THE UNITED STATES COMMITMENT TO VIETNAM:

A STUDY OF THE POLITICS OF ESCALATION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the principal objectives of United States foreign policy in Asia since 1950 has been the containment of any further spread of Communist influence in the region. Containment had its origins in Europe and can be seen in the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In Asia, containment has involved the United States in military conflict in Korea, Vietnam, and more recently in Cambodia. In addition bilateral and multilateral alliances have been negotiated with a view to preventing the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union from expanding their political influence over the states along the Communist perimeter, considered to be vital to the interest of the United States.

In South Korea, where the government was relatively stable, resistance to the North Korean invasion of 1950 was primarily in conventional military terms. South Vietnam presents a much more complex problem. Not only has the United States been involved in military conflict in North Vietnam, but it has confronted a formidable guerrilla force sup-

ported by the North Vietnamese. This force seeks to replace the weak and narrow based government in Saigon. The military conflict has been unconventional in terms of United States experience, and it has been costly in American lives and materials. Maintaining a viable government in Saigon has been a problem that was not experienced in Korea. Thus, from both a military and political standpoint, the United States has been confronted over the years with a costly and complex engagement. With each phase of the developing military conflict and with each fall of a Saigon government, the United States has experienced an increase in its involvement.

An understanding of the increasing commitment experienced by the United States requires a historical analysis. Initially the Indo-Chinese war was regarded as primarily a conflict between a colonial power and nationalist political forces. The United States did not desire to become involved in this kind of war. However, with the demise of the Nationalist regime in China in 1949 and the coming to power of the Communist Party, the situation in Southeast Asia became more ominous for the United States. The Communist regime in China appeared to the United States to be a major threat to its vital security interest in the region. Assistance in large quantities was given to the French in order to help sustain their position against the Viet Minh which was supported by the Chinese Communists.

With the defeat of the French in Indo-China in 1954 and the settlement at Geneva which permitted the French to withdraw, the United States gave assistance to the Diem regime directly. In effect, it replaced the French in South Vietnam and supported Diem's struggle against the Communists. Economic, technical, and military assistance not only continued but was eventually augmented with a large number of military advisers. By 1965, the United States' position had evolved from that of supplier of material assistance and advisers to one of complete and direct military involvement. The purpose of this study is to examine the process by which the United States became a full military participant in the Vietnamese war and the sustaining power in support of the Vietnamese government.

It is assumed that South Vietnam was considered to be vital to the United States' defense perimeter in Asia because of its location in the east-west air and sea lanes between Asia and Europe. In addition, South Vietnam under Communist control was viewed as a convenient stepping-stone to further political and military conquest of surrounding areas which would directly interfere with the position of the United States in the Pacific. In terms of these considerations the United States decided in 1950 to assist the French in hopes that they could maintain a dominant position in the region. But after 1954, when the French were defeated, it was decided

that support should be given to the Diem Regime, which was believed to have some nationalist appeal and a chance to become a viable and legitimate government. Perhaps the weakness of this regime and the complexity of the environment were not fully understood; or perhaps if they were understood, there was some hope that a viable government could be developed and that it was necessary to risk an entangling involvement.

The United States initially anticipated only a limited commitment of aid and advice to the Diem government, but the weakness of this government and the intensity of the military effort of the South Vietnamese Communists compelled the United States leadership to gradually shift from a policy of aid and advice to a complete military and political commitment in South Vietnam. This commitment has forced the United States to provide the leadership in the military contest and to determine the form of the political order in South Vietnam, including the selection of political leadership. This also implies, and this study seeks to confirm, that the question of the United States' commitment to the defense of the South Vietnamese regime is closely linked to the broader "containment-of-Communism" policy in Asia and the Pacific area.

This study attempts to identify the stages that characterized the evolution of the military and political commitment

in South Vietnam, once a general commitment to the Southeast Asian area was made. Perhaps the extent of the eventual commitment was not originally anticipated. A question of considerable importance is whether the full commitment which was finally made has served the best interests of the United States in Southeast Asia. How does a limited political and military commitment in support of a foreign regime force a large power to escalate its involvement in order to legitimize its original commitment? This research should provide a background for further investigation of United States involvement in other areas of political instability. The methodology employed in the preparation of this thesis is descriptive-analytical.

Chapter one presents a historical perspective of the problem. This will include a broad analytical description of United States foreign policy objectives in Asia since 1950.

Chapter two discusses why the United States believed it necessary to commit itself to the maintenance of the Diem regime after the demise of the French position in Vietnam and the Geneva Conference.

The third chapter provides a detailed presentation of the progression of this commitment to the Diem regime in the years from 1954 to 1963. The emphasis of this chapter will be on the critical internal and external problems confront-

ing South Vietnam.

Finally, the fourth chapter discusses South Vietnam's inability to cope with its problems without vast amounts of economic aid and military assistance from the United States and how this led the United States to a full military commitment including the maintenance of political order in Saigon.

The data and source material consist of primary sources in the form of documents relating to alliances, international conferences, and statements and pronouncements of the various parties concerned. The specific documents used are mainly found in published collections of documents. Extensive use was made of United States Government document sources. Articles in professional journals were particularly helpful on specific problems not thoroughly discussed in comprehensive works. An invaluable source was the New York Times.

CHAPTER II

THE UNITED STATES AND INDO-CHINA 1945 - 1954

Since World War II the United States has been extremely sensitive to political developments threatening the status quo in areas considered vital to its security interests. Of particular concern has been the threatened rise to power of Communist leaderships in the countries of these areas. Resistance to these developments has required the expenditure of considerable energy and resources. Large amounts of economic and military aid have been dispatched to friends and allies who have been willing to share the burden, and a world-wide system of military alliances has been created to check the military expansion of the adversary powers. These developments have been a manifestation of the United States policy of containment originally enunciated in 1947 in response to the Soviet Unions' challenge in Europe and later extended to Asia. George F. Kennan, who has provided a vivid expression of this policy, wrote:

> It is clear that the United States cannot expect in the foreseeable future to enjoy political intimacy with the Soviet regime. It must continue to regard the Soviet Union as a rival, not a partner, in the political arena. It must continue to expect that

> Soviet policies will reflect no abstract love of peace and stability, no real faith in the possibility of a permanent happy coexistence of the Socialist and Capitalist worlds, but rather a cautious, persistent pressure toward the disruption and weakening of all rival influence and rival power.
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> Balanced against this are the facts that Russia, as opposed to the western world in general, is still by far the weaker party, that Soviet society may well contain deficiencies which will eventually weaken its own total potential. This would itself warrant the United States entering with reasonable confidence upon a policy of firm containment, designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counter-force at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interest of a peaceful and stable world. [1]

At mid-century, when the United States had adjusted in some measure to the Soviet challenge in Europe, it found that postwar events in the Far East had frustrated its effort to create a stable Orient around the China of Chiang Kai-shek. With the establishment of the Communist People's Republic of China and the fear that Peking would forcefully extend its boundaries and influence in the Far East, the United States took the lead in an effort to provide a deterrent. Southeast Asia soon became a focal point of United States' concern in this rivalry.

Secretary of State Dean Acheson's speech in Washington, January 12, 1950, comprised an overall statement of United

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[1] George F. Kennan, American Diplomacy 1900-1950 (Chicago, 1951), p. 104.

States Far Eastern policy for the time. The Secretary very carefully defined the nation's defense perimeter in the Far East, but went on to say there were other problems confronting Asia which were incapable of being solved by military means. The Secretary stated:

> This defensive perimeter runs along the Aleutians to Japan and then goes to the Ryukyus, then runs from the Ryukyus to the Philippine Islands. So far as the military security of other areas in the Pacific is concerned, it must be clear that no person can guarantee these areas against military attack. But it is a mistake, I think, in considering Pacific and Far Eastern problems to become obsessed with military considerations. Important as they are, there are other problems that press, and these other problems are not capable of solution through military means. These other problems arise out of susceptibility of many areas, and many countries in the Pacific area, to subversion and penetration. That cannot be stopped by military means.[2]

This statement suggested the limits of the United States military commitment in Asia and pointed to "soft" spots where it was considered that military means could not be relied on primarily. Unfortunately the statement was vague in reference to what the United States considered to be its interests beyond the military defensive perimeter.

By June of 1950 North Korea had crossed the 38th parallel, invading South Korea, a country outside the announced

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[2]United States Department of State. The Department of State Bulletin. Washington: United States Government Printing Office, XXII, January 23, 1950, p. 111. Hereafter cited as Bulletin.

defensive perimeter. The United States responded militarily despite Secretary Acheson's January statement. To United States' leadership this invasion was nothing less than the beginning of a general Communist assault on the "free" world. "The attack upon the Republic of Korea," President Truman warned the nation, "makes it plain beyond all doubt that the international Communist movement is prepared to use armed invasion to conquer independent nations."[3] The Soviet Union was accused of encouraging the attack. If aggression succeeded in Korea, so the argument ran, it would be repeated elsewhere until it rendered a third world war unavoidable. The Korean War also caused the United States to take a more active interest in Southeast Asia. To prevent attacks in this area, the President increased military assistance to the Philippines and to the French in Indo-China and ordered the Seventh Fleet to patrol the waters between mainland China and Formosa.

China's entry into the Korean War in November, 1950, was used by the Administration to support the argument that the Communist threat of aggression was world-wide. But, not until the Korean War demonstrated the strength of mainland China did United States leadership accept the necessity of building an alliance system that would cover all of the Far

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[3] Bulletin, XXIII, July 3, 1950, p. 5.

East. In August and September, 1951, the Truman administration negotiated mutual defense treaties with the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand. Also in September, 1951, it signed a similar pact with Japan, which gave the United States the right to maintain land, air, and naval forces in and about Japan.

The danger, according to United States leadership, rested in the ability of Communist agitators to aggravate the nationalist aspirations of people so that they would rebel violently against the existing order. Before a new stability could be created, it was believed, the Communists would gain control of the State and convey it into the Soviet orbit. So pronounced became this interpretation of pressures against the status quo in Asia, that nationalism was discounted and the Communists were credited with stimulating all revolutionary action against governments friendly to the West. Thus, the United States made a commitment to preserve the status quo, and to work toward limiting change in the Far Eastern area to a peaceful and gradual process. There seemed to be no choice but to place its emphasis on military means to prevent change that would be detrimental to its interests, but the Korean War remained an isolated example of traditional military aggression. Elsewhere the pressures for change, whether Communist-led or not, responded to indigenous political conditions and took the form of revolutions.

The situation in Indo-China demonstrated the truth of Secretary Acheson's appraisal of conditions in Asia. The strength of the revolutionary forces which were confronting the French lay not in the fact that their leader, Ho Chi Minh, was a Communist, but sprang from the nationalist fervor of the people and their general desire to rid the country of French rule. Above all, it demonstrated that revolutionary change could not be prevented by military means. But the fact that Ho Chi Minh was a Communist convinced the United States leadership that this was not a civil war, but Communist aggression directed by China and the Soviet Union.

United States leadership, therefore, being fully convinced that most change in Asia was due to Communist pressure and influence, began constructing its Asian policy around a series of alliances aimed at the containment of Communist states. In addition to the earlier pacts the United States had signed with Japan, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand in the late summer and fall of 1951, the United States entered into a mutual defense treaty with the Republic of Korea in October, 1953.[4] As will be developed later in this study, United States leadership in general, and Secretary Dulles in particular, believed that the West

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[4]Richard P. Stebbins, ed., Documents on American Foreign Relations, 1953 (New York, 1954), pp. 312-313. Hereafter cited as Documents.

had suffered a severe diplomatic defeat at the Geneva Conference in the summer of 1954. Believing that further Communist aggression in Southeast Asia was now only a question of time, United States leadership believed that what was needed was some sort of an alliance system for the area. The result was the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, which was negotiated in September of 1954.[5] The treaty was to become a basic instrument of United States policy in Southeast Asia.

The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization was comprised of the United States, England, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Thailand, and the Philippines.[6] These

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[5]Ibid., 1954, pp. 319-323. Actually, Secretary Dulles had proposed a formal alliance prior to the Geneva Conference. "The Threat of a Red Asia," Address by Secretary Dulles, Bulletin, XXX, April 12, 1954, p. 540. According to Russell H. Fifield: "The conflict in Indo-China proved an obstacle to such action, for a number of prospective participants viewed a multilateral security pact or "united action" under the circumstances as a means of involvement in war rather than a deterrent to it. The United States believed a security treaty would strengthen the West in the coming negotiations with the Communists on Indo-China, but Great Britain was convinced that such a pact should await the outcome of the Geneva Conference." Russel H. Fifield, Southeast Asia in United States Policy (New York, 1963), p. 27.

[6]South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia were not parties to the Treaty, but they were included in the area covered by the defense and economic provision in a protocol to the Treaty. Laos was removed from coverage under the Treaty as a result of the Geneva Conference in 1962 which neutralized it, and Cambodia later voluntarily withdrew.

eight nations agreed to act jointly in any situation which might endanger the peace of the "area" south of Taiwan. India, Burma, Ceylon and Indonesia's refusal to join limited its military value. In fact, the pact required little of its Asian members except that they resist what was understood to be "Communist aggression." In return for this, the United States would provide economic, political and military support. Common action under the treaty, however, could be difficult to achieve since each member state reserved the right, in the wording of the treaty, to make the response it deemed necessary in each situation. With the negotiation of a mutual defense treaty with the Republic of China on Taiwan in December, 1954, Secretary of State Dulles completed the United States alliance system in the Far East.

The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization was intended to be the backbone of the United States' defense structure in Southeast Asia. However, Secretary Dulles made it plain that the United States would not permanently maintain forces in particular countries of the region for the purpose of deterring aggression, but would develop mobile striking power that could respond when needed. He said at the Manila Conference:

> ...the responsibilities of the United States are so vast and farflung that we believe we would serve best not by earmarking forces for particular areas of the Far East but by developing the deterrent of mobile striking power plus

strategically placed reserves.[7]

The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization actually had little real strength.[8] The Asian members possessed only conventional weapons and in those terms were militarily weak. European members were withdrawing from the region and realistically could not be depended upon to make major contributions. Also, during this period the United States defense strategy was based upon "massive retaliation" against a major aggressor, and limited attention was given to the prospects of fighting a localized war. In view of these factors the SEATO arrangement merely provided boundaries within which the United States was concerned that the status quo be preserved. The burden for maintaining the status quo during this period of change realistically rested upon the United States. Its leadership, however, hoped that direct military involvement could be avoided by extending aid to the weak governments in the region and by using the nuclear threat against any large power aggression. In a ten year period beginning in 1945, United States policy in the Far East and United States policies toward Indo-China in particular had

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[7] Bulletin, XXXI, September 20, 1954, p. 391.

[8] C. L. Sulzberger, "The Loss of Options in Vietnam," New York Times, January 11, 1965, p. 44. This author described the alliance system constructed by Secretary Dulles as "valueless".

evolved from reliance upon major European powers in the region to one in which the United States was the principal protector. The questions this study now turns to are as follows: What were the reasons and the process by which United States policies toward Indo-China made this transition? How did United States policy evolve from one of relative non-interest in the area in 1945, to one of a unilateral military commitment to defend the states of the area against what United States leadership termed "Communist aggression" in 1954?

The Evolution of United States Policies Toward Indo-China 1945-1954

Throughout the Second World War, the Free French frequently asserted their intention to return to Indo-China after the War. However, the French Cabinet on March 24, 1945, announced that Indo-China would have a "new" political status within the French community. France, it was said, had always believed that Indo-China deserved a special position within the French community. However, there seems to have been several motives behind this new plan. The Japanese had offered Indo-China her independence after the War; so the French offer was made partly to counteract this. In the background, however, the French leadership feared the possibility that Indo-China might be placed in an interna-

tional trusteeship after the war. The French leadership knew that both Marshal Stalin and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek did not oppose this idea and that President Roosevelt was highly in favor of it. Roosevelt, they knew, blamed France for allowing Indo-China to become the springboard for Japan's attack on the Philippines, Malaya, and the Dutch East Indies. If the idea of placing Indo-China under an international trusteeship had not been so vigorously opposed by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the plan might have been implemented.[9]

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[9]At a press conference held aboard the U.S.S. Quincy on February 23, 1945, en route to Yalta, Roosevelt said: "For two whole years I have been terribly worried about Indo-China. I talked to Chiang Kai-shek in Cairo (Nov., 1943) and Stalin in Teheran. They both agreed with me....The first thing I asked Chiang was, 'Do you want Indo-China?' He said, "It's no help to us. We don't want it. They are not Chinese. They would not assimilate into the Chinese people." I said, 'What are you going to advocate? It will take a long time to educate them for self-government.' He said they should not go back to France, that they have been there over a hundred years and have done nothing about educating them, that for every dollar they have put in, they have taken out ten, and that the situation is a good deal like the Philippines were in 1898....I suggested at the time to Chiang, that Indo-China be set up under a trusteeship--have a Frenchman, one or two Indo-Chinese, and a Chinese and a Russian, because they are on the coast, and maybe a Filipino and an American, to educate them for self-government.... Stalin liked the idea. China liked the idea. The British didn't like it. It might bust up their empire, because if the Indo-Chinese were to work together and eventually get their independence, the Burmese might do the same thing to England. The French have talked about how they expect to recapture Indo-China, but they haven't got any shipping to do it with. It would only get the British mad. Chiang would go along. Stalin would go along. As for the British,

Because of Churchill's opposition, by the spring of 1945, United States leadership had apparently ruled out the possibility of any major interference with the French position in Indo-China. However, the United States continued to be critical of the French intention to return to Indo-China. The French were suspicious that the United States was interested in the region for itself and were annoyed by the presence of the Office of Strategic Services in Indo-China. Major Patti who was in charge of the Office of Strategic Services in Hanoi seemed to the French to be unusually anti-French. The Office of Strategic Services was looked upon as the vanguard of American imperialism in Indo-China.[10]

The March 24, 1945 plan, despite its high-sounding phraseology, called for the re-establishment of French hegemony in Indo-China after the Japanese forces had been defeated and forced to evacuate the area. The most vigorous oppo-

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it would only make the British mad. Better to keep quiet just now." Samuel I. Rosenman, ed., The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1944-45 (New York, 1950), pp. 562-563.

[10]According to a French report, OSS agents went so far as to propose to Ho Chi Minh that economic interests with which General William Donovan, OSS Chief, was associated, would help reconstruct Vietnamese railroads, roads, and airfields, in exchange for economic privileges in the region. Ho, according to this French account, rejected the offer. Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indo-China (Stanford, 1954), p. 130n.

sition to this plan came from Vietnamese leadership itself. In a message to General de Gaulle, the Vietnamese Emperor Bao Dai wrote:

> You would understand better if you could see what is happening here, if you could feel this desire for independence which is in everyone's heart and which no human force can any longer restrain. Even if you come to re-establish a French administration here, it will no longer be obeyed: each village will be a nest of resistance; each former collaborator an enemy, and your officials and colonists will themselves ask to leave this atmosphere which they will be unable to breath.[11]

Leading the opposition, however, at this time, not only to the re-establishment of French hegemony, but also to Bao Dai himself, was a thin, wisp of a man by the name of Ho Chi Minh.[12] The Viet Minh had fought the Japanese, and after the War, Ho Chi Minh was able to establish his forces in northern Vietnam. In 1945, the Bao Dai regime at Hue[13] was too weak to cope with the Viet Minh, and on August 26, 1945,

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[11] Ibid., p. 102.

[12] Ho Chi Minh (He Who Enlightens) was born Nguyen Tat Thanh, May 19, 1890, in the central Vietnamese village of Hatinh. He went to Paris in 1911 to agitate against the French for Vietnamese independence. He studied Communist techniques in Moscow from 1923 to 1925. He founded the Indo-Chinese Communist Party in 1930. He formed the Viet Minh (full name: Vietnam Doc Lap Dong Minh Loa - League for the Independence of Vietnam) on May 19, 1941. He adopted the name Ho Chi Minh in 1943.

[13] Hue was the old Imperial city, 400 miles north of Saigon. It was the traditional City of the Emperors.

the Emperor abdicated in favor of Ho. Ho Chi Minh declared the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on September 2, 1945. The Capitol was moved to Hanoi, and after seventy-five years of foreign domination, first under the French and then the Japanese, Vietnam was free and united.

General Leclerc began the reconquest of Indo-China for France on October 25, 1945. By January, 1946, French troops had recaptured most of the cities of Cochin China, and the rich rubber plantations. By February, 1946, most of the Viet Minh leaders had been forced to flee to Hanoi. French leadership, on March 7, 1946, recognized the automony of the Viet Minh regime in the North with Ho Chi Minh as President. However, Ho Chi Minh, in a campaign to win all of Vietnam, kept guerrilla pressure on the French troops until full-scale war broke out between the two protagonists on December 19, 1946. This date marks the beginning of the first Indo-Chinese War, a war, which initially attracted very little attention. In fact, there was very little international interest in Indo-China in 1946 and 1947. This included the United States.[14]

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[14]Indonesia seemed to United States policy-makers to offer far better reasons for intervention than Vietnam. For one thing, both Americans and Englishmen had substantial investments in Indonesia, while Indo-China was almost exclusively a French economic preserve. Also, because of her tradition of anti-colonialism, United Stated leadership was hesitant to play the role of assisting a colonial power

The United States did have a real interest in France, however, which United States policy-makers considered to be a key nation to the defense and recovery of Western Europe. The French argued that, if they lost Vietnam, it would lead to the loss of most of their empire and would have disastrous economic and military repercussions in France. When this argument was added to the fact that the Communists played a key role in the Vietnamese resistance, the United States Government ceased being so openly critical of French policy in Indo-China. The United States contented itself, however, by simply expressing a desire for peace in Vietnam. In February, 1947, Secretary of State George C. Marshall said that he hoped "a pacific basis of adjustment of the difficulties could be found."[15]

Despite early French victories on the battlefield, it soon became apparent to French leadership that its objectives in Vietnam could not be accomplished by military means alone. It was then that the proposal was made to return Bao Dai to his throne. Bao Dai, it was hoped by Americans[16] and French

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regain her empire.

[15]New York Times, February 8, 1947, p. 2.

[16]William C. Bullitt, "The Saddest War," Life, December 29, 1947, pp. 64-69.

alike, still had enough influence in Vietnam to win over many of Ho Chi Minh's supporters. William C. Bullitt, United States Ambassador to France during World War II, had visited Indo-China in the fall of 1947 and had talked to the former Emperor in Hong Kong. Evidently, Bullitt had persuaded United States leadership to consider the merits of returning Bao Dai to his throne to counteract the popularity of Ho Chi Minh. With the arrival of the Chinese Communists on the Vietnamese border by the winter of 1948-1949, the French position in Indo-China became critical. The dimensions of the problem changed considerably, for Ho Chi Minh would soon have a powerful ally close at hand. It was proposed with some urgency by the French government that Bao Dai be returned to his throne in the hope that he could provide an alternative to Ho Chi Minh.

After a great deal of persuasion, the Emperor Bao Dai agreed to return to Vietnam as Emperor, and as head of Government. The Elysee Accords, by which the Emperor agreed to return, were signed by Bao Dai and Vincent Auriol, President of France, on March 8, 1949, at the Elysee Palace in Paris.[17]

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[17]By the provisions of the Elysee Agreements signed in Paris on March 8, 1949, Vietnam officially joined the French Union as an Associated State. France promised to support a Vietnamese application for membership in the United Nations. However, this did not mean that Vietnam was independent or even close to it. France still had control of Vietnam's foreign and military affairs. Cochin China became a part of

In June, 1949, the new unified state of Vietnam was formed, under the leadership of Bao Dai. The Department of State issued a statement saying that the United States hoped "for the progressive realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Vietnamese people."[18]

When the Ho Chi Minh government sought recognition early in 1950, the Communist People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union immediately recognized the Northern regime. Secretary of State Dean Acheson issued a statement saying that this "should remove any illusion as to the nationalist character of Ho Chi Minh's aims and reveals him in his true colors as the mortal enemy of native independence in Indo-China."[19] For the French this served to overcome initial reluctance of the United States to come to the assistance of a colonial power. United States leadership now interpreted the conflict as an integral part of the international power struggle between the East and West. If the Communists won in Vietnam, so the thinking went, they would have an entree into the "soft underbelly" of the Asian continent. In turn, this would endanger the United States' vital security inter-

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the new Associated State of Vietnam.

[18] Bulletin, XXI, July 18, 1949, p. 75.

[19] Ibid., XXII, February 13, 1950, p. 244.

ests throughout the Pacific area. The French government, of course, was aware of this change in thinking on the part of the leadership of the United States and took advantage of it to secure aid.

The Bao Dai government owed its existence to the Elysee Agreements which had been signed in Paris on March 8, 1949, but these agreements were not immediately ratified by the French Assembly. The Assembly ratified them on February 2, 1950, after being told by the government that ratification was a prerequisite to economic assistance from the United States.[20] On February 7, both the United States and Great Britain extended recognition to the Bao Dai government. Later that month, the French government put in a formal request to the United States for military and economic aid to Indo-China. France had been insisting for some time that Indo-China had become an international responsibility and a problem that should be dealt with by all of the large powers. The aid was granted to France in the spring of 1950.[21] Although France insisted that all military aid be sent directly to her, military aid was also granted to the three Indo-

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[20]Ellen J. Hammer, "Genesis of the First Indo-Chinese War," Vietnam, ed. Marvin E. Gettleman (Greenwich, Conn., 1965), p. 80.

[21]Bulletin, XXII, May 22, 1950, p. 821.

Chinese states.[22] However, most of the aid went to the Bao Dai regime in Vietnam. United States leadership believed that it must sustain this regime in order to enable it to rally around itself the nationalists who were then in Ho Chi Minh's camp. The United States made it clear that it was not supporting France as a colonial power and the only reason it granted the aid was to "enable Indo-China to emerge from colonial status into real independence."[23] The leadership of the United States declared it did not intend to assume the major burden of defending Indo-China. French leadership, at this time, was talking of United States aid in terms of hundreds of millions of dollars.[24] This aid, granted in the spring of 1950, was the beginning of the United States financial commitment to South Vietnam.[25]

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[22]Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Most of the $75,000,000 at President Truman's disposal until June 30, 1950, under the Mutual Defense Assistance Act, was to be granted to Indo-China, and this was to be primarily for military equipment. Further aid after that date would have to be voted by Congress. Transportation and communications equipment, including aircraft, was high on the list of material to be sent to Indo-China.

[23]New York Times, May 9, 1950, p. 3.

[24]Ibid., p. 1.

[25]Senator J. William Fulbright, ed., The Vietnam Hearings (New York, 1966), p. 9.

The Emperor, Bao Dai, returned to Vietnam after the French National Assembly ratified the Elysee Accords to find himself in what amounted to a political vacuum. It did not take the Vietnamese long to see Bao Dai for what he really was, a puppet of the French colonialists. No one was more aware of the weakness of his position than Bao Dai himself, and in January, 1950, he resigned as Prime Minister. His successor, Nguyen Phan Long, tried to win over members of the resistance, but had little success. No sooner was he in office than he appealed for United States military and economic aid to be granted directly to Vietnam without being routed through French intermediaries, and he made no secret of his desire to develop a Vietnamese army. He asked the United States to give him some $146,000,000 for economic reconstruction and for a national army. With this aid he felt that Ho Chi Minh could be defeated within six months. United States leadership refused to grant him this aid, but Long's pro-American policy antagonized the French administration, and when French officials directed Bao Dai to dismiss him the Emperor did so in May, 1950. In 1953, on the basis of military plans drawn up by General Henri-Eugene Navarre and a French pledge to intensify the prosecution of the war and make "every effort to break up and destroy enemy forces in Indo-China," the United States promised France an

additional $385 million.[26] This was the Navarre Plan, which the United States financed, and which called for French reinforcements and for the training of native troops.

In the Vietnamese Thai country near the Laotian border was located what was considered to be the key point of the entire French military position in Indo-China. This was the French jungle fortress at Dienbeinphu. By January, 1954, the entire region was heavily beseiged by the Viet Minh. The French immediately requested that the United States send them four hundred airplane mechanics and maintenance men.[27] The United States finally sent two hundred, and this caused some concern in the United States that it might be the prelude to a large-scale commitment of United States forces in Indo-China; President Eisenhower in his message to the Congress, January 7, 1954, assured Congress that it would not.[28]

On March 20, 1954, General Paul Ely, the French Chief of Staff, arrived in Washington and informed President Eisenhower, Secretary of State Dulles, and Admiral Radford[29]

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[26] Bulletin, XXIX, October 12, 1953, p. 487.

[27] New York Herald Tribune, January 27, 1954, p. 7.

[28] Bulletin, XXX, January 18, 1954, pp. 75-79.

[29] Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

that unless the United States intervened at Dienbienphu, the fortress would fall to the Viet Minh and the war would be lost. According to Chalmers M. Roberts,[30] General Ely's remarks initiated a tense struggle within the National Security Council. Admiral Radford favored intervention and was supported by Secretary Dulles and Vice-President Richard Nixon. According to the Roberts' account, Secretary of State Dulles, Admiral Radford, Under-Secretary of Defense Roger Kyes, Navy Secretary Robert B. Anderson, and Thruston B. Morton, (Dulles' assistant for Congressional Relations), met with several leaders in both houses of the Congress on April 3, 1954.[31] Secretary Dulles evidently had called the meeting in order to secure a joint resolution from Congress supporting the President in the employment of air and naval power in Indo-China, if the President believed that it was needed to rescue the French at Dienbienphu. Upon hearing from Admiral Radford that the other members of the Joint

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[30]Chalmers M. Roberts, "The Day We Didn't Go To War," The Reporter, XI, (September 14, 1954), 31-35.

[31]There were eight legislators present at this meeting: Senate Majority Leader William Knowland, Senate Minority Leader Lyndon Johnson, and Senators Eugene Millikin, Richard B. Russel and Earle C. Clements. From the House, there was Speaker Joseph Martin, John W. McCormack and J. Percy Priest.

Chiefs of Staff were not in agreement with him,[32] and learning that Secretary Dulles had not contacted any of the Allies to see if they would support the United States if it did decide to intervene, the Congressmen were all in agreement that Dulles had better consult with the Allies first. Secretary Dulles seemed very anxious to implement the plan, for within a week after the April 3 conference he had contacted the diplomatic representatives of nine allied states. United States leadership believed that Great Britain's cooperation was essential to the implementation of the plan. However, Prime Minister Churchill, believing that it was too late to save the French position at Dienbienphu regardless of what the Allies did or did not do, refused to be a party to the proposed intervention. Secretary Dulles in the end had to tell the French that what they wanted the United States to do would be impossible.

United States leadership, however, was convinced that the Communists should be denied a military victory in Indo-China. Secretary Dulles said in March, 1954:

> If the Communist armies achieved victory in Indo-China or any part thereof, they would surely resume the same pattern of aggression against other

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[32]Admiral Radford at this point explained that the other members of the J.C.S. did not know as much about the Far East as he did. Chalmers M. Roberts, "The Day We Didn't Go To War," The Reporter, XI, September 14, 1954, 31.

> free peoples in the area. Under the conditions of today, the imposition in Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia, and it's Chinese Communist ally, by whatever means, must be a grave threat to the whole free community.[33]

According to a report carried in the New York Times on April 17, 1954, a high government source was quoted as saying:

> The situation in Southeast Asia is currently the most important issue facing the United States. It relates to a war we might have to fight in the future and that we might lose...Conquest of areas so vital to Japan's economy would reduce Japan to an economic satellite of the Soviet Union...The war in Indo-China involves the future of Asia, of Europe and, finally, the United States... The United States as a leader of the free world cannot afford further retreat in Asia. It is hoped that the United States will not have to send troops there, but if this government cannot avoid it, the Administration must face up to the situation and dispatch forces.[34]

This was the first public statement by a top ranking member of the administration to the effect that there was a possibility that United States troops might be deployed in Indo-China short of direct aggression by the Chinese Communists.

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[33] Bulletin, XXX, April 12, 1954, pp. 539-542. The quote comes from a speech delivered by Secretary Dulles before the Overseas Press Club of America at New York City, on March 29, 1954, with the purpose of "...outlining the administration's thinking about two related matters...Indo-China and the Chinese Communist regime."

[34] New York Times, April 17, 1954, pp. 1-3.

The Geneva Conference

Soon after the Korean conflict had drawn to a close, in July, 1953, pressure began building up in France for a negotiated settlement along Korean lines. At Bermuda in December, 1953, Premier Joseph Laniel of France, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Prime Minister Winston Churchill met to discuss the situation in Indo-China. They decided to meet at the Foreign Minister level early in 1954 with the Soviet Union. This meeting took place in Berlin, in February, 1954. Here it was decided to hold a conference in Geneva in April, where both the Korean problem and Indo-China would be discussed. The Geneva Conference began on April 27, 1954, but the Indo-China part of the Conference did not begin until May 8. A few hours earlier, Dienbienphu had fallen to the Viet Minh under the command of General Vo Nguyen Giap. This, of course, strengthened considerably Ho Chi Minh's negotiating position at the Conference. It also brought the first Indo-Chinese War to a close. It was a humiliating defeat for the French which brought their military influence in Asia to an end.

Four sets of Agreements came out of this Conference.[35]

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[35]Agreement on Vietnam, Agreement on Cambodia, Agreement on Laos, Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference, July 21, 1954.

An analysis of these Agreements is beyond the scope of this paper, but they deserve most careful study, for each of the parties to the current conflict in Vietnam claims the Agreements justify their stand.

The principal purpose of the Geneva Convention, of course, was to bring to a close the seven and one-half year war between France and the Viet Minh in Vietnam. The Conference, which began on April 27, lasted until July 21, 1954. The Soviet Union and Great Britain served as co-chairman. Also represented at the Conference were delegates from France, the Communist People's Republic of China, the United States, the French-sponsored State of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and the Viet Minh. The Geneva Accords provided that Vietnam would be partitioned roughly at the Seventeenth Parallel. This was to be a temporary demarcation line until nation-wide elections could be held which would determine the ultimate disposition of the two regimes. Consultations on these elections were to begin no later than July 20, 1955, and elections were to be held by July 20, 1956. Separate treaties provided for independent kingdoms in Laos and Cambodia.[36] All three states were to be neutral, and each would have the right to have diplomatic relations with any nation

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[36] Documents, 1954, pp. 302-310.

it chose. However, each side was strictly forbidden to increase its military manpower or armaments beyond the replacement of worn out equipment it already possessed. Neither side could join any military alliance or permit the establishment of a military base on its territory under the control of a foreign nation. An International Control Commission was established to supervise the implementation of the Agreements. India, (acting as chairman), Canada, and Poland were the three member states of this Commission. These were the principal provisions of an international agreement which all involved cite as supporting their position. The Agreement is officially known as an Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam.[37]

Both the Saigon and Viet Minh delegations initially insisted on territorial unity, and asked for national elections to be held immediately under United Nations supervision. This was clearly impossible considering the turn the war had taken. Partitioning the state was the only practical answer, but it is important to bear in mind that this division was to be only temporary. Vietnam was divided into "temporary regroupment areas." The South Vietnamese delegate, Foreign Minister Tran Van Do, refused to sign the

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[37]Ibid., pp. 283-302.

Agreements in protest of the provision for de facto partition of Vietnam. However, he pledged that his government would take no action that would violate the terms of the Agreement. Later, President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam was to say that these Agreements which were signed at Geneva in July of 1954 were not binding on South Vietnam because they were signed by a foreign military power--France.[38] He therefore refused to enter negotiations with Ho Chi Minh concerning the elections in 1955, and refused to participate in the elections of 1956.[39] Later, he permitted a foreign nation--the United States--to establish military bases on South Vietnamese soil and accepted millions of dollars worth of military equipment from that same nation. In effect a de facto military alliance with the United States was created.

The United States delegation at Geneva was under constant pressure from the Congress not to sign anything which would give the impression of approving a surrender to the Communists. Thus, the United States, a non-belligerent in the military contest, also refused to sign the Agreements.

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[38]During the Geneva Conference, Emperor Bao Dai was persuaded to appoint Ngo Dinh Diem as Premier.

[39]For position of United States leadership on elections, see page 26.

The United States, however, on the last day of the Conference, issued a so-called Unilateral Declaration.[40] The Soviet Union and Communist China may have been reluctant to leave the United States in a position where it would be free to interfere in Indo-China in the future, or intervene in support of the Diem Regime. By applying diplomatic pressure on the Allies of the United States, the Communist nations may have been able to force Secretary Dulles to agree not to disturb the Agreements. Whatever may have been the politics behind the United States' Unilateral Declaration, it was certainly an equivocal recognition of the Agreements.

Secretary Dulles was in a very uncomfortable position at the Conference. In the first place he was fearful that the Conference would result in a severe diplomatic defeat for the West and particularly the United States; and Communist China, which the United States did not recognize, was a participant. It has been reported that at one point, he turned his back on the outstretched hand of China's Premier, Chou En-lai.[41] Mr. Dulles left the Conference on May 4, even before the delegates turned to the Indo-China question. Undersecretary of State Walter Bedell Smith remained to

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[40] Documents, 1954, pp. 316-317.

[41] Edgar Snow, The Other Side of the River (New York, 1962), p. 695.

represent the United States. He read the Unilateral Declaration of the United States to the delegates. This document contains three principal provisions: (a) the United States promised to "refrain from the threat or the use of force to disturb the Agreements," (b) the United States "would view any renewal of the aggression in violation of the aforesaid Agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security." and (c) the United States would "continue to seek to achieve unity through free elections, supervised by the United Nations to insure that they are conducted fairly." However, it must be remembered that the United States was not actually a signatory to the Agreements.

United States leadership perhaps failed to understand the realities of what was possible and not possible at Geneva. Speaking just prior to the Geneva Conference in April, 1954, Senator John F. Kennedy reflected this attitude on the floor of Congress. He warned against any "negotiated solution that would allow participation in the Vietnamese government by Ho Chi Minh." The Communists, he said, "would then eventually take over because they were so popular."[42] Instead, he called for an independent Vietnam supported by

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[42]U. S., Congressional Record, 83rd. Cong., 2nd Sess., 1954, C, Part 4, 4672-4674.

the United States.

At the Geneva Conference, however, there seemed to be no doubt, that national political unity could be restored by general elections to be held no later than July 21, 1956. The idea of permanent partition had been officially rejected by both sides. Furthermore, Ho Chi Minh, probably believed that he would very easily win the election. President Eisenhower summed it up very well in his memoirs:

> I have never talked or corresponded with a person knowledgeable in Indo-Chinese affairs who did not agree that had elections been held as of the time of the fighting, possibly eighty percent of the population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader rather than Chief of State Bao Dai. [43]

It must be remembered that while Ngo Dinh Diem was relatively unknown even to the Vietnamese people, Ho Chi Minh was known and recognized internationally. His reputation as a national patriot first and party man second, seemed to be unquestioned by the Vietnamese. Ho Chi Minh, not Diem, had been the one who organized the opposition to the French and eventually defeated them at Dienbienphu. Thus for many, the two-year delay of the elections was simply a face-saving device for the West.

In February, 1956, the Diem regime requested France to

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[43] Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mandate for Change 1953-1956 (New Jersey, 1963), p. 372.

withdraw its troops from South Vietnam. The French, faced with a new colonial crisis in Algeria, more than willingly complied with the request. The French High Command was dissolved on April 26, 1956. After the French forces had moved out, who could guarantee that the Agreements would be implemented? South Vietnam, which was not a signatory, had already declared it was not bound by them. The United States had not signed the Agreements, though it had declared that it would not disturb them. Consequently, the elections were never held. Both the Soviet Union and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam protested this apparent violation of the Accords but to no avail. The United States supported Diem's position and on July 1, 1956, the State Department issued a statement charging that North Vietnam had already violated the cease-fire provisions and also had chosen to disregard the freedom-of-movement provisions.[44] Secretary Dulles had also given his approval to Diem's refusal to hold the elections.[45]

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[44] Bulletin, XXXV, August 13, 1956, pp. 264-269.

[45] New York Times, March 15, 1956, p. 12. According to this report, Secretary Dulles did not believe that there would be a renewal of the conflict even if elections to unite North and South Vietnam were not held in July, 1956.

The Viet Minh guerrillas who had remained in South Vietnam after 1954 had made very little trouble for the Diem regime; after all why hasten what was assumed to be a legal transition of power? In fact, the most dangerous threats to Diem's regime during his first two years as Premier arose from Nationalist and non-Communist factions within South Vietnam. However, with the passage of the July 21, 1956, election deadline, Ho Chi Minh realized there was no longer even a remote chance to peacefully reunify Vietnam. A few months later, the Viet Minh guerrillas began to assassinate village chiefs in South Vietnam. The 1965 State Department White Paper called these guerrillas who had never left South Vietnam "outside aggressors."[46] By the time the conflict became a military challenge to United States leadership in 1961, the Second Indo-China War had been going on for almost five years.

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[46]Marcus G. Raskin and Bernard B. Fall, eds., The Viet-Nam Reader (New York, 1965), pp. 125-128.

CHAPTER III

UNITED STATES AID AND THE DIEM REGIME

1954-1963

United States leadership has considered the maintenance of a pro-Western regime in South Vietnam vital to its national security interests in the entire Pacific area. For this reason, the United States felt compelled to commit itself long before the Geneva Conference began in April, 1954, to the maintenance of a "free" Vietnam. Aid, as has been previously noted, began in the spring of 1950, and by 1954, the United States Government had assumed responsibility for eighty percent of the French military expenditures in Indo-China.[1] Between 1950, when the United States began to absorb the costs of the Indo-China War, and 1954, it expended $1.5 billion for this purpose, most of which was used by the French military forces in Vietnam.[2] The distribution of economic and military aid, which had averaged $500 million

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[1] Hammer, p. 313.

[2] Robert Scigliano, South Vietnam: Nation Under Stress (Boston, 1964), p. 111.

annually after 1950, was under the direct supervision of a United States Military Assistance Advisory Group (M.A.A.G.) to the French forces in Indo-China. This Group had been created as early as July, 1950, for this purpose.[3]

This aid, however, did not accomplish its intended purposes, and the situation continued to deteriorate, until the French military forces were forced to surrender at the jungle fortress of Dienbienphu on May 8, 1954. On that same day, the delegates at the Geneva Conference, which had opened in April, turned to the Indo-China question.[4]

Given its assumptions regarding United States security interests in Vietnam, the settlement reached at Geneva on July 21, 1954, as was stated previously, was interpreted by United States leadership as a diplomatic victory for Ho Chi Minh. Consequently, the United States moved rapidly to strengthen the Diem regime and the South Vietnamese economy, in order that it might successfully maintain itself vis-a-vis the Communists.

This chapter is concerned with the rise and fall of Ngo Dinh Diem. It includes a discussion of the internal problems

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[3]United States aid included small arms and automatic weapons, ammunition, vehicles, aircraft, naval vessels, hospital supplies and technical equipment.

[4]The Geneva Conference is discussed in Chapter II.

with which Diem was confronted; of the inability of the Diem regime to cope with these domestic difficulties, and of how this led United States leadership, given its assumptions regarding its vital security interests in the area, to attempt to stabilize the Diem regime through the employment of aid. Thus, it is shown in this chapter that United States aid was extended to the Diem regime for the purpose of stabilizing the political order and that the evolution of the aid program can be observed in stages, as the problems of stabilizing the political order became more difficult. The increasing difficulty experienced by the Diem regime was paralleled by an increasing involvement by the United States.

Several events occurred during the summer of 1954 which were of special significance for the future of Vietnam. One, of course, was the Conference which ended at Geneva on July 21. A month before, on June 18, Pierre Mendes-France had been invested as Premier by the French National Assembly. On this same day in Paris, Ngo Dinh Diem also announced that he had accepted the Emperor Bao Dai's invitation to take over the premiership of the newly created Associated State of Vietnam.

Ngo Dinh Diem, who had demanded and received from Emperor Bao Dai full civil and military power, formally assumed office on July 7, 1954. In the past Diem had continually refused to accept the premiership unless Vietnam was accorded

dominion status similar to that of India and Pakistan in the British Commonwealth of Nations. Vietnam was now, of course, an independent state and had even withdrawn from the French Union. Under Ngo Dinh Diem's leadership, South Vietnam not only succeeded in eliminating the remaining political influences exercised by France, but by the Emperor Bao Dai as well. One of the foremost Asian scholars of the United States writing in 1954 called Diem the "most prominent of the nationalist leaders in 1953."[5]

Ngo Dinh Diem's fame as an "uncompromising" nationalist leader in Vietnam had been established as far back as 1933. In May of 1933, Bao Dai, who had become Emperor the previous year, appointed the thirty-two year old Diem to the post of Minister of Interior. Diem, a Catholic and a member of Vietnam's feudal aristocracy, soon found that his efforts at reform were being blocked by the French colonial administrators. He therefore resigned his post in September, 1933, and went into semi-retirement from public life. He continued, however, to work for the independence of Vietnam. What distinguished Diem from most of the other nationalist leaders was the fact that he continually refused to commit himself to the French, the Viet Minh, or the restored Bao Dai regime until he accepted the post of Prime Minister in 1954. Ngo

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[5]Hammer, p. 286.

Dinh Diem was therefore, by 1954, the symbol of unyielding opposition to colonialism and Communism.

By 1954, Diem was also well known to United States leadership. He had come to the United States in 1950, upon the advice of a Michigan State University political scientist, Wesley Fishel, whom he had met on a visit to Japan. Fishel had persuaded Diem to come to the United States to plead his case for Vietnamese independence. While in the United States, he managed to enlist in his cause many important and influential Americans. Among these were Francis Cardinal Spellman and Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas. Through Justice Douglas, Diem met Senators Mike Mansfield and John Kennedy. Both Senators Kennedy and Mansfield believed that in Diem the United States had found a popular alternative to Ho Chi Minh. Senator Kennedy in a speech made in April of 1954 called for an independent (that is, an anti-Communist) Vietnam and had Diem in mind as the logical man to lead this regime.[6]

There are many hypotheses as to why United States leadership decided to support Diem. A recent book about the Central Intelligence Agency, for example, placed the responsibility for swinging United States support to Diem on Edward

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[6]U. S., Congressional Record, 83rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1954, C, Part 4, 4672-4674.

Lansdale, a C.I.A. agent serving in Vietnam during President Eisenhower's Administration.[7] But such a view ignores the fact that in 1954, United States leadership, given its interests, had no alternative. Ngo Dinh Diem, a Catholic, was anti-Communist and satisfied the requirements for serving as an instrument of the United States. The leadership of the United States, therefore, became convinced after deciding to aid the South Vietnamese regime that the anti-Communist nationalism proclaimed by Ngo Dinh Diem was indispensable to its objectives. As early as October of 1954, President Eisenhower in a letter to Diem assured him of the support of the United States.[8] This letter has been cited many times as proof of United States' commitment to the South Vietnamese regime. Without United States support it is doubtful that Ngo Dinh Diem would have remained in power as long as he did. That his regime was politically dependent on this support was demonstrated many times. One example to illustrate his political dependence was the support which United States leadership extended him when he was having sharp disagreements with his chief of staff, General Nguyen Van Hinh.

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[7]David Wise and Thomas B. Ross, The Invisible Government (New York, 1964), p. 34.

[8]Raskin and Fall, p. 100.

General Hinh had disobeyed several orders from Diem including one sending him to France. Hinh was warned by United States leadership that aid to South Vietnam would be immediately cut off if he made any attempt to unseat the Premier.[9] President Eisenhower's special ambassador to Vietnam, General V. Lawton Collins, repeated this warning to General Hinh's military supporters on November 17, shortly after his arrival in Saigon.[10] General Hinh left Vietnam on November 19, after a summons from Emperor Bao Dai, and, once safely out of the country, was dismissed from his post.

In October, 1954, Senator Mike Mansfield issued a report, recommending that: "In the event that the Diem government falls, I believe that the United States should consider an immediate suspension of all aid to Vietnam and the French Union Forces there."[11] This report not only influenced United States leadership but also led to a belief among the Vietnamese that Diem was the only man that the United States would deal with. Any group that ousted him would not re-

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[9]Peter Schmid, "Free Indo-China Fights Against Time", Commentary, January, 1955, p. 28.

[10]New York Times, November 17, 1954, p. 14.

[11]Senator Mike Mansfield, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Report on Indo-China, October 15, 1954, (Washington, 1954), p. 14.

ceive the support of the United States. The North Vietnamese government and the National Liberation Front always referred to the South Vietnamese government as "My-Diem" or American-Diem-regime. Without United States military, economic, and financial aid the Diem regime could not have survived its domestic difficulties, much less have coped with the pressure applied to the regime by Ho Chi Minh.

The Diem regime, believing that with United States support it would be secure in the future, demonstrated a repressive and authoritarian character in many ways. By 1957, for example, any criticism of the methods employed by the regime was not tolerated, and anyone who opposed the regime was dealt with harshly. The police, guided by their informers, seemed determined to eliminate the last vestige of opposition. The situation grew so bad in 1958 and 1959 that Diem finally alienated the villagers against the regime. With disorder and insecurity returning, many civilian and military groups in the nationalist camp came to the conclusion that the powers of Diem had to be limited or he had to be removed from power.

The United States continued to support Diem, however, because of its primary concern with security and the felt need to maintain in power a non-Communist regime. Because United States leadership viewed security solely in military terms, it failed to fully grasp the political nature of guerrilla

warfare and the importance of political reform as the most effective means of countering the Communist challenge to Vietnam. Because of its preoccupation with security, the United States was willing to give in to the Vietnamese government on most other issues. The United States might have wished that Diem was a little more democratic, and it certainly was not blind to the regime's shortcomings; but its leadership considered him the only alternative to the Communists in Vietnam.

Internal Problems

The partition of Vietnam near the Seventeenth Parallel was a political necessity at the Geneva Conference, considering the turn the war had taken. Economically, however, it was an unnatural and unfortunate division. From the beginning of French colonial rule in the 1870's, Vietnam had developed as an economically integrated unit. Most of her industry was located in the North, while the South was devoted principally to the raising of agricultural products and fishing. This was a logical development, and because of territorial specialization, there had always been a considerable degree of trade between the two areas. But this was not the only problem. The Civil War from 1946 to 1954, had virtually devastated the economic structure of the country. Thousands of acres of agricultural land had been abandoned to the jun-

gle, while roads, railroads, and inland waterways had been severely damaged. Vietnam's independence from French colonial rule also resulted in an exodus of French firms, which meant that Vietnam would suffer in the future from a shortage of skilled personnel. It also meant the cessation of new French investment. Meanwhile, the Diem regime had to cope with the problem of assimilating nearly 850,000 refugees from the North into the already weakened economy. The evacuation of the 178,000-man French Expeditionary Corps from Vietnam meant a loss of the most important income-generating group in the state. The departure of French troops, completed on April 26, 1956, directly cost 85,000 people their jobs in South Vietnam.

Another problem the Diem regime had to face was the archaic and cumbersome governmental system it had inherited from the French. The French had never allowed the Vietnamese to exercise executive responsibility in the civil service, so the Diem regime suffered from lack of competent, and experienced officials. Many had gone over to the side of Ho Chi Minh. The country was also left with an education system that had not prepared the Vietnamese for the civil service. A number of intellectuals withheld support from Diem because of authentic political differences with the new regime. Many others did not extend their support to Diem because of the habit they had fallen into during the long

years of battling the French, of refusing their support to the established government. The Vietnamese, it will be recalled, had considered the Emperor Bao Dai a puppet of the French colonialists when he returned to his throne in late 1949. In contrast to the Diem regime, Ho Chi Minh's government dated back to 1945. It was unified by strict Communist Party discipline. The regime also had a vast network of agents in the South, and the Vietnam People's Army comprised seven hard-core divisions abundantly equipped with modern United States weapons which had been captured by the Chinese in Korea and sent to the forces of Ho Chi Minh. The Northern regime also had an unconquerable will and determination to win control over the South and unite the country.

In 1954, some 80,000 Viet Minh guerrillas and regulars, in accordance with the Geneva Accords, went northward. However, the elite of General Giap's southern force, perhaps another 5,000 to 6,000, simply went underground. There were, in effect, from this time on two governments in South Vietnam. The Viet Minh forces in the South were so well organized that when night came, much of the rural area came under their domination. The strength of the Viet Minh forces in the South grew, nurtured by economic chaos and the political deficiencies of the Saigon regime. As the strength of the Viet Minh grew, there was growing dissatisfaction among the South Vietnamese peasants with a regime that no longer could

maintain law and order. Economic progress in the South slowed down considerably as lawlessness increased.

In its attempt to restore law and order and solve its many domestic difficulties, the Diem regime increasingly resorted to dictatorial and repressive methods, and in so doing, alienated large segments of the population.

The Diem regime, however, did manage to carry out many positive reforms. A new university was established at Hue. Malaria eradication teams were sent into the countryside. The large leper population in South Vietnam was treated extensively with drugs, developed, manufactured and supplied by the government. The entire rural health program was expanded. Food and textile production rose above prewar levels. Prior to 1954, the south had relied upon the north for most of its manufactured goods. There was some light manufacturing in the south but not enough to sustain the economy. Most of these goods after 1954 had to be imported because Diem continually refused to negotiate any kind of trade agreement with Ho Chi Minh. This attitude on the part of Ngo Dinh Diem amounted in fact to an economic blockade of North Vietnam which, until then, had received an average of more than 200,000 tons of rice a year from the South.

President Diem's main problem, however, was one of trying to consolidate support in the South for his regime. As previously mentioned, President Diem had considerable diffi-

culty in securing competent personnel in the government. Under these circumstances, it was inevitable that he should come to depend largely upon his Roman Catholic family to assist him in carrying out his official responsibilities. However, the Vietnamese resented the nepotistic practices he followed in choosing his top governmental associates. For example, one of his brothers, Ngo Dinh Nhu, was the chief advisor to the President as well as the head of the secret police organization in South Vietnam. Ngo Dinh Can, another brother, was the Governor of Central Vietnam. A third brother, Ngo Dinh Thuc, was the Archbishop of Hue, while a fourth brother Ngo Dinh Luyen, was Ambassador to Great Britain. Mrs. Ngo Dinh Nhu was the official hostess at the Presidential Palace and a deputy in the National Assembly. Madame Nhu's father, Tran Van Thoung, was Ambassador to the United States, and her mother was the permanent Vietnamese observer at the United Nations. This then, was the ruling elite of South Vietnam, in which only about seven per cent of the population was Roman Catholic. Thus, President Diem created a dynastic, family rule and carried personal centralization to an extreme point. President Diem found it difficult to bridge the gulf between this ruling elite and the Vietnamese people. The overwhelming majority of the refugees from the north who crossed the Seventeenth Parallel during the 300 days (the time alloted by the Geneva Accords for free move-

ment between the two zones)[12] were Catholic. This gave to the regime a strong Catholic cast. For example, of the 123 deputies in the first National Assembly, twenty-seven members (twenty-two per cent) were Catholics.[13]

Another unfortunate act by President Diem was the announcement that the one million Chinese in Vietnam would have to become citizens. A presidential order was issued on August 22, 1956, which declared that all persons of Chinese parentage born in Vietnam were now Vietnamese citizens. This act was resented by many of the Chinese in South Vietnam as "compulsory naturalization." A further order, issued in March, 1957, declared that no alien would be allowed to conduct any type of retail business in South Vietnam. This order seriously affected the 600,000 Chinese residents of Saigon-Cholon,[14] who owned or controlled most of the commerce and light industry in that city.

Thus, President Diem continued to alienate large segments of the population. He promised the 700,000 or so mountain tribal people, known as the Montagnards, equality and integration with the lowland Vietnamese. The Montag-

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[12]Gettleman, p. 198.

[13]Scigliano, p. 54.

[14]Cholon is the Chinese suburb of Saigon.

nards, who made up less than five per cent of the population of South Vietnam, but occupied sixty per cent of the country's territory, soon discovered that "equality" meant the right of the lowland Vietnamese to colonize the hill areas and drive the tribesmen back into more inhospitable areas. President Diem also wanted to close the tribal schools where classes were taught in the native dialects. The North Vietnam regime dealt with the problem entirely differently. Two autonomous zones were created in North Vietnam where Montagnard tribal leaders were free to deal with their own local affairs. An Advisory Council on Minorities was created in Hanoi which advised the government on all matters affecting the tribes.

Thus, under the rule of President Diem and his Roman Catholic family, the disintegration of South Vietnamese political and economic order proceeded. Businessmen were restive under the rigidity and complexity of the many government controls. The Chinese community in Saigon-Cholon was resentful of the discriminatory laws passed by the National Assembly. The Buddhists were claiming discrimination because President Diem was a Catholic. The South Vietnamese were also resentful of the fact that the government was controlled by Vietnamese from central and North Vietnam. The government lacked broad support and confidence. The people themselves were without even the rudimentary political rights.

United States Aid and the Diem Regime

These problems placed a heavy burden on the already limited resources of the country and resulted in inflation, which was contained only by massive amounts of United States economic aid. Considering United States leadership's assumptions regarding its vital security interests in Southeast Asia, the decision to strengthen the Diem regime through the employment of vast amounts of economic and military aid was a logical one. It was felt that if the United States did not establish the South Vietnamese government on a more permanent footing, it would fall to Communist leadership. If this happened, the entire strategic defense position of the United States in the Pacific area would be endangered. Thus, assistance was rendered to the South Vietnamese Government because of its inability to cope with its domestic difficulties.[15] These domestic difficulties threatened to engulf the regime, and President Diem was without the economic, military or moral resources to cope with them.

Economic aid, therefore, has been vital to the Diem regime from its beginning in 1954. The United States assumed economic responsibility not only for the influx of the refu-

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[15]The Viet Minh did not pose a grave threat to the security of the South Vietnamese government until the July, 1956 election deadline had passed.

gees from the North who needed immediate economic assistance, but also for the support of the large South Vietnamese army which had been almost entirely dependent upon French financial aid. United States military and technical assistance was increased, and foreign service personnel was considerably augmented. Beginning on January 1, 1955, United States aid was given directly to the Vietnamese government, bypassing the French authorities entirely. This was a reflection of diminishing French influence over Vietnamese affairs. By 1960, South Vietnam was more dependent on United States aid than any other state in the world, with the exception of Laos.[16] From 1955 to 1960, United States economic assistance to the South Vietnamese government totaled $1,387,200,000. During this same period, military equipment and supplies amounted to almost $500 million.[17] Another indication of the necessity of United States aid to the South Vietnamese economy was the foreign exchange gap which was closed by the economic assistance during the early years of the Deim Regime. For example, during 1960, Vietnam exported $84 million

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[16]As compared to Vietnam's economic aid of $13.7 per capita in 1960, Laos received $17.0, Taiwan $12.5, Korea $8.6, Pakistan $3.8, India $1.9, and Thailand $1.2. Milton C. Taylor, "South Viet-Nam: Lavish Aid, Limited Progress," Pacific Affairs, 34 (Fall, 1961), 244.

[17]Ibid.

in goods and imported $239 million, resulting in a trade deficit of $155 million. United States economic assistance in that year, however, amounted to $179 million.

TABLE I [18]

FIGURES IN MILLIONS OF U.S. DOLLARS

Year	Exports	Imports	Trade Deficit	American Economic Assistance
1956	34	205	171	210
1957	80	269	189	282
1958	55	232	177	187
1959	75	225	150	207
1960	84	239	155	179

United States aid during the first two years of the Diem administration, however, was limited in both time and scope by the nation-wide Vietnamese elections scheduled to take place no later than July 21, 1956. It was only after it was certain that these elections would not be held that the United States came to regard its aid to the Diem regime

[18] Ibid. Foreign trade and United States aid statistics are summarized above in Table 1 (in millions of U. S. Dollars, with trade figures on a calendar year basis and aid on a fiscal year). Totals are rounded to the nearest one million.

as a long-range program with important implications for the entire economic structure of South Vietnam. This, of course, called for a revaluation of the entire aid program. One problem was the official exchange rate of thirty-five piastres to the dollar, which was maintained in South Vietnam, although on the semi-official market the piastre was worth less than half that amount, and in Hong Kong it was worth even less. The size of the aid program to South Vietnam has always been dictated primarily by military considerations and has been consumption-oriented. Economic development has been only of secondary importance.

Table II indicates that two-thirds of the total United States aid granted between the years 1954 and 1958 was used to finance the redevelopment of the South Vietnamese paramilitary and military forces. From 1955 to 1960, only thirteen per cent of all United States aid was available for economic and technical aid projects. For the five fiscal years from 1955 to 1959, the aid program (excluding military hardware) totaled $1,101.1 million. The United States Operations Mission also provided additional non-defense expenditures of $127.6 million in project aid and $16.2 million for technical cooperation. Sixty eight per cent of this aid was spent for defense. In 1958, United States aid accounted for 62 per cent of total public expenditures in South Vietnam.

Admiral Felix Stump summed up the importance of economic

TABLE II

AMERICAN AID, 1954-58* [19]
(in thousands of dollars)

Fiscal Year	Military Support	Refugee Aid	Economic and Technical Assistance	Total
1957-58*	$155,000	----	$29,000	$184,000
1956-57	173,000	----	82,900	255,900
1955-56	109,000	$37,000	50,500	196,500
1954-55	234,800	55,785	29,715	320,300
TOTAL	$671,800	$92,785	$192,115	$956,700
Percent of Total	69	9	22	100

* Totals for 1958 are tentative. A $25 million loan was also extended which would be added to the economic and technical assistance total of $50 million. In 1957-58 about 50 per cent of the economic and technical assistance total was allocated to the construction of a modern highway between Saigon and Bien Hoa.

and military aid to the objective of realizing security very well in 1958 when he told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

[19] Richard W. Lindholm, "American Aid and Its Financial Impact", Viet-Nam: The First Five Years, ed. Richard W. Lindhold (Michigan, 1959), p. 317.

> The free world could not hold the non-communist nations without economic and military aid. With all Asia in the Soviet orbit, I don't think Europe and the Middle East could survive the threat of Communism. This would leave the United States an island in the Communist world, and eventually this country would be brought to its knees by the Soviet-dominated nations. Foreign military and economic aid are absolutely essential to the survival of the United States.[20]

The importance of the security objective, for example, has been reflected in the size of the United States military mission in South Vietnam as compared to that of the economic and other groups. The economic aid program has been used in many ways to generate resources for support of the vast military budget; in other words, economic and technical aid projects have been tailored to serve military purposes. For example, it was announced in the spring of 1961 that the United States would increase its aid in order to expand the Vietnamese army by 20,000 men. This announcement came after Vice-President Johnson's visit to South Vietnam in May.[21] There can be no doubt that this decision by United States leadership had an economic impact by causing a rise in the dollar level of the commercial import program, but the motivation for this decision was entirely military. At a press

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[20]U. S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Hearings, Mutual Security Act of 1958, 85th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1958, p. 104.

[21]Bulletin, XLIV, May 22, 1961, p. 957.

conference held in Washington on May 4, 1961, Secretary of State Dean Rusk reported that the Viet Minh forces in South Vietnam had increased to 12,000 men and during 1960, they had killed and kidnaped more than 3,000 people. He also said the United States was ready to render to South Vietnam "every possible help, across the entire spectrum in which help is needed." He refused to comment, however, on whether the United States might intervene militarily.[22]

It was announced on May 5, 1961, that Vice-President Lyndon Johnson would go to Asia on a so-called fact-finding mission.[23] Vice-President Johnson declared in a speech delivered to the South Vietnamese National Assembly on May 11 that the United States was ready "immediately" to help expand South Vietnam's armed forces and to "meet the needs of your people on education, rural development, new industry, and long-range economic development."[24] He declared on May 12 that the United States would stand "shoulder to shoulder" with South Vietnam in its war against communism.[25] If the United States was not completely committed to the Diem re-

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[22]Ibid., pp. 756-763.

[23]Ibid., p. 750.

[24]New York Times, May 12, 1961, pp. 1-2.

[25]Ibid., May 13, 1961, pp. 1-2.

gime before Vice-President Johnson went to Southeast Asia on his fact-finding mission, it certainly was after he returned. President Kennedy gave no hint in his announcement that he was sending the Vice-President to Southeast Asia that he had empowered him to make such broad, sweeping statements about what the United States was prepared to do. However, these statements must be viewed as official policy statements of the Kennedy Administration. The United States, having once made a financial commitment, was now prepared to go all the way, "across the entire spectrum", as Secretary Rusk put it, in defense of the South Vietnamese regime. It was announced on May 13, 1961, that an agreement had been reached by the Vice-President and President Diem for increased United States aid to South Vietnam. The aid increases, expected to total $40 million, were to be used primarily to: (a) strengthen the South Vietnamese army and civil guard, and (b) support social welfare and public works programs.[26] The same day, May 13, 1961, Vice-President Johnson declared before a joint session of the Philippine Congress:

> America will honor her commitment to the cause of freedom throughout the community of free nations; we will proceed either alone or with our free friends to preserve our position in Asia.[27]

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[26] Ibid., May 14, 1961, pp. 1-4.

[27] Ibid., p. 3.

The only interpretation that can be drawn from such a statement is that the United States was prepared to embark upon a unilateral course of action in Southeast Asia, if necessary, to preserve its own vital security interests in the area. The issue of freedom was only of secondary importance. United States leadership has very carefully defined what these vital interests were, but it has remained unclear as to exactly how they were being endangered by the civil conflict in Vietnam.[28]

A program was announced on January 4, 1962, in which the United States and the South Vietnamese governments would cooperate in starting "a broad economic and social program aimed at providing every Vietnamese with the means of improving his standard of living."[29] In the past, President Diem had resisted most of the suggested political reforms. These reforms, the United States believed, were essential, in that they would enable the South Vietnamese regime to combat the Viet Minh guerrillas more effectively in the social and economic, as well as the military field. The program was to be financed by South Vietnam by means of heavy duties on luxury imports and by a new tax system. The United States

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[28]For discussion of America's vital security interests in Asia, see Chapter II.

[29]New York Times, January 5, 1962, pp. 1-2.

would provide advice, support essential imports, and finance specific projects. The announcement also states that expenditures for South Vietnam would be "appreciably" above the $136 million worth of economic aid provided in 1961. It also stressed that the United States "simultaneously" would act to strengthen South Vietnam militarily. Thus, in 1962 and 1963, the United States "commitment" to protect and maintain a South Vietnamese regime against internal political forces and "external" aggression had become complete. The Diem regime, unable to cope with either its domestic problems or the civil conflict which threatened to engulf it, continued to deteriorate. While the process of deterioration progressed, the regime became more and more dictatorial and oppressive, until many of its initial supporters had turned against it. United States leadership, determined to prevent the deterioration of the regime, extended vast amounts of military and economic aid to President Diem for the purpose of building him up and stabilizing his government. However, the large-scale military and consumption-oriented United States aid program did not accomplish its purpose, for it did not contribute to genuine economic growth. Thus, United States aid insured its own perpetuation. The United States commitment to South Vietnam, then, is a concomitance of the economic and military aid to that state. As South Vietnam's domestic and foreign difficulties

increased, so did United States aid and its leadership's commitment to the regime. In the next chapter, the process whereby this economic and political commitment evolved into a full-scale military commitment to South Vietnam by February, 1965, is discussed.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNITED STATES MILITARY COMMITMENT AND THE MAINTENANCE OF POLITICAL ORDER

If a viable, pro-Western regime in South Vietnam was essential to the national security interests of the United States in the Pacific area, then a strong political leadership had to be cultivated. Ngo Dinh Diem seemed to qualify as the only man in South Vietnam capable of creating and maintaining a pro-Western regime. At least he was the one considered to be most likely to succeed. Therefore, the Diem regime was extended United States support against the internal disorders which threatened to destroy it and against what was interpreted as communist aggression. The United States leadership as early as 1954 was forced to make risky calculations about the military, economic, and political costs of such an engagement. In its determination to prevent the deterioration of the Diem regime, vast amounts of military and economic aid were extended to President Diem for the purpose of constructing and stabilizing a government. However, the large scale military and consumption-oriented United States aid program did not accomplish its purpose,

because genuine economic growth did not result, nor did political stability. United States aid seemed to insure its own perpetuation. As South Vietnam's domestic and foreign difficulties increased, so did United States aid, and so did the commitment to the Regime. In this chapter, the process by which this economic and political commitment evolved by February, 1965, into a full-scale military commitment to South Vietnam is examined.

"Power", said Madame Nhu, "is wonderful. Total power is totally wonderful."[1] This attitude was also shared by her husband Ngo Dinh Nhu, who was President Diem's brother, chief adviser and head of the secret police in South Vietnam. It provides some indication of the cause of the Buddhist uprising of 1963, which culminated in the military coup on November 1, 1963, and the subsequent overthrow and brutal assassination of President Ngo Dinh Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu. Tran Van Choung, Madame Nhu's father, said of Diem and his brothers,

> They are very much like medieval inquisitors who are so convinced of their righteousness that they would burn people for their own sake, and for the sake of mankind, to save them from error and sin.[2]

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[1]Dennis Warner, "Agony in Saigon: The Lady and the Cadaver," The Reporter, October 10, 1963, pp. 39-42.

[2]Ibid., p. 41.

During the month of May, 1963, the South Vietnamese Buddhists began a series of riotous demonstrations against President Diem, his government, and his Roman Catholic family, whom they accused of anti-Buddhist discrimination. In order to dramatize their protests publicly, several Buddhist monks and nuns burned themselves to death.

Throughout this entire agonizing year, however, United States involvement in the conflict continued to mount. President Diem was warned by the United States that he would be wise to end the Buddhist repression, try to restore good relations between his regime and the people, and concentrate his efforts on battling communist aggression. The United States, however, seemed to assure Diem at the same time that support for his government would continue.

Economic and military aid to South Vietnam came into serious question in the United States in 1963. A report submitted to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee by a four-man panel headed by Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield, questioned the wisdom of continuing to give economic and military aid to the South Vietnamese regime. The report was made public February 24, 1963, and declared that:

> This intensification inevitably has carried us to the start of the road which leads to the point at which the conflict could become of greater concern and greater responsibility to the United States than it is to the government and people of South Vietnam. There is no interest of the United States in Vietnam which would justify, in present circum-

> stances, the conversion of the war primarily into an American War to be fought primarily with American lives. [3]

The Committee believed that the United States should reappraise its "overall security requirement on the Southeast Asia mainland" in order to initiate a gradual reduction in the United States military and economic aid programs. Senator Mike Mansfield recalling his visit to South Vietnam in 1955, commented in this report that what disturbed him was that all the problems that existed in South Vietnam then still existed in 1963, seven years later and after two billion dollars worth of United States aid had been spent. There were other spokesmen, both in Congress and out, who accused the administration of pursuing a "no-win" policy in South Vietnam. When asked to comment on these criticisms of United States Vietnamese policy at his February 13, 1963, news conference in Los Angeles, Secretary of State Dean Rusk replied:

> Our policy there is not that we put in doughboys to do every bit of the job ourselves but that we do what we can to put the Vietnamese in a position to win their war, and they are beginning to win it. It's going to be a long and tough and frustrating and mean war, as any guerrilla operation of that sort has been in the past, whether in Greece or in Malaya.
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> I think it would do some 10,000 or 11,000 men out there a disservice to think this was a "no-win"

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[3] New York Times, February 25, 1963, p. 2.

> policy. They are working with great gallantry and under great difficulties, and the Vietnamese are too. [4]

The anti-government activity which led to the downfall of the Diem regime in 1963 also had the effect of solidifying the United States' commitment to South Vietnam. The Buddhist demonstrations began at Hue, the old capital on the northern coast and a traditional center of Buddhist learning, 400 miles north of Saigon. The ruler of Hue was Ngo Dinh Can, a brother of Diem. Another brother, Archbishop Ngo Dinh Thuc's see was also at Hue. The demonstrations were touched off by a telegram from President Diem in Saigon ordering enforcement of a regulation that only the national flag could be flown during religious ceremonies. The Buddhists were preparing to commemorate the 2,507th anniversary of the Buddha's birth on May 8, 1963, when the order was issued. Just prior to the planned Buddhist celebration, the Catholics in Hue had been celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of Archbishop Ngo Dinh Thuc's consecration as bishop. During these ceremonies, which ended on Sunday, May 5, Vatican flags had been flying all over the city. On May 8, over 9,000 Buddhists demonstrated in Hue against this obvious religious discrimination on the part of President Diem and his Catholic family. The crowd was forcibly dispersed, and nine people

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[4] Bulletin, V. 48, March 11, 1963, p. 365.

were killed.

The Buddhist leaders on May 15, 1963, demanded that the Government grant Buddhists the same legal rights as Roman Catholics and withdraw its ban against religious flags. They also demanded the freedom to preach their religion and requested that the officials responsible for the incident in Hue be punished. The only response from the government was to replace three officials in Hue. The Buddhist leaders rejected this as insufficient and announced that the public protests would be continued until all their demands were met. On June 11, a Buddhist monk, Quang Duc, seventy-three, committed suicide by burning himself to death in Saigon.[5] This event initiated a series of self-immolations during the summer of 1963.[6] All of these were in protest against the government's policies. Mrs. Ngo Dinh Nhu in an address in Saigon on August 3, 1963, referred to the suicides as "barbeques". She called Quang Duc's suicide "murder", and went on to say:

> What else can be said when they (the Buddhist leaders) murder their own kin and their own peers in a most barbaric manner under the pretext of defending a faith that has never been under attack. [7]

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[5] New York Times, June 11, 1963, p. 6.

[6] Seven monks and nuns committed suicide by fire during the summer of 1963 in protest of the South Vietnamese Government's arbitrary actions.

[7] New York Times, August 4, 1963, p. 1.

The same day, Ngo Dinh Nhu, warned in a Saigon interview that if the Buddhist crisis was not soon resolved "it will lead toward a coup d'etat that would be anti-American and anti-Buddhist."[8]

In August, 1963, the Diem government struck back at the Buddhist protest movement charging that the leaders of the uprising were acting as tools of the Communists. The nation's major pagodas were seized, and many priests and student demonstrators were arrested. On August 21, 1963, President Diem imposed nation-wide martial law. Censorship was imposed and a 9:00 p.m. - 5:00 a.m. curfew was ordered. At a Washington press conference on August 16, 1963, Secretary of State Dean Rusk said that the United States was "deeply distressed by the dissensions that have occurred in South Vietnam." He went on to say:

> We are especially distressed because we regret anything which seems to create disunity at a time when things were moving in a favorable direction.[9]

Speaking in Washington on August 25, 1963, Theodore J. C. Heavner, Deputy Director of the Vietnam Working Group, said in connection with the repressive measures taken by the Diem government against the Buddhist leaders:

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[8]Ibid., p. 15.

[9]Bulletin, V. 49, September 2, 1963, p. 359.

> This action represents a direct violation by the Vietnamese Government of assurances that it was pursuing a policy of reconciliation with the Buddhists. The United States can only deplore repressive actions of this nature. [10]

The Department of State had issued a statement on August 21, 1963, to this same effect.[11] The United States made it clear on August 23, 1963, however, that the situation would have no effect on its basic policy of assisting Vietnam in its war against the Viet Cong.[12]

The United States, given its commitment, was either powerless to change the course of action of the Diem regime or believed that in time conditions would improve. Diem advocated democracy, which was set forth as a ruling concept in the Constitution; but in practice it was curtailed and abridged by the use of clandestine political and overt police controls, initiated and applied by his brothers, especially Ngo Dinh Nhu. If President Diem could have pursued more tolerant policies toward the Buddhists and instituted and sustained a good land reform program, he might have been able to gain support for his government even without holding national elections. Robert G. Scigliano, a critic of the

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[10] Ibid., September 9, 1963, p. 395.

[11] Ibid., p. 398.

[12] Ibid.

Diem regime, was in South Vietnam in 1958-1959 as an administrative advisor. Scigliano said of the Diem regime:

> It would seem that the Ngo Dinh Diem government has been unnecessarily cautious and has at times acted for narrow advantage in dealing with the problem of political freedom.

Referring to Diem's opposition in the August, 1959, elections, he said the opposition was agreed on the fact that the regime was:

> A family dictatorship run by a man who is incapable of sharing power and will go to almost any length to preserve it. It (the opposition) doubts the regime's integrity and ability though it often excludes the President himself from the first of these judgments and disbelieves in its (the regime's) good motives.[13]

There can be no doubt that President Diem was repressive and, what is worse, almost completely impervious to advice. This made it difficult, of course, if not impossible, for other leaders to emerge. In his struggle to extend his authority throughout the country, the methods employed by Diem were often ruthless. However, it must be remembered, he was confronted with an almost impossible situation from the very beginning. Saigon itself was dominated by a "sect" of adventurers known as the Binh Xuyen, which had exercised almost absolute, feudalistic control over a large part of

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[13] Robert G. Scigliano, "Political Parties in South Vietnam Under the Republic", Public Affairs, XXXIII (1960), 327-346.

Vietnam for years. A large part of Cochin China was controlled by two other political-religious sects, the Cao Dai and the Hao Hao. All of the sects at one time or another had resisted the Viet Minh or the French. By 1956, President Diem had rendered these sects politically and militarily powerless. He also had to deal with the Viet Minh, who were left behind after 1954, who controlled many of the rural districts, and who had successfully infiltrated the police, army, and civil administration. A good description of Diem's tactics is provided by William Henderson[14] who wrote:

> From the beginning Diem ran his government along the lines of a police state. Most manifestations of political opposition, whether Communist or otherwise, were vigorously suppressed. Civil liberties remained an unfulfilled ideal. Elections were far from free, and many of the devices used to stimulate popular support for the regime bore the familiar stamp of modern totalitarian practice. No doubt these moves could be justified, at least to some extent, in terms of the overwhelming problems confronting Diem during his first two years in office, and also the inexperience of Free Vietnam's people with the forms and substance of democracy. But, by the middle of 1956, after two years of power, Diem had still to prove that his professed devotion to the democratic cause represented anything more than a facade to disguise the increasing plain reality of stern dictatorship.[15]

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[14]Assistant Executive Director of the Council on Foreign Relations, Inc., New York. Mr. Henderson is Far Eastern specialist on the Council's permanent staff.

[15]William Henderson, "Commentary on Casey," Viet-Nam: The First Five Years, ed., Richard W. Lindholm (Michigan, 1959), p. 343.

The above description of the Diem regime's repressive and dictatorial nature provide at least some indications why the Buddhist uprising in the summer of 1963 sounded the death knell for the Diem government. Diem was powerful, but not capable of complete suppression of opposition. The Buddhist demonstrations grew increasingly intense and widespread. The military leaders were drawn into the anti-Diem rebellion. During the last week of August, 1963, Saigon University professors and students also joined the demonstrations. Several university professors were arrested in August for refusing to sign a government loyalty oath. Students boycotted their classes in protest. When student unrest continued, the Government closed down the university and all secondary schools in Saigon. Between 1,000 and 2,000 students were arrested for demonstrating and sent to detention camps. Nhu's Special Forces units and combat policemen were employed in these mass arrests. There was a great deal of criticism of the United States for supporting the Diem regime at this time.

In spite of these difficulties a White House statement issued October 2, 1963, made it clear that the United States leadership fully intended to continue military support of the Diem regime.[16] This statement of United States policy in

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[16]Raskin and Fall, p. 128.

South Vietnam reiterated the position that "the security of South Vietnam is a major interest of the United States as other free nations" and predicted that "the major part of the United States military task can be completed by the end of 1965." It also said that things had progressed to the point that 1,000 military personnel on duty in South Vietnam could be withdrawn by the end of 1963. The report denied that the anti-Government activity in South Vietnam had significantly hampered the military effort.

The coup d'etat itself occurred on November first and second, 1963.[17] A civilian-military government assumed office on November 4, 1963, with ex-Vice President Nguyen Ngoc Tho, a Buddhist, as Premier. A Military Revolutionary Council under Major General Duong Van Minh's chairmanship was formed. This military junta ruled South Vietnam until it was replaced in a bloodless coup d'etat on January 30, 1964, by Major General Nguyen Khanh, Commander of the Army's First Corps.

The new military leadership of South Vietnam said in a military broadcast on November 4, 1963, that "the best weap-

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[17]The chief plotter was Dr. Tran Kim Tuyen, a physician who had protested in writing to President Diem about Madame Nhu's increasing meddling in the political affairs of state. After the second letter, Dr. Tran fell out of favor with the regime and was in effect "exiled" to Cairo as Consul General to get him out of the way.

on to fight Communism is democracy and liberty."[18] The new Regime declared it was on the side of the West and that it was dedicated to the war against the Communists. The head of South Vietnam's ruling military committee pledged on November 6, 1963, that a democratic government would be set up "in the very near future," after the revolutionary regime stabilized the situation.[19]

One day after the new Regime had requested recognition on November 6, 1963, the United States recognized the provisional government.[20] Secretary of State Dean Rusk said in his news conference on November 8, 1963:

> It is our hope that the political and the military leadership that has now formed a new government there in Vietnam will be able to rally the country, consolidate the effort, get on with the job, so that country can be independent and free and secure.

He repeated the traditional United States position that:

> As far as the United States is concerned, we do not have and have never had any special United States interest in terms of military bases or anything of that sort. [21]

He said the United States was primarily concerned with South Vietnam's security and independence. He went on to say there

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[18] New York Times, November 5, 1963, p. 12.

[19] Ibid., November 7, 1963, p. 9.

[20] Bulletin, November 25, 1963, p. 818.

[21] Ibid., p. 810.

would be no problem in South Vietnam "if others would leave it alone."

Lyndon B. Johnson became President of the United States on November 22, 1963, upon the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. In a speech delivered to the Congress on November 27, 1963, the new President pledged that his administration would continue to pursue the policies on Vietnam that had been established by President Kennedy.[22]

By December, 1963, however, President Johnson had abandoned his pledge and the plans of the Kennedy Administration regarding the withdrawal of most of the United States personnel from South Vietnam by the end of 1965.[23] These revised plans were based on a report made to President Johnson on December 21 by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara after returning from a two day fact-finding mission in South Vietnam.[24] Secretary McNamara reported that the Viet Cong had apparently taken advantage of the disorder which followed the coup d'etat on November 1 and had made new gains. This was an important reversal of national policy, a reversal which was to have far reaching effects on the United States

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[22]Ibid., December 16, 1963, p. 910.

[23]Raskin and Fall, p. 129.

[24]Bulletin, V. 50, January 13, 1964, p. 46.

military commitment to South Vietnam. It was more than just coincidence that a change in leadership in the United States in November, 1963, was followed shortly by a corresponding change in leadership in Saigon on January 30, 1964. The Johnson Administration was dissatisfied with General Minh's prosecution of the war and the role that the United States was being forced to play in that conflict. The war was being lost in the South, and there was considerable international pressure at this time for some sort of negotiated settlement in Vietnam.

As previously stated, Major General Nguyen Khanh came to power on January 30, 1964. General Khanh charged that the Military Revolutionary Council under the leadership of Major General Duong Van Minh was involved in a French-led plot to neutralize South Vietnam. Indeed, such a plan had already been proposed by the French. Charles de Gaulle had made the proposal August 29, 1963, that Vietnam (North and South) be converted from a divided state at war into a unified, neutral state that could assume a new role in Asian affairs.[25] De Gaulle had said the French would assist Vietnam in this venture if it was willing to throw off the foreign influence currently being wielded by the United States and the Communist nations. The French proposal had been

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[25]New York Times, August 30, 1963, pp. 1-2.

turned down by President Kennedy on September 2, 1963, as "irrelevant to the current situation in Vietnam."[26] President Kennedy said that as long as the Viet Cong menace existed in South Vietnam, such a plan was inconceivable. The proposal was again made by President Charles de Gaulle on January 31, 1964: this time to the effect that the major Western powers negotiate with Communist China to neutralize Southeast Asia. President De Gaulle said:

> There is in Asia no political reality that does not concern or affect China. There is neither a war nor a peace imaginable on this continent without China's being implicated in it. Thus it would be impossible to envisage, without China, a possible neutrality agreement relating to the Southeast Asian states.[27]

In his reply to De Gaulle on February 1, 1964, President Johnson said he would be prepared to consider any plan that would insure the "neutralization of both North Vietnam and South Vietnam." However, he said he saw no evidence of that developing at the present time.

> As long as Communist-inspired unrest in South Vietnam persists, I think that the present course we are conducting is the only answer, and I think that the operations should be stepped up there. 28

Major General Nguyen Khanh was to rule South Vietnam as

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[26] Bulletin, V. 49, September 30, 1963, p. 498.

[27] New York Times, February 1, 1964, pp. 1-4.

[28] Ibid., February 2, 1964, pp. 1-4.

Premier until a civilian government headed by Tran Van Huong, a former mayor of Saigon, assumed office November 5, 1964. During these months, the crisis in Vietnam deepened and the United States military commitment to the Southern regime increased. Robert Shaplen sums it up very well by saying:

> The year in which General Nguyen Khanh ruled Vietnam, for the most part singlehandedly, was perhaps the most frustrating and turbulent in the experience of the Americans since they had become deeply involved in Vietnamese affairs in 1954. It was a year in which the United States commitment to participate in the war was clearly spelled out, by such measures as the naval and air bombardment of North Vietnamese bases early in August, 1964, in retaliation for attacks by motor patrol boats; and by the gradual dispatch of more planes and more American troops to South Vietnam.[29]

It will suffice at this point to say that the Tonkin Gulf incidents of August 2 and 4, 1964, were used to further escalate the United States' role in the conflict. At this time, as previously stated, the United States leadership believed that the war in the South was being lost, and increasingly it was becoming dissatisfied with the total situation. United States involvement was becoming greater and greater primarily because of the increasing political instability of the South Vietnamese regime. It was becoming impossible to create a government which to any significant

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[29]Robert Shaplen, The Lost Revolution (New York, 1965), p. 235.

extent would be acceptable to all the warring and embittered factions which were tearing the "nation" apart and rendering the United States' military role in Vietnam hopeless. The United States initially looked upon these domestic difficulties as Vietnamese problems, to be settled by the Vietnamese themselves. However, the situation continued to deteriorate and the tendency to engage in constant power struggles remained. Under these circumstances it was difficult for the United States to ignore the internal problems. Dennis Warner stated it this way:

> No new American effort, however, dynamic and dedicated, can have any hope of success without a firm assurance of stability at the top Vietnamese political and military levels. There must be a moratorium on coups, an end to young soldiers' dreams of using their guns to win personal power.[30]

Jean Lacouture argues that the Khanh coup can be attributed in part to the disappointment of United States leadership with the Minh junta's prosecution of the War.

> The officers on General Harkins' staff, began to look for candidates and to sound out the malcontents. Two of these emerged above all the others: Generals Nguyen Khanh and Duong Van Duc.[31]

The United States press had also taken note of the lack of trust General Harkins had for the junta and speculated that

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[30]Dennis Warner, "Vietnam: The Awful Choice", The Reporter, XXX, February 27, 1964, p. 27.

[31]Jean Lacouture, Vietnam: Between Two Truces (New York, 1966), p. 131.

General Minh might soon be replaced by someone more acceptable.[32] Recalling the White House statement on October 2, 1963, in which Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara announced the withdrawal of most of the United States troops from South Vietnam by the end of 1965,[33] the first indication to the United States public of a change in official thinking came in a letter from President Lyndon Johnson to Duong Van Minh, Chairman of the Military Revolutionary Council, on December 31, 1963. The President promised "the fullest measure of support in this bitter fight." The letter went on to declare: "We shall maintain in Vietnam American personnel and material as needed to assist you in achieving victory."[34] Three days before the Khanh coup d'etat, Secretary Robert S. McNamara, testifying before the House Armed Services Committee, said:

> The survival of an independent government in South Vietnam is so important to the security of Southeast Asia and to the free world that I can conceive of no alternative other than to take all necessary measures within our capability to prevent a Communist victory.[35]

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[32] New York Times, January 15, 1964, p. 6.

[33] Raskin and Fall, p. 128.

[34] Bulletin, V. 50, January 27, 1964, p. 122.

[35] Franz Schurmann, Peter Dale Scott and Reginald Zelnik, eds., The Politics of Escalation in Vietnam (Greenwich, Conn., 1966), p. 33.

Franz Schurmann, in discussing Secretary McNamara's testimony, failed to point out in his book that Secretary McNamara also stated before this committee that he still believed that most of the 15,500 American troops on duty in South Vietnam could be withdrawn by the end of 1965.[36] Secretary of State Dean Rusk announced in his press conference on January 2, 1964, however, that

> A Vietnamese Army group seized in the delta area of Vietnam some 300,000 rounds of small arms ammunition, made in China and that without question Hanoi was primarily responsible for their infiltration into South Vietnam.[37]

That North Vietnam was supporting the guerrillas in South Vietnam was no more a secret than the fact that the United States was supporting the South Vietnamese government against them. So, the situation in Washington in 1964 became as confusing as the situation in Vietnam. On the one hand, United States leadership was talking about withdrawing; while on the other (in talking about the deteriorating political situation in Saigon and how Hanoi was assisting the Viet Cong), they were building a strong case for staying.

Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and General Maxwell D. Taylor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reported on the conclusion of a five day inspection trip to

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[36] New York Times, February 19, 1964, pp. 1-8.

[37] Bulletin, January 20, 1964, p. 81.

South Vietnam, March 8-12, 1964, that there had "unquestionably been setbacks" in the war effort. They said, "the Viet Cong have taken maximum advantage of two changes of government, and of more longstanding difficulties" to make new gains. The White House statement continued:

> The supply of arms and cadres from the North has continued; careful and sophisticated control of Viet Cong operations has been apparent; and evidence that such control is centered in Hanoi is clear and unmistakable. [38]

So, United States leadership finding itself inextricably involved in a civil conflict was building a case for charging North Vietnam with aggression. Perhaps the United States built such an air-tight case that it lost all of its options.

In a major policy speech on March 26, 1964, McNamara reinforced the case for external aggression and warned that "the situation in South Vietnam has unquestionably worsened, at least since last fall." He further reported an estimated "20,000 to 25,000 'hard core' Viet Cong guerrillas..." in South Vietnam and said they had been able "to recruit from among the South Vietnamese an irregular force of from 60,000 to 80,000."[39] The secretary candidly admitted that the war there might not be finished "in the first thousand days of the Johnson Administration." It was announced on March 29,

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[38] Ibid., April 6, 1964.

[39] Ibid., April 13, 1964, pp. 562-570.

1964, that the United States would provide South Vietnam with $50 million annually to finance expansion of its armed forces by 50,000 men.[40] This would be in addition to the then current assistance of $500 million annually.

United States leadership made it very clear, almost from the moment that General Nguyen Khanh had seized power, that it was ready to back him fully in his efforts to sustain a government and conduct a war against the Viet Cong. The chief architect of this policy of complete military and financial support of General Khanh's dreams of being the man who saved Vietnam from the Communists seems to have been McNamara. To many, by this time, the war had become "McNamara's war," but the Secretary in his public statements simply ignored these attacks upon his policy. The additional aid from the United States would be used to finance General Khanh's efforts to save South Vietnam from the Communists, as he stated it. These multifarious plans revolved around two basic principles: (1) the mobilization of able-bodied citizens to perform some of the para-military tasks which were essential to the successful conduct of the war and (2) a continuation and improvement of the strategic hamlets program. This, it should be remembered, was South

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[40] New York Times, March 30, 1964, pp. 1-7.

Vietnam's first long-range counteroffensive against the Viet Cong, called Operation Sunrise. It was launched March 22, 1964, in Binh Duong Province, thirty-five miles north of Saigon.

General Nguyen Khanh also had plans to bring the Civil Guard, which was the provincial or regional force, up to full strength and assimilate it into the regular army. The Civil Guard was about twenty per cent under its authorized strength of eighty thousand. These plans also involved merging the village Self-Defense Corps with the Combat Youth for the purpose of defending the strategic hamlets. The Self-Defense Corps also would be brought up to its alloted strength of seventy-two thousand men. General Khanh in addition had developed plans to train young army officers to take over as chiefs of 237 districts in the country and be in charge of the "holding" part of the new "clear and hold" military plan. He realized the difficulties he would have in implementing these plans and recognized them in his new "Program of Action," proclaimed in mid-March, 1964. He said that Diem oppression and Viet Cong pressure had brought things to a point that "the people kept more and more away from the government, were no longer interested in fighting for survival, and were gradually approaching annihilation."[41]

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[41]Shaplen, p. 238.

General Khanh's new program impressed the United States. Military and economic aid to the regime was increased, and Secretary McNamara clearly endorsed his leadership. The situation in South Vietnam, however, continued to deteriorate, and the Khanh regime soon demonstrated its inability to cope with the series of political crises that began in South Vietnam in the summer of 1964. There was constant talk of coups in Saigon. This can be explained by the fact that under President Diem's rule freedom of expression had not been allowed for nine years. Anyone who disagreed with Diem and his ruling family was branded a traitor. When Diem fell, so did most of the oppressive rules and regulations pertaining to freedom of expression and the press. This newly found freedom of expression became a game; no one understood the rules of democracy, but everyone wanted to participate.

In an attempt to quell the rising discontent, General Khanh in mid-July attempted to rally the nation by advocating an attack on North Vietnam. A bac-tien or "march to the North," became the slogan of the day. This was not yet United States policy. However, Secretary of State Dean Rusk in Manila at the tenth annual meeting of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization in April had said the United States did not rule out the possibility of extending the conflict to

North Vietnam.[42] This announcement by Khanh brought him into sharp conflict with Ambassador Maxwell Taylor who had replaced Henry Cabot Lodge on June 23.

In July, 1964, an additional 5,000 American troops were sent to South Vietnam, raising the total United States forces there to 25,000. General Nguyen Khanh however, needed more than this to shore up his shaky position. Nothing was going right for him. He had yet to score one significant military victory over the Viet Cong, and the results of his attempt to meet the social and political challenge which faced his regime were far from satisfactory. In his attempt to gain support from the people for himself and his government, he had opened the door to all of the dissidents and radical elements in the country. His only hope now was that the United States might take a more active role in the conflict.

The opportunity that General Khanh had been waiting for came on August 2, 1964, in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam. It has since been referred to as the Tonkin Gulf incidents of August 2 and 4, 1964. United States leadership has never adequately explained the events that made up these incidents. The result was clear, however. It led to the bombardment of North Vietnamese coastal defen-

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[42] New York Times, April 14, 1964, p. 3.

ses by United States aircraft on August 5, 1964. This bombardment, the first overt attack by the United States on North Vietnam, constituted a basic change in the Johnson administration's Vietnam policy by making the United States a direct combatant on a significant scale. The Tonkin Gulf incidents and the immediate United States response, in turn, led to the passage of Senate Joint Resolution 189 on August 7, 1964, approving and supporting...

> The determination of the President...to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression. [43]

That document, known as the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, called the incidents "part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression" by North Vietnam, and became the primary legal and political basis of United States participation in the conflict. It was also stated in this Resolution that "the maintenance of international peace and security in Southeast Asia" was considered vital to the national interest of the United States.

The United States Congress approved by an almost unanimous vote the Tonkin Gulf Resolution--the House of Representatives by a vote of 416 - 0, the Senate by a 88 - 2 vote. It is interesting to note that the two dissenting votes in

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[43] Bulletin, V. 51, August 24, 1964, p. 268.

the Senate were cast by Senators Wayne L. Morse and Ernest Gruening. Senator Morse in the Senate debate over the proposed Resolution said that such a Resolution was unconstitutional because it was "a predated declaration of war power."[44] Senator Morse also said on August 5, 1964, that the United States was as responsible for the Tonkin Gulf crisis as North Vietnam was.[45] As a matter of historical record, it should be stated that North Vietnam did not deny--in fact, it confirmed--the August 2, 1964, episode; but it has always emphatically denied the August 4 episode which led directly to the reprisal raids and the August 7, 1964, Congressional Resolution. The only evidence that the United States could muster in proof of the August 4 episode was one bullet imbedded in the hull of a destroyer.

With the passage of Senate Joint Resolution 189 on August 7, 1964, the United States political and military commitment to South Vietnam was complete. The Tonkin Gulf incidents and the United States raids which responded to them marked the beginning of a transformation of the United States role in Vietnam. The United States troop buildup--to more than 500,000 men--and the air war against North Vietnam can

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[44]U. S., Congressional Record, 88th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1964, CX, Part 14, 18133.

[45]New York Times, August 6, 1964, p. 8.

be traced to that engagement. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution was used by United States leadership to justify the February 7, 1965, air attacks on North Vietnamese territory by carrier-based United States aircraft.[46]

According to the official United States version of the Tonkin Gulf incidents, on August 2, and again on August 4, 1964, United States naval vessels, operating in international waters in the Gulf of Tonkin off the coast of North Vietnam, were attacked without provocation by three North Vietnamese torpedo boats. When Secretary McNamara testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on August 6, 1964, he insisted that the "DeSoto" operations[47] were routine. A study prepared by the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February, 1968, asserted, however, that the destroyer U.S.S. Maddox was under orders in August, 1964, to take provocative action to induce the Chinese Communists and North Vietnam to turn on their radio and radar equipment so the destroyer could monitor them.[48] According to the staff study, the U.S.S. Maddox, which had gone on

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[46]Ibid., February 8, 1965, p. 14.

[47]"DeSoto" was the code name given to the operational maneuvers that the U.S.S. Maddox and another United States destroyer, the C. Turner Joy, were engaged in.

[48]New York Times, February 22, 1968, p. 15.

patrol on July 28, 1964, was under orders from the Commander-in-Chief of United States forces in the Pacific "to stimulate Chicom/North Vietnamese electronic reaction." The staff study also revealed that the U.S.S. Maddox had encountered technical difficulties with its sonar shortly before detecting what it thought to be an attack by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. This disclosure raised further questions about the reliability of the evidence on which the Administration based its conclusion that the U.S.S. Maddox and the C. Turner Joy had come under North Vietnamese attack the night of August 4, 1964. The committee staff, which had access to the messages sent and received by the U.S.S. Maddox found no subsequent message from the destroyer reporting that the technical difficulty had been corrected, nor did the staff study show that during the attack higher authorities had sent any messages to the U.S.S. Maddox inquiring about the state of repair of the sonar.[49]

These United States vessels were on patrol in Tonkin Bay while South Vietnamese warships were bombarding two Northern coastal islands, Hon Me and Hon Nieu on July 30 and 31, 1964, and again on the nights of August 3 and 4. Secretary McNamara's testimony in August, 1964, which denied United States involvement with the South Vietnamese against

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[49]Ibid., February 4, 1968, p. 3.

the North Vietnamese raises questions about accuracy. He testified then:

> Our Navy played absolutely no part in, was not associated with, was not aware of, any South Vietnamese actions against the North Vietnamese islands of Hon Me and Hon Nieu, if there were any.[50]

The staff study revealed that the United States Navy provided the advice, crew training, and the vessels for these South Vietnamese raiding operations, known as 34-A. The operations were set up in February, 1964, by South Vietnam and the United States Military Advisory Group.[51] The "De-Soto" operations under these circumstances hardly seem routine. None of this was revealed until the February, 1968, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearings on the Tonkin Gulf incident. During these Hearings, Secretary McNamara for the first time told the Committee that the two United States destroyers were on intelligence missions. He still insisted, however, that the patrols were routine. This revelation prompted Senator Wayne Morse to say:

> He calls it a "routine patrol," the Maddox was a spy ship under instruction to stimulate the electronic instruments of North Vietnam to carry out a spying activity. This is not a routine patrol for a destroyer...The United States was a provocateur in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 4, 1964, and history will so record.[52]

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[50] Ibid., August 6, 1964, p. 6.

[51] Ibid., February 22, 1968, p. 15.

[52] Ibid.

According to the North Vietnamese version of the incident which occurred on August 2, 1964, the U.S.S. Maddox had penetrated North Vietnamese territorial waters, and this was the reason for the attack. Like many other nations, North Vietnam recognizes a twelve-mile territorial limit rather than the three-mile limit favored by nations with larger navies. It was officially stated by United States leadership that the U.S.S. Maddox "went in at least eleven miles in order to show that we do not recognize a twelve-mile limit."[53] Secretary McNamara testified during the February, 1968, Hearings that at no time prior to the August, 1964, Tonkin Gulf incidents did the North Vietnamese Government claim a width of territorial sea in excess of three miles. He said that no such claim would be assumed unless specifically made and published. The Secretary testified that North Vietnam made no such claim until September 1, 1964, when it was announced over Radio Hanoi.[54]

The United States version of an "unprovoked" attack is somewhat dubious. It is difficult to believe that three small torpedo boats would attack a United States destroyer

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[53]U. S., Congressional Record, 88th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1964, CX, Part 14, 18407.

[54]It should be remembered in this connection that the United States claims another nine miles as "contiguous waters" in which it can enforce its law on foreign ships.

operating in international waters without provocation. When it was revealed that the United States warships were at the time operating within the twelve-mile limit claimed by North Vietnam, Senator Richard Russell, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee confirmed this and added, in speaking about the August 2 incident:

> Our vessels had turned away from the North Vietnamese shore and were making for the middle of the gulf, where there would be no question, at the time they were attacked on August 2, 1964.[55]

Evidently, there was some concern about the legal position of the United States.

The Pentagon, when questioned about the August 2 incident, remarked in an official statement that the situation was "unwelcome, but not especially serious."[56] However, the raids of August 4 and 5, 1964, which hit seven targets in the Bay of Along at Vinh, eliminated half of North Vietnam's naval force, while the United States sustained only light losses--three planes and one pilot. The United States flew sixty-four bombing sorties over North Vietnamese territory, destroying or damaging twenty-five North Vietnamese torpedo boats and an oil depot. This attack, in reprisal, patently altered the United States commitment. The United States in

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[55]Raskin and Fall, p. 312.

[56]New York Times, August 3, 1964, p. 6.

two days had escalated the conflict on a grand scale. Engagement in the conflict was now direct, extending beyond the boundaries of South Vietnam, and the precedent had been established which would lead to further bombing raids on North Vietnamese territory which began on February 7, 1965.

These raids of August 4 and 5, 1964, the United States claimed, were carried out in reprisal for the unprovoked attacks on United States warships on August 2 and again on August 4. Even if the attacks on the warships were without provocation, as the United States claimed, the reprisal raids were out of all proportion to the damage suffered by United States ships. Indeed, the United States sustained heavier losses in carrying out the reprisal raids than it had in the claimed North Vietnamese attacks which supposedly triggered the raids. The United States Ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson, told the Security Council in April of 1964 in reference to another incident that:

> My government has repeatedly expressed its emphatic disapproval of provocative acts and of retaliatory raids wherever they occur and by whomever they are committed.[57]

Current doctrine, moreover, entirely rejects the theory of retaliation which, at certain periods in history, was a prerogative of the great powers. In his book, Theory and

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[57]United Nations, Security Council Official Records (Security Council Meeting 1108, April 6, 1964), p. 13.

Reality in Public International Law, the Belgian jurist, Charles de Visscher, who was a member of the International Court of Justice, said:

> In fact, resort to armed reprisals was a matter of pure political opportunism, for it depended essentially on the existing balance of strength. Reprisals were par excellence the arm of the strong against the weak. The states resorting to them were those powerful enough not to fear a riposte that might lead to war. [58]

The reprisal raids carried out by the United States made President Johnson look a little less than the champion of world law and order he proclaimed himself to be.

General Khanh, needless to say, welcomed the reprisal raids. He had, upon several occasions, called for such raids upon North Vietnamese territory. Such raids, he believed, would serve a dual purpose. They would strengthen his position as the head of the South Vietnamese government and prove to Hanoi and Peking that the United States was willing to support him with military force. He declared a nationwide state of emergency on August 7, 1964, to cope with what he called increasing pressures from Communist China and North Vietnam following the United States reprisal raids. A strict curfew was imposed in Saigon; strikes and public meetings were temporarily banned, and censorship of

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[58] Charles de Visscher, Theory and Reality in Public International Law (Princeton, 1957), p. 288.

the press was imposed. Indeed, Premier Khanh believed that his position was so secure that on August 15, 1964, he attempted to seize all civilian and military power. He imposed his own constitution which would in effect have given him complete control over the state. General Minh was ousted as chief of state, and the post was abolished. The office of premier was also eliminated and Premier Khanh became President of South Vietnam on August 16, 1964, under the new Constitution which provided for a strong presidential system. This assumption of wider powers and the repressive August 7, 1964, emergency decrees, however, brought about a great wave of mass movements that forced General Khanh and his government to resign on August 25, 1964. At this time, he promised to return all power to the civilians, which he did on October 27, 1964. General Nguyen Khanh had tried to move too rapidly, and the salutary effect that the United States raids had in bolstering his government at a time when he needed it most was short-lived.

Whether the August 4, 1964, Tonkin Gulf incident was provoked by the North Vietnamese, as United States leadership testified it was, or prefabricated by the United States, as North Vietnam claimed, is not within the scope of this study to determine. It is apparent, however, that the August 4 incident served as the rationale for the retaliatory raids upon North Vietnamese territory. These raids es-

calated the conflict on a significant scale, and, in turn, led to the passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution on August 7, 1964, which solidified the United States military commitment to the South Vietnamese government. Further escalation of the conflict was not inevitable. The United States military commitment and participation in the conflict increased until it became, as Senator Mike Mansfield feared in 1963, "of greater concern and greater responsibility to the United States than it is to the government and people of South Vietnam."[59] The Tonkin Gulf Resolution inevitably led to the conversion of the conflict into a war fought primarily with United States combat troops.

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[59]See p. 3, Chapter IV.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

United States concern for its security interests in Asia and the Pacific area soon after the demise of Chiang Kai-shek and the Korean War turned to Southeast Asia and particularly Vietnam. There the French Expeditionary Corps was engaged in a steadily deteriorating conflict with the nationalist forces of Ho Chi Minh. United States leadership believed that, if the French were defeated, the vacuum thus created would be filled by the Communists and that Vietnam could then be used as a stepping-stone for the military penetration of the American defensive perimeter in Asia.

For this reason, the United States believed it necessary to make a commitment to the maintenance and stability of the French supported regime in Vietnam. To accomplish its intended purpose, the United States began in the spring of 1950 to extend vast amounts of military and economic aid to the French in Vietnam. By 1954, the United States had expended approximately 1.5 billion dollars for this purpose. Also during this period, a limited number of economic and military advisors were made available to the French and Viet-

namese leadership. This limited aid and advice did not accomplish its intended purpose, however, for the French position continued to deteriorate. It is evident that throughout this period (1950-1954) United States leadership believed that through a limited commitment of economic and military aid French hegemony could be restored to its former position in Vietnam.

By 1954 it was clear that the French were going to be defeated. On May 8 the French jungle fortress of Dienbienphu surrendered to the forces of General Vo Nguyen Giap. Simultaneously the Geneva Conference, which had opened in April, 1954, was considering the difficult and complex Indo-Chinese question. At Geneva, it was decided to divide Vietnam into two regroupment areas, roughly along the 17th Parallel. The Northern section would be reserved for the Viet Minh, while the "pro-French" forces would gather in the South. National elections, under the supervision of an International Control Commission, were to be held no later than July 21, 1956, to reunite the state under one government.

This settlement was opposed by the United States. The United States regarded the Final Settlement as a diplomatic victory for Ho Chi Minh, and indeed it was. The United States at Geneva sought to prevent any further extension of Communist influence in Vietnam; however, it failed to do this.

It was certain that when national elections were held in 1956 Ho Chi Minh would win easily. The United States did, however, on the last day of the Conference, issue a Unilateral Declaration in which it pledged to "do nothing which would disturb the provisions of the Accords."

The Final Settlement negotiated at Geneva was a realistic one. Considering the drastic turn the War had taken for the French, a military compromise which would permit the French to gracefully withdraw was the only possible solution. The United States and South Vietnam, by opposing this solution, contributed to the problem from which United States leadership is now trying to extricate itself. The United States moved rapidly to strengthen the Diem regime and the South Vietnamese economy in order that it might successfully maintain itself vis-a-vis the Communists. This was consistent with its policy of containment of Communist influence throughout the world.

The problem for the United States, however, involved much more than simply pouring in vast amounts of economic, technical, and military aid. The United States had made a commitment to the support and survival of a regime which lacked popular support. Nationalism had become a strong force in Vietnam, but Diem lacked broad popular support and confidence because he was considered to be a puppet of United States leadership. The United States underestimated the

strength of nationalist sentiment under the inspiration and leadership of Ho Chi Minh. The fact that Ho Chi Minh was a Communist blinded the United States to the realities of the Vietnamese political environment. The result was a futile effort to sustain a leadership that had little chance of succeeding against a strong nationalist movement under very capable leadership.

The French had not constructed a viable administrative structure nor had they permitted an effective and compatable political group to come into existence. The United States attempted to build a viable political regime in an environment committed to a nationalist leadership antagonistic to the United States. It attempted to sustain a leadership with only limited nationalist appeal. The Diem regime's corruption and narrow base limited its capacity to expand its writ throughout Vietnam. The Communists were able to acquire popular support to prosecute an effective stand against the Diem regime. The United States was constantly confronted with a weak government capable of only a meager military effort. As the Communists stepped up the campaign, these weaknesses turned into defects, and the United States involvement was increased to prevent total collapse.

The Communists, however, did not pose a real threat to the stability of the Diem regime until the July 1956 election deadline had passed. The refusal of the Diem regime, with

the support of the United States, to hold the elections led to the intensification of the military effort of the South Vietnamese Communists against the Saigon government. The Diem regime was not only confronted with internal political difficulties but the security of the regime was threatened by antagonistic internal guerrilla forces morally supported by external powers. These events compelled United States leadership gradually to shift from a policy of aid and advice to a military and political commitment in South Vietnam. This political and military commitment intensified as the internal and external difficulties of South Vietnam increased. The United States commitment, therefore, increased as South Vietnam was unable to cope with its internal security. This commitment forced the United States to provide the leadership in the military contest and to determine the form of the political order in South Vietnam, including the selection of the political leadership.

In 1964, the United States realized that the conflict in the South was being lost and the regime it was backing in Saigon was on the verge of collapse. Since some semblance of political stability in Saigon was essential to the successful waging of the conflict, the United States attempted unsuccessfully to put General Nguyen Khanh in a stronger position vis-a-vis the internal political forces in South Vietnam by extending the conflict to the North. This action

did not stabilize the Khanh regime, however, and it was replaced within two months. The increasing involvement of the United States in the struggle led to the direct involvement of the North Vietnamese in the war.

After 1964 United States involvement in Vietnam was one of rapidly increasing cost and commitment. On February 7, 1965, the United States began to bomb North Vietnam. When this did not succeed in changing the course of the war, President Johnson ordered a vast increase--from about 21,000 to over 140,000--in United States troop strength in South Vietnam and a vigorous prosecution of the land war. The United States was now inextricably involved in the war.

The United States became deeply involved and entangled in the conflict because initially it had misinterpreted the political environment, had underestimated the strength of the Communist opposition, and had been overly sanguine about the prospects of building a viable regime in the South. This led the United States to make many costly miscalculations, to further intensification of its involvement.

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