to face after coming to power was the opposition of General Nguyen Van Hinh, Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese Army. This opposition consisted of two dissident religious sects, a militant gangster-like organization which controlled Saigon's police, and a national army which apparently owed its loyalty to Hinh. Premier Diem suspected a coup d'etat. He therefore ordered the recalcitrant pro-French Chief of Staff to leave on September 11, 1954, for a vacation in France, which in effect exiled him.⁸ This was a bold move since General Hinh commanded the army. Hinh refused to obey the Premier's directive. The crisis that ensued lasted

⁶ Idem.

⁷ Miriam S. Farley, United States Relations with Southeast Asia; with Specific Reference to Indochina, 1950-1954 (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1955), 55. See Senator Mike Mansfield's comments, Congressional Record, 101 (May 2, 1955), p. 5290.

⁸ New York Times, September 12, 1954, p. 1.

several weeks. In this chaotic period there was no effective government.⁹ Premier Diem's days seemed numbered. Direct American intervention, however, helped stave off a possible military coup.¹⁰

On November 17, upon his arrival in Vietnam, General J. Lawton Collins, President Eisenhower's Special Envoy, said that the United States was not interested in "training or otherwise aiding a Vietnamese army that did not give complete and implicit obedience to its premier."¹¹ While in Saigon General Collins cautioned officers of the Vietnamese army that the United States would give "every possible aid to the Government of Ngo Dinh Diem and to his Government only."¹² If Mansfield's Report on Indochina was the birth of United States policy toward Vietnam, Collins' warning to General Hinh was its christening.

Pressure was exerted by the United States on Bao Dai to ask his Chief of Staff to leave for France.¹³ Since

⁹Brian Crozier, "The Diem Regime in Southern Vietnam," Far Eastern Survey, 29 (April, 1955), p. 51.

¹⁰"General Hinh talked openly of plans to seize the government by a coup de main." Corley, op. cit., p. 542. "It is no exaggeration to say," commented an observer who was on the scene, "that today [late June 1954] the President's [Sic: Premiers?] power ends at the gates of his governmental palace." Peter Schmid, "Free Indochina Fights Against Time," Commentary, 19 (January, 1955), p. 28.

¹¹Quoted in New York Times, November 17, 1954, p. 14.

¹²Quoted in Farley, op. cit., p. 56.

¹³Crozier, loc. cit.

Washington was paying for the maintenance of the army, which included the salaries of the soldiers, General Hinh thought he had better not jeopardize economic and military aid.

Leaving Saigon on November 18, Hinh said,

I only had to lift my telephone and the coup d'etat would have been over. Nothing could have opposed the army. But the Americans let me know that if that happened, dollar help would be cut off. The country cannot survive without American help. We would only have played into the Viets' [Viet Minh's] hands with a revolt.¹⁴

The chances of bloodshed were reduced when Hinh was removed from the country. Bao Dai dismissed his Chief of Staff on November 29.¹⁵

On October 24, the United States decided that effective, January 1, 1955, American aid would be channeled directly to Vietnam. Hitherto, aid had been given primarily through French authorities. President Eisenhower expected that "this aid will be met by the Government of Vietnam in undertaking needed reforms."¹⁶ Possibly these "needed reforms" meant a more compromising attitude by Diem toward the dissident sects. Donald R. Heath, United States Ambassador and General Paul Ely, French Commissioner General

¹⁴Quoted in Schmid, loc. cit.

¹⁵Donald Lancaster, The Emancipation of French Indochina (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 350.

¹⁶Quoted in New York Times, October 25, 1954, p. 6 President Eisenhower in a letter to Premier Diem allegedly speaks of "indispensable reforms." The letter must be viewed with reservations since the account published in the Times was a French version and France favored the removal of Diem in the fall of 1954.

had allegedly urged Diem throughout his first months in power to take the leaders of the Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects into his cabinet.¹⁷ On September 25, Diem consented to form a more representative government. It seems likely that American aid and support were conditioned on the Premier's inviting representatives of the different sects into his shaky government. In other words, increased direct aid from the United States was dependent on "indispensable reforms" which seemed to amount to forming a coalition cabinet. According to one American expert on the scene, "the United States was now exerting the greatest amount of influence on political events in Vietnam."¹⁸

The crises continued. There was a mutual antipathy between the francophobic Diem and the francophilic Bao Dai. The Chief of State, with French backing, attempted to cut away Diem's political support. He did this by encouraging an anti-Diem coalition called the United National Front, established on March 4, 1955. It was comprised of the leaders of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen armies. The United Front coalition wanted to keep its armies independent and to remain sovereign over the territories it dominated.¹⁹ On

¹⁷Ibid., October 13, 1954, p. 3.

¹⁸Wesley R. Fishel, "Problems of Democratic Growth in Free Vietnam" in Wesley R. Fishel (ed.), Problems of Freedom: South Vietnam Since Independence (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), p. 13.

¹⁹New York Times, March 27, 1955, Sect. IV, p. 5.

March 21, the United Front issued Diem an ultimatum: it gave the Premier five days to replace his cabinet with a five-man council.²⁰ Diem refused to accept this ultimatum.²¹ An armed clash seemed imminent.

In early March Bao Dai received a letter from the United Front asking for the Premier's removal.²² Even though it seemed that the Chief of State favored such a move he hesitated. His support for the United Front became lukewarm. In all likelihood this was due to a personal letter he received from President Eisenhower on March 9.²³ While the contents of the letter are unknown, it seems safe to surmise that it reminded the Chief of State that the United States was supporting the legal government of Ngo Dinh Diem.

In April General Collins wavered in his support for Diem. He seemed to favor the French view that the first step in finding a solution to the crisis in Vietnam was to get rid of Diem. When Collins returned to Washington on April 20 he was reported to recommend the replacement of Diem by another premier more acceptable to the French and the sects.²⁴ According to one close American observer of

²⁰Crozier, op. cit., p. 53.

²¹Fall, op. cit., p. 252.

²²New York Times, March 11, 1955, p. 2.

²³Lancaster, op. cit., p. 390.

²⁴Wells C. Klein and Marjorie Weiner, "Vietnam," in George McTurnan Dahin (ed.), Government and Politics in South-east Asia (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1959), p. 340.

Vietnamese events, this recommendation was made at a meeting of the National Security Council.²⁵ Homer Bigart of the New York Times writes that Colonel (now Major General) Edward G. Lansdale, the Premier's military advisor, persuaded Allen Dulles, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, that the United States should stick with Diem. The CIA chief convinced his brother, John Foster Dulles, that Lansdale was right, Collins wrong.²⁶

In late April, 1955, American policy wavered.²⁷ Diem was advised to avoid a military showdown with the sects.²⁸ General Collins feared that open fighting might provoke an all-out civil war. A Vietnamese spokesman, commenting on Diem's contemplated attack on the Binh Xuyen, said:

Our hands have been tied by the intervention of General Collins. He wants us to wait six more days, but I doubt if Premier Ngo Dinh Diem can do that. The people want something done about the Binh Xuyen whom they fear and hate.²⁹

Disregarding American advice Diem decided forcefully to eliminate opposition elements. He said, "We are determined

²⁵New York Times, July 25, 1962, p. 4.

²⁶Congressional Record, 101 (May 2, 1955), p. 5290.

²⁷Wesley R. Fishel, "Free Vietnam Since Geneva," Yale Review, 49 (September, 1959), p. 72. Fishel states, "The American special envoy in Saigon insisted that the government try to negotiate a settlement. Ngo refused, and within a few days the vice gang's forces were routed and their leaders fled the country."

²⁸Quoted in New York Times, April 1, 1955, p. 7.

²⁹Ibid., April 28, 1955, p. 11.

to give the final blow to the Binh Xuyen, otherwise this business will never finish. If the Army is independent of the Government and the police are independent of the Government, then there is no Government."³⁰ A pitched battle with the Binh Xuyen was fought and won in the streets of Saigon. Once the battle began on April 28, the New York Times reported on the following day the "United States [was] giving Premier Diem all possible backing in his struggle with the rebellious Binh Xuyen."³¹ Troops of the Hoa Hao sect took to the hinterland and were put on the defensive. In late June, 1955, all organized sect resistance was ended.³²

April and May were months of civil strife and turmoil. On May 4, General Collins allegedly told a group of American correspondents in Saigon that he favored a Vietnamese constitutional monarchy with Bao Dai as the Chief of State.³³ This statement apparently indicated that Collins favored a compromise settlement between Diem and the sects that would avoid bloodshed. Two days later the State Department disavowed any intention of supporting Bao Dai.³⁴

³⁰ Ibid., April 29, 1955, p. 1.

³¹ Fall, op. cit., p. 253.

³² New York Times, May 5, 1955, p. 7.

³³ Ibid., May 7, 1955, p. 1; Ibid., May 8, 1955, p. 1.

³⁴ Congressional Record, 101 (May 2, 1955), p. 5290.

A debate in the Senate on May 2, 1955, lends credence to the charge that American policy wavered during the period immediately preceding the armed clash with the Binh Xuyen. It was a confusing and critical period in Vietnam. Senator Mansfield reiterated his recommendation that the "immediate suspension of all aid" should occur if Diem was overthrown, but Senator Hubert Humphrey praised Diem's independent regime as worthy of the "wholehearted support of the American Government and our foreign policy."

I was pleased to see . . . that we again clarified our policy. But we cannot have these hot and cold flashes. We cannot have a policy that is in and out, that is certain and uncertain. There has been entirely too much of this. We must make our policy clear, because to waver and indicate any doubt or uncertainty is to play into the hands of the rebel forces in South Vietnam. . . .³⁵ [*Italics added*]

Mansfield denied the allegation that American policy had wavered. "There has been no letdown in our support of Premier Diem."³⁶ Humphrey retorted that United States policy did waver and that the State Department had permitted the situation to "drift." He referred particularly to American pressure on Diem to form a coalition government in late April. The debate ended with Mansfield discounting certain newspaper accounts that were mentioned by Humphrey. Mansfield reminded his colleague "that the first thing General Collins did upon his arrival at Saigon this morning [May 2] was to

³⁵ Ibid., p. 5291.

³⁶ Idem.

have a conference with Premier Diem, and to reaffirm, once again, the support of the United States Government of Premier Ngo Dinh Diem."³⁷

On May 11, Humphrey again charged that "from time to time within the past month our Government's policy has been unclear, dubious and at times vacillating, in reference to free Vietnam." He said that General Collins had exerted pressure on Diem to form a coalition government. Moreover, according to Humphrey, Collins was reported to have recommended that, "we might let the government of free Vietnam go by the board unless there was a coalition. . . ." It seemed "incredible that we should waver at this critical hour," Humphrey continued. This political bargaining was beneath the dignity of the United States.³⁸

As long as the absent Chief of State plotted with France, Diem's position was endangered. On April 29, 1955, Bao Dai summoned his premier to Cannes.³⁹ Diem refused to leave Vietnam; his departure might have meant his dismissal. Edgar Faure, France's Prime Minister, felt that "for some time past [Ngo Dinh Diem's] government has not been well adapted to discharge the mission with which it has been entrusted."⁴⁰ Pressure by France and Britain to back Bao Dai

³⁷Congressional Record, 101 (May 11, 1955), p. 6103.

³⁸New York Times, April 29, 1955, p. 3.

³⁹Quoted in Lancaster, op. cit., p. 390.

⁴⁰New York Times, May 8, 1955, p. 1.

was resisted by Secretary Dulles.⁴¹ The French, who were largely responsible for Diem's appointment, foresaw the extinction of French influence and commercial interests. Therefore, they favored the Premier's removal and his replacement with "a like-minded but more flexible man."⁴² The United States suspected France, in collusion with the Chief of State, of slipping supplies to the rebellious Binh Xuyen.⁴³ The British were concerned over their stake in Malaya. They were interested in a stable Vietnam to act as a buffer state between Malaya and Vietnam. Consequently, Britain favored Bao Dai as the best hope for keeping the peace since he was the symbol of legality.⁴⁴

The United States strongly reaffirmed its support of Diem as representing the "legal government,"⁴⁵ despite French opposition. The United States stood alone in believing that the Premier was suited to the task before him. Joseph Buttinger claimed that the Western allies lacked unity; "England does not support, France actually fights, American policy in Vietnam."⁴⁶ American efforts were largely

⁴¹Quoted in Ibid., August 24, 1955, Sect. IV, p. 3.

⁴²Ibid., April 29, 1955, p. 1.

⁴³Ibid., May 8, 1955, Sect. IV, p. 2.

⁴⁴Ibid., May 7, 1955, p. 1.

⁴⁵Joseph Buttinger, "Are We Saving South Vietnam?", New Leader (Supplement), 38 (June 27, 1955), pp. 3-4.

⁴⁶Lancaster, op. cit., p. 390.

responsible for forestalling any attempts by the French-supported Chief of State to reassert his authority.⁴⁷

Two articles in the New York Times of May 11, suggest that Diem was influenced by American and French pressure. Diem announced a major reorganization of his Nationalist Cabinet. The changes were intended to broaden the Vietnamese Government. Cabinet officials were drawn from different areas and, according to the Times, represented almost all political groups.⁴⁸ This "enlargement" of the Vietnamese Government led France's Premier Edgar Faure and Britain's Foreign Secretary, Harold Macmillan, to announce their support for the Premier.⁴⁹ Previously, both nations had serious reservations concerning Diem. On May 12, a United States-French agreement was promulgated formalizing what appeared to be a quid pro quo: France would support Diem and withdraw its remaining troops from Vietnam for Dulles' pledge to support the reunification elections called for by the Geneva accords. Despite Secretary Dulles' statement he emphasized that Mr. Diem was not "in his pocket" and therefore could not guarantee the agreement with the French Government.⁵⁰ France's pledge not to oppose the Diem

⁴⁷New York Times, May 11, 1955, p. 5.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁹Ibid., May 12, 1955, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁰William B. Dunn, "America and Crises in Vietnam" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1960), p. 264.

Government was in effect, an acknowledgment of the sunset of French influence in Vietnam.⁵¹

Ngo Dinh Diem did not want to risk deposing his enemy Bao Dai unless assured of American backing. On May 7 Ngo Dinh Nhu, the Premier's brother, sought encouragement from the Western powers regarding the contemplated ouster of the Chief of State.⁵² On the same day a State Department release sounded a very encouraging note: "The United States has great sympathy for a Nationalist cause that is free and effective. For this reason, we have been and are continuing to support the legal government of Ngo Dinh Diem."⁵³ G. Frederick Reinhardt, new United States Ambassador to Vietnam, gave Diem another indication of American approval. Reinhardt handed Diem documents of appointment addressed to "The Chief of the State of Vietnam." These credentials ignored any reference to Bao Dai and apparently signified America's willingness to support Premier Diem over Bao Dai.⁵⁴ After approximately three weeks of uncertainty, American policy firmly supported Diem.

Any doubt as to United States support was dispelled by Senator Mansfield's 1955 report on Vietnam. He reaffirmed

⁵¹New York Times, May 7, 1955, p. 1.

⁵²Quoted in Ibid., May 7, 1955, p. 1.

⁵³Ibid., May 29, 1955, p. 2.

⁵⁴U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Senator Mike Mansfield, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, 84th Cong., 1st Sess., October, 1955, p. 14.

his previous statements backing Diem. American policy had "effectively served the United States during the past year." This was largely due to the "decent and honest" government in Vietnam.⁵⁵ Along with impressive moral characteristics Mansfield, who had been dubbed "creator of the Diem regime,"⁵⁶ could not boast a tried political leader who emerged unscathed from what appeared to be an impossible situation of anarchy.

A referendum was held on October 23, 1955, to choose between Bao Dai and monarchy or Ngo Dinh Diem and a republic. The plebiscite gave Diem an overwhelming majority of 98.2% of the vote.⁵⁷ This was the first national vote taken in South Vietnam.⁵⁸ A republic was established with Ngo Diem as its President. Not only did the victory in the referendum remove Bao Dai from the Vietnamese political scene, but it served as a popular mandate for the infant republic.⁵⁹ Diem's national and international prestige were greatly enhanced.⁶⁰ An imprimatur of legitimacy was achieved since the plebiscite legally severed Diem's ties with Bao Dai.

⁵⁵ Brian Crozier, "The International Situation in Indochina," Pacific Affairs, 29 (December, 1956), p. 322.

⁵⁶ New York Times, October 27, 1955, p. 1.

⁵⁷ Ibid., October 24, 1955, p. 1.

⁵⁸ Ibid., October 23, 1955, Sect. IV, p. 8.

⁵⁹ William Henderson, "South Vietnam Finds Itself," Foreign Affairs, 35 (January, 1957), p. 291.

⁶⁰ Department of State Bulletin, 33 (November 7, 1955), p. 760.

After the Republic of Vietnam was proclaimed, Ambassador Reinhardt cordially greeted the new government. He looked forward to the same "friendly relations which have so happily existed between the two governments."⁶¹ It is doubtful if Diem would have called for a referendum without the acknowledged support of the United States. President Diem was aware that American aid was a sine qua non for the survival of his regime.⁶² This fact has led to charges that he was "America's man." It is noteworthy that the charges warranted a response by Secretary Dulles who asserted Vietnam was free and "not a puppet Government, it is not a Government that we give orders to and tell what we want it to do or what we want it to refrain from doing."⁶³

American influence again became important when President Diem needed support to by-pass the July, 1956, reunification elections. Secretary Dulles agreed with Diem that the chaotic conditions in Vietnam precluded free elections.⁶⁴ An American assertion that if the elections were really free "there would be no serious risk that the Communists would

⁶¹New York Times, April 30, 1955, p. 1.

⁶²Department of State Bulletin, 32 (May 30, 1955), p. 873.

⁶³New York Times, March 15, 1956, p. 1. Dulles' statement concerning free elections was not viewed as a contradiction since the joint United States-French policy pronouncement which stipulated that the reunification election "should be held under genuine freedom." See New York Times, May 12, 1955, p. 2.

⁶⁴Department of State Bulletin, 33 (July 11, 1955), p. 50.

win,"⁶⁵ remains moot. The important point is that the United States strongly supported Diem's decision.

The ruling group in Vietnam was not going to risk the future of the young Republic on national elections. A message from the newly elected National Assembly said: "We do not consider ourselves as bound by the Geneva agreement, which has been signed against the will and in contempt of the interests of the Vietnamese people."⁶⁶ With the passage of the election deadline on the last day in July, 1956, another obstacle was overcome. There were no "spontaneous uprisings" as the Vietnamese Government had feared. The peaceful passing of the "crisis date" was a good indication of the increasing strength and stability of the Republic of Vietnam.⁶⁷

After the Geneva Conference, America's influence in South Vietnam's military affairs kept pace with its increased role in the political sphere. The United States assumed the major responsibility of reorganizing and training Vietnam's army. Frenchmen were still training Vietnamese troops at the end of 1955. The methods used, however, and most of the instructors, were American. It became evident that the French Expeditionary Force would soon leave Vietnam. An undercurrent of Vietnamese hostility toward France and the

⁶⁵Quoted in New York Times, March 9, 1956, p. 5.

⁶⁶Ibid., August 6, 1956, p. 3.

⁶⁷Ibid., November 4, 1955, p. 2.

curtailment of France's financial and military commitment were indications of the diminishing role they would play in Vietnam's future.⁶⁸

Summary

The political vacuum left by France after the Geneva Conference was partially filled by the United States. Ngo Dinh Diem may not have been "America's man," as the French charged, but he was heavily dependent upon American aid and support. Washington exerted considerable influence in Saigon. By and large, this support was obdurate.⁶⁹ There were two instances when American support equivocated: when General Collins urged Diem to form a coalition government and not to battle the Binh Xuyen in late April;⁷⁰ and when General Nguyen Van Vy, a Bao Dai supporter, briefly took control of the army in a bloodless coup in early May, 1955.⁷¹

⁶⁸ It is noteworthy that in 1955 the New York Times published more than ten different articles mentioning United States support for Diem or urging France or Bao Dai to consent to the Premier's leadership. As a result of statements by State Department officials and Secretary Dulles personally, American prestige was virtually tied to the success or failure of Ngo Dinh Diem. The United States, therefore, could almost be considered godparents to the Republic of Vietnam.

⁶⁹ New York Times, April 8, 1955, p. 7; ibid., April 19, 1955, p. 3; ibid., April 28, 1955, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Ibid., May 1, 1955, p. 1.

⁷¹ See John W. O'Daniel, "Free Vietnam: Modern Miracle," American Mercury, 88 (March, 1959), pp. 146-152.

On the other hand, the United States intervened to support Diem at several critical junctures in his struggle to survive. The United States used the threat of aid sanctions to discourage General Hinh from executing a coup d'etat. It repeatedly cautioned Bao Dai of the probable consequences of overthrowing his Prime Minister. It backed the "legal government" of Ngo Dinh Diem when he desperately needed assistance. It encouraged the plebiscite that ousted Bao Dai. It favored Mr. Diem's stand in the face of French and British opposition on the question of holding reunification elections.

President Diem accomplished a "near miracle"⁷² in surviving several military crises in consolidating himself in power. He survived by skillfully combining political acumen and stubbornness. He chose to fight his enemies rather than to come to terms with them. This boldness when the Western powers cautioned moderation, reaffirmed American confidence in the Premier.

At times, Washington's support seemed to exert a strong influence on forces threatening the Diem regime. This support was principally founded on Senator Mansfield's recommendations of Diem as a man who "stands for a decent and honest government in an independent Vietnam."⁷³

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Congressional Record, 101 (May 2, 1955), p. 5289.

Mansfield was a champion of the Diem regime in its darkest hours. He did more, perhaps, to marshal sorely needed aid and to focus attention on the plight of Vietnam's shaky government than any other United States official.⁷⁴ Professor Wesley R. Fishel, a political advisor to Diem between 1954-1956, writes that Mansfield's October, 1954, report was of prime importance. "Without [Mansfield] there most certainly would not have been U.S. backing for the Diem government. He was the strong and unwavering 'spine' of what otherwise looked for the most part like a spineless policy--if indeed it was a policy at all."⁷⁵ [Emphasis in original.]

Why did the United States staunchly support Ngo Dinh Diem? Senator Mansfield furnishes the answer in responding to a rhetorical question. "What is the alternative to Diem? In my opinion, there is none . . ."⁷⁶ It seems appropriate to use a military metaphor to explain America's policy toward Vietnam since this policy is best understood in military terms. In military strategy there is an axiom which states that in a battle a commander always supports his leading element. Not only was Diem America's leading choice, but he appeared as the only acceptable alternative.

⁷⁴Corley, op. cit., p. 543.

⁷⁵Letter from Wesley R. Fishel to Robert Scigliano, June 2, 1962.

⁷⁶Congressional Record, 101 (May 2, 1955), p. 5290. See Senator Mike Mansfield, "Reprive in Vietnam," Harpers, 212 (January, 1956), pp. 46-51.

The United States favored a friendly non-Communist government in Vietnam since it was "the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia."⁷⁷ Diem represented America's hopes that the cornerstone would remain firm. He was a bulwark against further Communist encroachments. At the Geneva Conference, the main issue for Secretary Dulles was to stop, or at least, limit Communist expansion. This same primordial consideration of containing Communism continued to shape American policy toward Vietnam in its infant years. To this end, Ngo Dinh Diem went far beyond America's expectations and achieved what John F. Kennedy, at the time a senator from Massachusetts, called an "amazing success." In July of 1956, former Vice President Richard M. Nixon triumphantly proclaimed, "The militant march of Communism has been halted."⁷⁸ Amidst the praise that was heaped on the Diem regime for its remarkable achievements during its period of consolidation, The Times of London sounded what turned out to be a perceptive warning: "Mr. Diem's danger is that his regime may become a tinkering autocracy, able to annoy but not to inspire."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ John F. Kennedy, "America's State in Vietnam," in America's State in Vietnam, op. cit., p. 10.

⁷⁸ Quoted in New York Times, July 7, 1956, p. 4.

⁷⁹ The Times (London), July 17, 1956, p. 8.

IV

AMERICAN POLICY TOWARD VIETNAM: 1957-1962

Introduction

After 1956, the Republic of Vietnam began to rise out of the ashes of war. The infant nation entered a period of national reconstruction and rehabilitation. American policy toward Vietnam from 1956 to 1959 was designed to promote the building of a sound economy and a strong national army, and American aid began to strengthen Vietnam's war-torn economy.

In May, 1957, Senator Mike Mansfield spoke of the success of American financial assistance, and hailed Diem as "the savior of all Southeast Asia." A joint United States-Vietnamese communique issued on May 13, during a visit of President Ngo Dinh Diem to the United States, proclaimed the situation in Vietnam to be one of "progress and stability." It added that internal security had been "effectively established."¹ Many Americans praised President

¹Congressional Record, 103 (May 13, 1957), pp. 6759-6769. See Ellen J. Hammer, "Progress Report on Southern Viet Nam," Pacific Affairs, 30 (September, 1957), p. 227; P. J. H., "Progress in the Republic of Vietnam," World Today,

Diem and compared him to Ramon Magsaysay, the eminently successful leader of the Philippines.²

In March, 1958, President Dwight Eisenhower referred to Vietnam as a "modern miracle" and an example of the success of the mutual aid program. "American aid of all kinds played an indispensable role. With our help a National Army was organized and trained. Techniques helped the government to set up institutions needed for a healthy society and national life."³

Between 1956 and 1959, Washington enjoyed normal diplomatic relations with Vietnam. The Department of State Bulletin rarely mentioned American policy toward Vietnam except to illustrate foreign aid achievements. Similarly, the Congressional Record, contained few references to the subject, except an occasional objection to the magnitude of foreign aid appropriations. Annual reports issued by the United States Operations Mission (USOM) in Vietnam spoke of economic and political stability combined with substantial

15 (February, 1959), pp. 68-78; Joseph Buttinger, "The Miracle of Viet-Nam," in Richard W. Lindholm (ed.), Viet-Nam; The First Five Years (East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Press, 1959), pp. 30-31; American Friends of Vietnam, Aid to Vietnam: An American Success Story (New York: American Friends of Vietnam, Inc., 1959).

² Bernard B. Fall, "South Viet-Nam's Internal Problems," Pacific Affairs, 31 (September, 1958), p. 241.

³ Dwight Eisenhower, "Security and Peace," Vital Speeches, 24 (March 15, 1958), p. 323.

progress toward rehabilitation and modernization.⁴ The number of articles on Vietnam published in the New York Times appreciably decreased. The New York Times Index had less than one page of indexed items annually from 1956 through 1958 compared to five pages in 1955 and almost three in 1960. The decrease in news coverage seemed to indicate that things were quiet and stable in Vietnam. Washington appeared to hold this view.

The picture of "remarkable progress" was seriously disturbed when a newspaper reporter visited Vietnam for 19 days in mid-1959 and "uncovered" an "outrageous scandal."⁵

"An Outrageous Scandal?"

A series of six articles by Albert M. Colegrove, entitled "Fiasco in Vietnam: Our Hidden Scandal," appearing in the Scripps Howard newspaper chain from July 20, 1959, to July 25, 1959. Colegrove, writing in a sensationalistic style, made charges of waste, inefficiency and corruption in the administration of military and economic aid to Vietnam. His lurid charges raised a storm of protest in Washington and Saigon.⁶ Colegrove's "exposé" led to investigations by

⁴United States Operations Mission to Vietnam, Annual Report, Saigon, 1957; Ibid., 1958; Ibid., 1959; Ibid., 1960.

⁵See U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearings, Current Situation in the Far East, 86th Cong., 1st Sess., July 27, Aug. 3, 11, 14, 1959, pp. 288-324. (Hereinafter cited as Current Situation in the Far East.)

⁶Idem.

both houses of Congress to find out whether, in Senator Mansfield's words, "we are getting our money's worth."⁷

The House, investigating Colegrove's charges, held hearings on July 27, August 3, 11, 14, 1959. The accuracy of Colegrove's reporting was seriously questioned. Representative Clement Zablocki, for example, stated the articles were "obviously full of false statements."⁸ Colegrove would not recant his allegations. On the contrary, he reaffirmed his charges, saying that "our foreign aid and related programs in Vietnam . . . are a fiasco."⁹

The Senate committee held hearings on July 30 and 31, 1959. The hearings revealed shortcomings in Washington's air program. The need for better coordination between the ambassador and the different aid missions was established. The testimony revealed that the United States Operations Mission (MAAG), and the United States Information Agency (USIA) reported directly to Washington without going through the embassy, but that the embassy had final authority and responsibility for major policy decisions. Each agency had been deciding what was important enough to warrant the attention of the embassy. Washington often dominated the

⁷U.S., Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearings, Situation in Vitenam, 86th Cong., 1st Sess., July 30 and 31, 1959, p. 3. (Hereinafter cited as Situation in Vietnam.)

⁸Current Situation in the Far East, p. 2.

⁹Ibid., p. 206.

implementation of policy decisions that should normally have come under the scope of the ambassador's authority.¹⁰

On July 30, 1959, United States' Ambassador to Vietnam, Elbridge Durbrow, testified that the Vietnamese Government "is becoming more and more effective in curbing terrorists acts. The internal situation has been brought from chaos to basic stability."¹¹ Senator Mansfield, chairman of the subcommittee, read a statement into the record made on April 17, 1959, by Major General Samuel L. Myers, former Deputy Chief of the MAAG, in which Myers alleged that the military threat to Vietnam from Communist guerrillas was almost negligible.

The Vietminh guerrillas, although constantly reinforced by men and weapons from outside south Vietnam, were gradually nibbled away until they ceased to be a major menace to the Government. In fact, estimates at the time of my departure indicated that there was a very limited number of hostile individuals under arms in the country. Two territorial regiments, reinforced occasionally by one or two regular army regiments, were able to cope with their depredations.¹²

Myers' statement went on to say that internal security could now be turned over to civilian agencies. Durbrow confirmed Myers' appraisal of the military situation. The Vietnamese army, he said, had the capacity to cope with a

¹⁰Situation in Vietnam, pp. 183-184.

¹¹Ibid., p. 9.

¹²Quoted in ibid., p. 171.

military invasion from the North. As a result of Vietnam's increased internal security, Durbrow had asked for a reduction in American military aid to Vietnam.¹³

Mansfield emphasized that his 1955 report on Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, in which he had urged the reductions of American aid to Vietnam had been largely ignored by the State Department. Mansfield's report had stated that the need for military aid "crash" program had appreciably decreased and that the aid program to Vietnam should be re-examined.

Durbrow acknowledged Mansfield's charge that there had been no basic change in the State Department's policy. The United States had not shifted the emphasis from military to economic aid, nor had Vietnam become less dependent on American economic assistance. Mansfield intimated that Durbrow lacked an over-all policy which might have facilitated a more economically independent Vietnam and thereby fulfill a primary goal of American policy. In terms of long range planning and coordination, Mansfield alleged that better results might have been achieved if his recommendations had been carried out.¹⁴

During the hearings it proved difficult to answer Colegrove's main assertion: "We have helped keep the country

¹³Ibid., p. 172.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 173, 175.

from communism and helped divert economic chaos . . . but I think given enough money, I could rehabilitate Hades, and that is my complaint."¹⁵ A point-by-point refutation of Colegrove's charges by the State Department and International Cooperation Administration did not satisfy all of the investigating congressmen. Senator Wayne Morse, for example, praised Colegrove as "one reporter against the crowd."¹⁶

Several important shortcomings emerged from the hearings. The ambassador, it was recommended, should have greater authority over supervising United States activities in Vietnam. "A new and stronger leadership in American aid diplomacy" was needed to foster a deliberate, long range policy.¹⁷ American non-military aid programs lacked continuity and had been operating under an "essentially negative approach."¹⁸ These deficits might have been avoided, the Senate subcommittee charged, if the air program had been re-evaluated in 1955.

The Congressional hearings were a convenient vehicle to reappraise American aid policy, while debunking Colegrove's charges of an "outrageous scandal." Senator Frank Carlson

¹⁵Current Situation in the Far East, p. 218.

¹⁶Situation in Vietnam, p. 135. John D. Montgomery, The Politics of Foreign Aid (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), p. 227.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 231.

¹⁸United States Aid Program in Vietnam, p. 10.

summed up the investigations when he said, "Mr. Colegrove, I think you rendered a service at least to stir up the interest of this committee and the country in the foreign aid program."¹⁹

Surprisingly, even though the hearings cited numerous shortcomings, they generally commended America's efforts in Vietnam. Congressman Zablocki said, "if it will be any comfort to you, Mr. Gardiner [U.S.O.M. director] in spite of the fact that our questions may seem to be rather sharp, the Vietnam aid program is generally considered to be one of the best programs in that area," ²⁰

The hearings and report are interesting for what was not discussed. Little, if any, mention was made of the political unrest, of the absence of a legal opposition or of the growing strength of the Viet Cong guerrillas in Vietnam.²¹ By and large, the hearings reflected an official

¹⁹Situation in Vietnam, p. 93.

²⁰Current Situation in the Far East, p. 125.

²¹The preoccupation with matters of internal security has caused the Diem regime to adopt many para-Communist tactics. Political opposition has been suppressed. Suspected individuals have been put in "political re-education centers" without benefit of trial. Newspapers have been controlled by the government. Elections have been rigged. The legal process has often been used as an instrument of the regime to dispose of political opponents. One scholar has even exaggerated and described Vietnam as an "anti-Communist Communist state." J. B. Brimmell, "Communism in Southeast Asia," Royal Institute of International Affairs, United Kingdom Paper No. 2 (February, 1958), p. 8. For a discussion of the authoritarian nature of the Diem regime see New York Times, May 1, 1960, p. 1; ibid., May 22, 1960, p. 4; ibid., November 11, 1960, p. 1; Robert G. Scigliano, "Political Parties in South Vietnam Under the Republic,"

optimism over the success of the foreign aid program and of the establishment of internal stability and security.

On February 26, 1960, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations issued its report. The report underscored the failure of Washington's aid program to shift its emphasis from military to non-military aid.

Four or more years ago, the design of the non-military aid program was that of a holding action, a crash program to prevent a total collapse in South Vietnam . . . But there has not been a single basic change in directives for this program . . . It is still administered preponderantly as a holding action.²²

The report noted also that military programing was carried out under an over-all plan with long range objectives, whereas civilian aid was hampered by being appropriated on a yearly basis. There were several reasons for the greater effectiveness of military aid: this aid had a priority on

Pacific Affairs, 33 (December, 1960), pp. 327-346; P. J. Honey, "The Problems of Democracy in Vietnam," World Today, 16 (February, 1960), pp. 71-79; Adrian Jaffe and Milton C. Taylor, "A Crumbling Bastian," New Republic, 144 (June 19, 1961), pp. 17-20; K. R. Bombwall, "Presidential Leadership in the Republic of Vietnam," International Studies, III (October, 1961), pp. 147-158; Frank C. Child, "Vietnam--The Eleventh Hour," New Republic, 145 (December 4, 1961), pp. 14-15; Nguyen Thai, The Government of Men in the Republic of Vietnam (East Lansing, Michigan: n.p., June, 1962); Nguyen Tuyet Mai, "Electioneering: Vietnamese Style," Asian Survey, II (November, 1962), pp. 11-18.

²²U.S. Congress, Senate, Commiteee on Foreign Relations, Report, United States Aid Program in Vietnam, 86th Cong., 2d Sess., February 26, 1960, p. 9.

aid funds; there was a continuity of leadership and administration of military aid; and there was an integrated plan operating under sufficient authority to oversee the program. Non-military aid did not have these attributes. Ambassadors were changed. American agencies under ambassadorial jurisdiction often by-passed the embassy.²³ While the ambassador had the final authority and responsibility he did not have the power, or at least did not exercise the power, nor did he have the full cooperation and support of Washington to be an effective leader of the "country team."²⁴

The congressional hearings and the Senate report had reflected a basically encouraging picture of peace and progress in Vietnam, and the attempted coup d'etat of November, 1960, caught American policy makers off-guard.

The Attempted Coup d'etat,
November 11, 1960

On November 11, 1960, three crack Vietnamese paratroop battalions attempted a coup d'etat. The presidential palace was surrounded and the Tan Son Nhut airport was captured. For about 24 hours it seemed as if the coup might succeed. The leaders of the revolt charged that President Diem's policies were oppressive and that the

²³ Ibid., pp. 8, 24.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 12-13.

peasantry was not protected from Communism.²⁵

During negotiations with the two coup leaders, Lt. Colonel Vuong Van Dong and Colonel Nguyen Chanh Thi, President Diem agreed to important reforms. These reforms involved dissolving the government and replacing it with a coalition headed by the president. Diem said:

Following the uprising in the capital this night, to keep our forces for the struggle against communism, I, President of the Republic, have decided to dissolve the present government: . . . I will coordinate [sic: cooperate?] with the revolutionary committee to establish a coalition government. . . .²⁶

Headlines in the Times of Vietnam reported that the president's promises were intended to protect democratic liberties.²⁷

The coup lasted 36 hours. The leaders of the revolt delayed and did not directly assault the palace. They let the coup be "talked to death." They did not immediately seize control of the government radio station or sever the palace's communications.²⁸ The leaders of the revolt wanted reforms and an end to family rule. The Revolutionary Committee of rebels demanded a host of political reforms in order to

²⁵New York Times, November 11, 1960, p. 8.

²⁶Quoted in Nguyen Thai, The Government of Men in the Republic of Vietnam (East Lansing, Michigan.: n.p., 1962), p. 172.

²⁷Times of Vietnam, November 12, 1960, p. 1.

²⁸New York Times, November 13, 1960, p. 1.

allow them to mount a more effective offensive against the Communists. Diem promised these reforms, bargaining for time until loyal troops arrived and crushed the rebellion.²⁹

After the paratrooper rebellion was over a State Department spokesman said, "It is certainly encouraging that this short-lived crisis has been solved in view of the obvious dangers of protracted disturbances."³⁰ On November 15, 1960, the Times of Vietnam published what was apparently a continuation of the same official statement. It said that while official circles in Washington remained in support of Ngo Dinh Diem, "it was wished that his power be established on a wider basis, with rapid implementation of radical reforms and energetic action against corruption-suspected elements."³¹ The State Department's rather neutral statement following the coup is in sharp contrast to the repeated proclamations championing Diem in 1954 and 1955.

After the coup, Ngo Dinh Nhu, the president's brother and influential political advisor, charged that "Western embassies" in Saigon, in particular the American embassy had provoked the abortive revolt. "Not only did Americans provoke the rebellion but their military advisors were helping the paratroopers during the revolt and they volunteered--they

²⁹ Stanley Karnow, "Diem Defeats His Own Best Troops," Reporter, 24 (January 19, 1961), p. 28.

³⁰ Quoted in New York Times, November 13, 1960, p. 13.

³¹ Quoted in Times of Vietnam, November 15, 1960, p. 1.

were not invited."³² Nhu's charges against "Western embassies" were probably conditioned by the alleged association of Americans, especially press correspondents, with coup leaders.³³

The Vietnamese government claimed that a George Carver, an American working for an aid mission, was in contact with the coup leaders. Carver was said to have known Pham Quang Dan, a leader of the ephemeral Revolutionary Committee, and to have been a friend of Col. Nguyen Chanh Thi, the rebel commander. Carver's actual role in the coup, if he was involved, remains a mystery. He was reportedly speeded out of Vietnam on the 14th or 15th of November, 1960, after he received a letter threatening his life.³⁴

After the paratrooper revolt was suppressed an Anti-Coup d'Etat Committee was formed. Mr. Cao Xuan Vy, chairman of the committee, charged that the rebel officers and their colonialist instigators had aided the Communist cause. Posters plastered on walls in Saigon by the Committee denounced "Colonialist organizations."³⁵ Nguyen Dinh Thuan, Secretary of State at the Presidency, denied at a press conference that the Anti-Coup Committee had official backing.

³²Quoted in Karnow, op. cit., p. 28.

³³Personal files of Robert Scigliano, professor of political science, Michigan State University.

³⁴New York Times, July 6, 1963, p. 1.

³⁵Times of Vietnam, November 15, 1960, p. 1.

It was rather a "popular committee" reflecting the will of the people. However, the committee gave every indication of being government-supported, reflecting a keen suspicion, if not antipathy, toward the Western press. Secretary Thuan bluntly stated that Vietnamese blood was on the hands of foreigners who had systematically disparaged the Vietnamese government. "Those foreigners are more or less responsible for the Vietnamese blood which has been shed."³⁶ On November 19, 1960, Saigon denied the allegation that Western "colonialists" were behind the revolt.³⁷

The Western press was criticized by Vietnamese newspapers for falsifying news of the coup. On November 16, 1960, for example, the Vietnamese Press charged that American newspapers were seeking "sensationalism at all costs." A story intimated that the "press services of the Foreign Ministries" were involved in "inaccurate" reporting. Some of the reporting was, in fact, inaccurate. For example, the New York Herald Tribune as reported in the Vietnam Press (Feature Service) on November 12, "The [up]rising apparently brought to an end a firm but often dictatorial rule." The

³⁶Press Conference, Dien Hong Palace, by Secretary of State to the Presidency Nguyen Dinh Thuan, November 17, 1960. (Mimeographed.)

³⁷New York Times, November 19, 1960, p. 2. On July 5, 1963, nineteen paratroopers allegedly involved in the coup were brought to trial. The prosecutor resurrected charges of American involvement in the revolt. He claimed that he had an unsigned letter directly implicating the United States in the coup. The letter, allegedly from a paratrooper to an American official, is said to have accused the American of failing in his promise to support the revolt. New York Times, July 6, 1963, pp. 1, 4.

interesting point of the charges appearing in the government press is that they implied that Western embassies were involved in the coup.³⁸

Did the Diem regime enjoy Washington's firm support during the attempted coup? The few shreds of available evidence indicate that American policy-makers were caught off-guard and therefore hesitated to make an official commitment during the crisis that could have resulted in untold embarrassment if the rebels were successful. One source states that during the rebellion some rebel leaders went to an American general with the MAAG mission and asked for assistance. The general turned them down and, in effect, refused American support.³⁹ Washington adopted the only safe diplomatic posture during the crisis: wait and see.

The predominant concern of the United States during the coup in Vietnam was stability. Bloodshed, destruction and chaos was to be avoided at all costs. The United States therefore urged both sides to negotiate.⁴⁰

The attempted coup d'etat of November 11, 1960, led to some important developments. Drastic reforms were promised

³⁸Vietnam Press (Feature Service), November 16, 1960, pp. 12, 24.

³⁹Personal files of Robert Scigliano, professor of political science, Michigan State University. The defendants in the trial of the paratroopers told their lawyers that there was no American involvement. New York Times, July 6, 1963, p. 3.

⁴⁰Personal files of Robert Scigliano, professor of political science, Michigan State University.

but not implemented. Instead the reigns of control were tightened.⁴¹ This probably caused Diem to lose confidence and respect. The allegations of American involvement in the coup further weakened Saigon's confidence in American policy.

If the attempted coup was a warning knell calling for a reappraisal of American policy, it went largely unheeded by Washington.

Viet Cong Terrorism and Washington's Reappraisal

From late 1959 to 1961 there seemed to be a month... by month increase in Viet Cong terrorism. It became dangerous to venture out into the countryside.⁴² The situation was reminiscent of Viet Minh activity prior to the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu.⁴³ In 1960 the Viet Cong's campaign became comparable in size and ferocity to its Viet Minh counterpart, in the South, prior to the Geneva Conference. Communist units of as many as 1,000 men were used in an attack. In February, 1960, a regimental camp near Tay Minh, northwest of Saigon, was overrun by the Viet Cong. This surprising victory demonstrated the Communists boldness and an ability to coordinate

⁴¹ Thai, op. cit., p. 163.

⁴² New York Times, April 17, 1960, p. 27; ibid., May 2, 1960, p. 13; ibid., April 9, 1961, Sect. IV, p. 12.

⁴³ New York Times, May 2, 1960, p. 13. See Wesley R. Fishel, "Communist Terror in South Vietnam," New Leader, 43 (July 4-11, 1960), pp. 14-15.

a major assault.⁴⁴

United States policy-makers reacted cautiously to the accelerated guerrilla war. The Colegrove hearings had highlighted American optimism regarding Vietnam's increased internal security. As late as May, 1960, Admiral Harry D. Felt spoke in terms of harassment by Communist "bandits."⁴⁵ Saigon's counter-measures to the increased Viet Cong terrorisms and subversion were equally slow. The nucleus of a peasant army was boldly attacking armed encampments before it was realized that drastic measures were necessary. The time gap of three years, from early 1959 to mid-1961, in reacting to the Viet Cong's planned offensive allowed the Viet Cong ample opportunity to gain the allegiance of large segments of the peasantry.

By mid-1960, according to one American military source, "a major share of the South Vietnamese Government's forces were . . . engaged in antiguerrilla operations."⁴⁶ Saigon's counter efforts against the Viet Cong were still unimpressive.

The Army of the Republic of Vietnam showed itself unable to cope with Viet Cong aggression, even though it had

⁴⁴H. C. B. Cook, "The Situation in Vietnam," Royal United Service Institute Journal, 107 (August, 1962), p. 224.

⁴⁵New York Times, May 29, 1960, p. 4.

⁴⁶Amos A. Jordan, Jr., Foreign Aid and the Defense of Southeast Asia (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962), p. 30.

been well equipped by the United States. However, the American Military Assistance Advisory Group, trained the Vietnamese for a conventional war, whereas the jungle battlefields of Vietnam demanded a highly mobile counter-guerrilla army.⁴⁷

The main assumption underlying the American advisory group was that aggression would come from the north in division strength. Lt. General Samuel T. Williams, who headed the MAAG for five years in Vietnam, thought that the Vietnamese army would have to withstand a major assault.

In 1954, the communist army of North Vietnam could have crossed the 17th parallel and walked into Saigon standing up. Today, if they tried it, they would have one nasty fight on their hands.⁴⁸

Admiral Felix B. Stump indicated that the Vietnamese army mission was to fight a delaying action until the United States could help. "But I [did] think that the terrain being what it is that the army of South Vietnam could delay them long enough for them to get help from the outside."⁴⁹

A British officer went so far as to blame American advisors:

Most intelligent Vietnamese officers realized this was unsound. They sometimes use to refer to "the American type of war we have trained for (. . .) and the Indochina type of war we realize we may have to fight."⁵⁰

⁴⁷Franklin Mark Osanka (ed.), Modern Guerrilla Warfare, (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), Parts 6 and 9.

⁴⁸Quoted in Judson J. Conner, "Teeth for the Free World Dragon," Army Information Digest, 15 (November, 1960), p. 43.

⁴⁹U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearings, Mutual Security Act of 1958, 85th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1958, p. 111.

⁵⁰Cook, op. cit., p. 334.

The task of dealing with guerrillas was assigned to poorly equipped and inadequately trained para-military forces such as the Civil Guard.⁵¹

United States and Vietnamese officials had been unable to agree on what the Civil Guard's function, size and equipment should be between 1955 and 1959. President Diem wanted a mobile, heavily equipped para-military force of 50,000 men to augment the army. USOM officials, accepting the recommendations of the Michigan State University contract group, wanted a village-based, lightly equipped civilian police force of 25,000 men. Washington yielded to Diem in 1959. Four years of political uncertainty within the Vietnamese Government concerning the Civil Guard and the dispute with American officials rendered it largely ineffective.⁵² This ineffectiveness continued until 1961. It was in this period that Communist guerrillas recruited, trained and organized a peasant army. The Viet Cong gained a considerable measure of control over local security in large segments of the countryside. They succeeded in laying the ground work for their major objective of cutting the Saigon Government's political and administrative bonds with the peasantry.

Viet Cong activity steadily mounted in 1960 and 1961. The tempo of Viet Cong attacks increased in 1961 and their

⁵¹ Idem.

⁵² Montgomery, op. cit., pp. 66-70.

victories multiplied. The intensity of the guerrilla war led American and Vietnamese officials to reappraise the means to defeat the Viet Cong.⁵³ Two other things became apparent: Vietnam's conventional army was not winning the war and a counter-guerrilla type army was required to stem the tide of Viet Cong victories.

On May 4, 1961, Secretary of State Dean Rusk claimed that the Communist guerrilla organization had grown from about 3,000 to 12,000 between 1954 and 1961. This sharp increase, he said, was the result of a decision made in Hanoi in 1959 to "liberate" the South from the "rule of the U. S. Imperialists and their henchmen" by all "appropriate means."⁵⁴ Urgent measures were needed. Increased American aid was not containing Viet Cong aggression. American policy-makers began to ponder a new bold move; the commitment of combat troops.⁵⁵

On May 5, Senator J. W. Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the United States was considering sending combat troops to Asia. He indicated that President Kennedy was studying the possibility of an American military intervention in Vietnam.⁵⁶ Kennedy

⁵³ See for example Dean Rusk's statement, Department of State Bulletin, 64 (May 22, 1961), pp. 757-758.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ U.S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Report of Senator Mike Mansfield, et al., Vietnam and Southeast Asia, 88th Cong. 1st Sess., 1963, p. 5.

⁵⁶ New York Times, May 5, 1961, p. 1.

acknowledged that such a possibility was under study and had been considered by the National Security Council. Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson was going to visit Vietnam to find out whether American troops were needed.⁵⁷

On May 12, 1961, Vice-President Lyndon Johnson visited Vietnam. He strongly praised President Diem as the "Churchill of today" and reaffirmed past pledges of American support. He told the National Assembly that "there are many things the United States is willing to do" to insure Vietnamese independence, and added that "the United States stands ready to assist in meeting the grave situation that confronts you."⁵⁸ Approximately \$40,000,000 was promised to implement an eight-point program.⁵⁹ The gist of a new program was to provide for highly mobile and anti-guerrilla units and a general mobilization of the peasantry in strategic hamlets. A joint communique issued on May 13 said that the increased aid was to go for training and improving the civil guard and the self defense corps, as well as increasing regular military forces.⁶⁰

The Vietnamese Government was opposed to America sending combat troops "at this time" because it would be rich propaganda for the Communists. Sources close to the

⁵⁷Ibid., May 6, 1961, p. 1.

⁵⁸Quoted in Ibid., May 12, 1961, p. 1.

⁵⁹Ibid., May 14, 1961, p. 1.

⁶⁰Ibid., , , ,

government said that "United States troops will not be sent to South Vietnam unless there is documented proof of open aggression by North Vietnam in the Republic."⁶¹

In June, 1961, a study mission headed by Dr. Eugene Staley, a government economist, went to Vietnam and suggested changes that were designed to restore security within eighteen months.⁶² All phases of Vietnam's military organization were to be expanded. They were to receive new military hardware. The strategic hamlet program was put on a crash basis. An anti-guerrilla warfare school was created.⁶³

As the summer passed, the military situation in Vietnam became increasingly desperate. On September 25, 1961, President Kennedy spoke of "the smoldering coals of war in Southeast Asia. South Vietnam is already under attack. . . ."⁶⁴ A week later, President Diem said the struggle for Vietnam was now a "real war."⁶⁵

General Taylor, President Kennedy's special military representative, was sent to Vietnam on October 15 to make a "educated military guess" as to the need for United States troops."⁶⁶ Taylor recommended an increase in military

⁶¹Reuter, dispatch from Saigon, May 13, 1961.

⁶²New York Times, October 2, 1961, p. 1.

⁶³Ibid., May 27, 1961, p. 3.

⁶⁴Department of State Bulletin, 64 (September 25, 1961), p. 623.

⁶⁵New York Times, October 2, 1961, p. 1.

⁶⁶Ibid., October 12, 1961, pp. 1, 12.

assistance to Vietnam. Several hundred American military specialists in counter-guerrilla operations were sent to Vietnam. The large-scale increase in aid was accompanied by an emphasis on developing a mobile military force.⁶⁷ The sharp increase in American military advisors was explained by a State Department white paper issued on December 25, 1961.⁶⁸ Taylor said that Vietnam had been trained to defend itself "against a conventional attack."⁶⁹ Vietnam, he continued, had the "assets" available "to prevail against the Communist threat."⁷⁰

The Johnson, Staley and Taylor missions attested to the gravity of the situation and indicated a re-evaluation of American policy. United States involvement was underscored along with America's previous difficulty in finding a solution to the deteriorating military situation. For the second time

⁶⁷ Ibid., December 16, 1961, p. 9.

⁶⁸ United States Department of State, A Threat to the Peace: North Viet Nam's Effort to Conquer South Viet Nam, Part I, Far Eastern Series 110 (Washington, December, 1961), pp. 4-8. For a diametrically opposed account of why guerrilla terrorism began see, Philippe Devillers, "North Vietnam: The Struggle for the Unification of Vietnam," The China Quarterly, No. 9 (January-March, 1962), pp. 2-23. Devillers maintains that Diem's police and military aroused the peasantry to rebellion in self-defense against the brutality of Diem's police and military. The "partisan" uprising, in short, originated at "the grass roots," not Hanoi.

⁶⁹ Quoted in New York Times, October 8, 1961, p. 18.

⁷⁰ Quoted in New York Times, November 7, 1961, p. 32.

within six months the United States considered the possibility of sending troops to Vietnam to stem the Viet Cong's intensified attacks.

A central problem for the United States was how to urge the Saigon government to reorganize its political and administrative structure to enable the Vietnamese soldier to defeat the Viet Cong. Pressure on the administrative system, due to Communist terrorism, hampered the government's effectiveness.⁷¹ Critics charged that Diem excluded talented individuals from the government. Military coordination was poorly planned, due to "politicking" in top government echelons. There was a refusal to entrust combat leaders with command decisions.⁷² The principle of "unity of command" was often breached. The Civil Guard for example was "spectacularly unsuccessful" because of its divided command responsibility in counter-guerrilla operations.⁷³ Civil Guard units acted independently under the direction of various provincial chiefs. Cooperation among these chiefs in waging war against the Viet Cong was lacking.

Political interference hindered military operations.

⁷¹John T. Dorsey, Jr., "Stresses and Strains in a Developing Administrative System," in Wesley R. Fishel (ed.), Problems of Freedom: South Vietnam Since Independence (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961), p. 151.

⁷²Robert Shaplen, "A Reporter in Vietnam," New Yorker, 38 (August 11, 1962), p. 50.

⁷³Jordan, op. cit., p. 31.

President Diem occasionally ordered troops around, relying on a "hunch or whim" to plot his strategy.⁷⁴ According to one authority Diem's "lightest statements became policy which few dared criticize, and his convictions were immune to any pressures the Americans might try to exert."⁷⁵ Coordination between political leaders in the palace, and military commanders in the field, in the prosecution of the war, was lacking. Under the best possible governmental and military conditions it would be extremely difficult to win the guerrilla war. Given the poor political and military coordination it would almost seem impossible.

Pressures to Reform and Repercussions

Vice-President Johnson, in his trip to Vietnam, is believed to have pressed the Diem government for political reforms, and the New York Times reported that domestic reforms were made a condition of increased military aid.⁷⁶ General Taylor recommended that President Diem be encouraged to liberalize his regime. The United States Ambassador accordingly urged Diem to decentralize his government and allow more political freedoms.⁷⁷ The Vietnamese Government offered stiff resistance.

⁷⁴Shaplon, loc. cit.

⁷⁵Montgomery, op. cit., p. 100.

⁷⁶New York Times, May 29, 1961, p. 1.

⁷⁷Ibid., November 27, 1961, p. 1.

In late November, 1961, the government controlled press indicated that Washington had undergone a change of policy toward Vietnam. Whereas the United States had in the past been unconcerned with the question of political reform,⁷⁸ the United States was now applying strong pressure to reform. This aroused the resentment of the ruling Ngo family,

A Saigon newspaper accused the United States of attempting to use South Vietnam as "a pawn of capitalist imperialism."⁷⁹ Eight-column headlines in Thoi Bao and Tu Do read, "Republic of Vietnam is not a Guinea Pig for Capitalist Imperialism--Is It Time to Revise Vietnamese American Collaboration?"⁸⁰ Editorials criticized the "interference by the United States in South Vietnam's internal affairs." One paper declared that the United States attached "conditions" to increased foreign aid, and charged that a main condition was that, "Washington can interfere in the internal

⁷⁸Washington Post, June 17, 1962, p. E4. In September, 1960, in an "off the record" talk with the Michigan State University Group in Vietnam, a high American official stated that Washington had given the embassy authority to apply pressure for reform in the Diem regime. The embassy's efforts to encourage reforms achieved little, if any, positive results. It took a position that seems to typify American policy toward Vietnam: communism was the only alternative to Diem. Furthermore the official said that Americans expect too much political liberalization, and Vietnam cannot afford an opposition party. Personal files of Robert Scigliano, professor of political science, Michigan State University.

⁷⁹Quoted in New York Times, November 25, 1961, p. 7.

⁸⁰Quoted in Ibid., November 27, 1961, p. 1.

affairs of this country."⁸¹

In early December, 1961, American-Vietnamese relations came close to a crisis. Washington seriously contemplated calling Ambassador Frederick E. Nolting back to the United States for "consultations."⁸² Mr. Nolting found it exceedingly difficult to budge Vietnam's stubborn leader toward reforms.⁸³ He felt that President Diem should give capable aides a voice in the government and army. Nolting urged Diem to take a more liberal view towards the political opposition. Diem balked at liberalizing his regime and refused to implement suggested changes in Vietnam's military organization.⁸⁴

In the second week in December, 1961, the Vietnam government announced several reforms: pay increases for the army and Civil Guard;⁸⁵ joint United States-Vietnamese military intelligence cooperation; and the sharing by Diem of strategic responsibility with Vietnam's National Security Council.⁸⁶ The purpose of the National Security Council was to facilitate better United States-Vietnamese liaison and

⁸¹Ibid., November 27, 1961, p. 4.

⁸²Ibid., December 1, 1961, p. 1.

⁸³Ibid., December 1, 1961, p. 4.

⁸⁴Ibid., December 6, 1961, p. 15; Ibid., November 27, 1961, p. 1.

⁸⁵Ibid., December 10, 1961, p. 2.

⁸⁶Ibid., December 17, 1961, pp. 1, 27.

coordination. Henceforth, the United States would have a voice in planning the war against the Viet Cong.⁸⁷ Changes were made in Vietnam's general intelligence network of gathering and evaluating information.⁸⁸

Political and economic changes were also agreed upon. Provincial councils were to be organized to give the regime a broader base, and a National Economic Council was to be organized to give business, professional and labor groups a voice in the government. President Diem urged these groups to initiate legislation and to criticize bills drafted by the National Assembly.⁸⁹

The actual reforms instituted by Ngo Dinh Diem did not measure up to the announcement. Although Vietnam's military organization was somewhat improved, political power remained highly concentrated. There was, in fact, only a nominal liberation of the regime. According to Robert Trumbull:

Developments . . . indicate Ngo has prevailed again. Little has emerged, at least openly, from the discussions made by Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor . . . except for a set of assurances by Ngo that steps will be taken to make his Administration more "efficient." There has been no mention of "liberalization."⁹⁰

⁸⁷"Vietnam: Debate Over Diem," Newsweek, 59 (March 5, 1962), p. 41.

⁸⁸New York Times, February 20, 1962, p. 34.

⁸⁹Ibid., January 9, 1962, p. 12; Ibid., January 5, 1962, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁰Robert Trumbull, "'Mandarin' Who Rules Vietnam," New York Times Magazine, Sec. VI (January 7, 1962), p. 87.

The Diem government had reacted strongly to American proposals for reform, and the United States did not feel able to push them too strongly. The cost of reforms seemed to compromise amicable relations, and American policy-makers decided henceforth to try a different tactic. According to Homer Bigart, American line became "Let's not prod the Saigon Government too much."⁹¹

On February 16, 1962, Ambassador Nolting delivered a "major policy speech" in Saigon affirming United States support of President Diem. "My Government fully supports your elected constitutional Government."⁹² Nolting urged Vietnamese and Americans to stop criticizing the Saigon government and work instead to improve it from within. Three days later Attorney-General Robert F. Kennedy, on a stopover in Vietnam, said, "We are going to win in Vietnam. We will remain here until we do win."⁹³ This statement, in

⁹¹ Ibid., April 1, 1962, Sect. IV, p. 5.

⁹² Quoted in Ibid., February 16, 1962, p. 1.

⁹³ Quoted in Ibid., February 19, 1962, p. 1. At the airport in Saigon an interesting exchange took place between Robert Kennedy and a reporter. Asked whether the U. S. is involved in a "war" in Vietnam, Kennedy stated:

"We are involved in a struggle."

"What is the semantics of war and struggle?" a reporter asked.

"It is a legal difference," answered the Attorney General.

"Perhaps it adds up to the same thing. It is a struggle short of war."

Quoted in Idem. For a discussion of the legality of America's intervention in Vietnam, see Brian K. Landsbury, "The United States in Vietnam: A Case Study in the Law of Intervention," California Law Review, 50 (August, 1962), pp. 515-531.

conjunction with Nolting's speech underlined Washington's reversal of "hard" diplomacy, and left no doubt that the United States was strongly committed to President Diem.

Increased military assistance and many more military advisors were unmistakable proof that the United States was firmly committed to the defense of South Vietnam, and to the leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem. Washington's unequivocal support was illustrated by President Kennedy's telegram to Diem "that you are safe and unharmed"⁹⁴ when a wing of the Presidential Palace was bombed by two disaffected Vietnamese air force officers on February 28, 1962. President Kennedy's rapid reassurance dissipated any lingering doubts of America's backing.⁹⁵

A sharp difference of opinion over American policy in Vietnam is said to have occurred on May 23, 1962, between Averell Harriman, Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East, and Ambassador Nolting. The occasion was a conference in Bangkok attended by all United States ambassadors in Southeast Asia. Harriman, it was alleged, wanted to apply new pressure on Diem to encourage social reforms; he thought Diem had to attract wider support for his government or else face the probability of losing the war. Nolting disagreed. He felt that Diem was liberalizing his regime as fast as

⁹⁴Quoted in New York Times, February 28, 1962, p. 2.

⁹⁴Robert Scigliano, "Vietnam: A Country at War," Asian Survey, 3 (January, 1963), pp. 53-54.

circumstances permitted. America's ambassador to Vietnam considered Diem to be the only one who could meet the grave military crisis in Vietnam. The report of this encounter claimed that Harriman "vigorously" demanded that Nolting be removed from his post in Saigon.⁹⁶ This alleged diplomatic quarrel polarizes the two main lines of American diplomacy: work with the Diem regime or apply pressure for change.

John D. Montgomery in his book The Politics of Foreign Aid is critical of Washington's lukewarm efforts to encourage political reforms in Vietnam. "Political advice," he says referring to the American ambassadors in Vietnam, "was offered so timidly that it could be safely ignored."⁹⁷ He feels that the political potential of foreign aid to foster responsible institutions has largely been neglected. It is certainly true that America's "non-interventionist dogma" has discouraged democratic forces in Vietnam and, in so doing, has bolstered Diem's authoritarian regime. Little effort has been made, for example, to use American aid to urge the Saigon Government to change the National Assembly into something more than a "rubber stamp."⁹⁸ Montgomery adds that:

⁹⁶Los Angeles Times, May 23, 1962, Part II, p. 5.

⁹⁷Montgomery, op. cit., p. 252.

⁹⁸Ibid., pp. 261, 264.

The most important fact about American "strings" is that the various sanctions available to U. S. aid administrators are either too severe or too trivial to be effective. Withdrawing a program or even withholding funds for a period defeats the object of the aid, a fact well known to both parties.⁹⁹

Montgomery calls for a "much stronger" stand favoring political reforms by the United States if Basic changes are to occur in Vietnam's highly centralized government.¹⁰⁰

In the period under review American choices in Vietnam were limited. The brief experiment in forceful diplomacy illustrated the difficulty of pressuring a country to change against its will when it has a guerrilla war on its hands. In Vietnam foreign coercion and economic duress proved unacceptable ingredients to political change. In this case some nominal political reforms were announced but little was done to implement them. The example of Vietnam raises the question of whether any government can be reformed against its will.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 245.

V

CONCLUSIONS

Senator Mike Mansfield's 1963-1963 Appraisal

The situation in 1962 is best summed up by comparing statements made by Senator Mansfield in 1960 and 1962. In July of the first year, Mansfield was buoyantly confident that the "pioneering spirit which seems to characterize the Vietnamese," coupled with American support would permit Vietnam to maintain itself as a free nation.¹ In a commencement address at Michigan State University, on June 10, 1962, Mansfield's words on Vietnam reflected deep concern. He spoke of the "enormous investment in foreign aid and military assistance," in Vietnam and added:

After five years of military assistance of the most costly kind, it is discovered that the aid went to build the wrong kinds of forces and that it is now necessary to build almost from scratch with the aid of thousands of additional American training and support forces and at an even higher level of annual aid.²

¹Senator Mike Mansfield, "Introduction," in Wesley R. Fishel (ed.), Problems of Freedom: South Vietnam Since Independence (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961), pp. xi, xiv.

²Senator Mike Mansfield, "Interests and Policies in Southeast Asia," Commencement Address, Michigan State University, June 10, 1962.

Vietnam was in 1962, according to Mansfield, more dependent on the United States aid than it was in 1957. This appraisal of the situation acknowledged past American and Vietnamese shortcomings. He added that United States involvement in the future would be "very deep" and very costly.³

In December, 1962, Senator Mansfield made a brief trip to Vietnam. He praised President Diem "as one of Asia's great leaders,"⁴ but made no comment on the progress of the war. Mansfield refused to read a prepared embassy statement that he was "encouraged" and the "guarded optimism" expressed by other recent official American visitors to Vietnam was curiously missing.⁵

In early 1963 Senator Mansfield sounded a foreboding note in a report he submitted with four other senators on Vietnam and Southeast Asia. He stated that the United States was just beginning to cope with the same grave problems that confronted Vietnam in 1955. After two billion dollars of American aid, the young Republic had apparently suffered a serious set-back.⁶

³Idem.

⁴Quoted in New York Times, December 3, 1963, p. 13.

⁵"Vietnam Again," New Republic, 147 (December 15, 1962), p. 5.

⁶U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Vietnam and Southeast Asia, 88th Cong., 1st Sess., 1963, pp. 3, 4. Mansfield is vague regarding the reasons for "current difficulties" that are possibly greater than the ones in 1955. Robert Scigliano's explanation seems the

The report outlined a three-pronged strategy to defeat the Viet Cong: intensify American assistance to win over the tribal peoples; equip government forces to seize the initiative from the Viet Cong; and mobilize the peasants to defend themselves in strategic hamlets.⁷

The Report concluded with a realistic appraisal of the difficult task ahead,, a task that seemingly was hindered by the inflexible nature of the Diem regime. "Able and self-sacrificing leadership" are excluded from a government which "appears more removed, rather than closer to, the achievement of popularly responsible and responsive government."⁸

It is ironic that in 1963 Senator Mansfield should reiterate statements made in his 1953 and 1954 reports, that called for greater emphasis on political and economic development. Was the Senate's 1963 report a sounding board for past American policy as well as future United States policy toward Vietnam; the overemphasis of short-range military considerations at the expense of long-range political developments?⁹

most plausible. Diem's political control of the countryside was seriously slipping three years before the Vietnamese and Americans adequately perceived the severity of the Viet Cong threat. Robert Scigliano, South Vietnam: A Nation Under Stress (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963), Chap. 6, forthcoming.

⁷ Mansfield, et. al., Vietnam and Southeast Asia, p. 6.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

⁹ Hans J. Morgenthau, "Vietnam - Another Korea?" Commentary, 33 (May, 1962), pp. 370-371.

Conclusions

1. American policy toward Vietnam from 1954 to the beginning of 1963, was primarily motivated by a desire to stop the spread of Communism.

2. During that time the United States kept South Vietnam from Communist control. Two important goals of American policy, were not fulfilled: Communism in South Vietnam was not defeated and a viable government was not established.

3. American efforts to encourage a responsive and responsible government in Vietnam were almost negligible. The fact that the Diem regime was vehemently anti-Communist apparently caused Washington to disregard or at least, to tolerate Saigon's dictatorial practices.

4. American efforts to stem the guerrilla insurrection were conditioned by an over-reliance on military considerations. Washington disregarded the importance of a viable political settlement as a prerequisite for effective military action.

5. Today, the United States seems no closer to victory over the Viet Cong than it was in 1959. The sharp increase in American military aid did not enable nationalist forces to stem the guerrilla insurrection.

6. American policy-makers saw Communism as the only alternative to President Diem. The ability of American diplomats to negotiate with the Diem regime for political reform was therefore limited.

7. The political potential of American foreign aid has not been used to encourage political reforms. Foreign aid, has so far been a largely unexploited source of diplomatic strength.

8. Washington's embassy in Saigon has not established adequate channels of communication with the Vietnamese people. Consequently, America's policy toward Vietnam has been formulated without sufficient information.

9. The writer concludes that the guerrilla war in Vietnam will be a long struggle. Any chances of success against the Viet Cong look bleak as long as the Diem regime remains in power.

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