Close inspection of the record, with the aid of historical hindsight, highlights some of the peculiarities of what was the strange, modern war in Indochina, one that was far more complex than the "limited" action in Korea. For the political and diplomatic historian, the affair must be viewed in global terms, as part of the domestic and international Cold War. In the end, that may be the only rational explanation for what most commentators have considered an irrational episode in modern American history.

American policy wavered along each step of the way, reassessing periodically, and then wavered some more, always managing to steer directly along a course determined not by military prescriptions but by the exigencies of a) domestic politics, and b) perceptions of Cold War imperatives.

An examination of the Eisenhower-Kennedy years must also necessarily recognize Ngo Dinh Diem's personification of what was wrong with pursuing the enterprise. Thirty years after the origins of the American inheritance of French Indochinese hegemony, the installation, maintenance, and subsequent disposal of the Diem regime remains central to any understanding of that failed enterprise.

More recent critics have cited the Kennedy complicity in Diem's overthrow as sealing the American commitment, both morally and critically. A more dispassionate analysis might suggest that the most egregious blunder was his initial
investiture. In this view, the Eisenhower era may be recognized for its effort to employ Diem as part of a desperate search for stability, while the Kennedy years marked the often indecisive quest for means of coping with that inheritance. How we sank into the "big muddy" is at the heart of this present examination.

I would start by recalling that the condition of contemporary partisan politics was hardly lost on John Foster Dulles, who wrote the key foreign policy plank for the Republicans. It was also a fighting issue for the party's right-wing, which not only gave its support to Joe McCarthy (often for the most cynical of reasons) but was still bruised over a convention outcome that gave the nomination to an apolitical general rather than to "Mr. Republican," Senator Robert A. Taft. Even without all the strategic and ideological reasons, their need to demonstrate strength was inescapable, to succeed in a region where the Democrats had been castigated for cowardice, weakness, and even treason. Both matters were, as Dulles feared, closely related, with Moscow and Peking deftly capitalizing on the heritage of colonialism. In 1951, while still in Paris heading NATO, Eisenhower advised the French government that "you people are making one very bad error. You're letting the world, and particularly the people in Indo China believe that you're still fighting a colonial war. You've got to make this thing a matter between freedom and communism."1

That concept, which was implicit in Harry Truman's warning about the need for military aid to Greece and Turkey, was accepted with equal applicability to other regions of the world, especially the Far East. Dr. Walter Judd, the Minnesota congressman best known for his China Lobby connections, headed a 1953 study mission that stressed the importance of preserving Indochina as a safeguard for all of Southeast Asia.2 Eisenhower himself gave the theory its greatest legitimacy during an explanation at a news conference on April 7, 1954, at the time of the Dienbienphu crisis: "You have a row of dominos set up, you knock over the first
one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences." Debates centered around the relative roles of communism, the quality and quantity of support given by the international movement, and the roles of nationalism and internal social and economic distress, but hardly anybody doubted that the contagion could poison an entire area of the world.

While the Soviets and Chinese Communists were assumed to be military allies, they were perceived as working together to compete for world markets even at the expense of undermining the economy of the Far East. Indochina was the "rice bowl of Asia," invaluable for extending communist economic control "into Japan and into India." Moreover, there was little reason to doubt that Moscow and Peking were equal backers of Ho Chi Minh's Vietminh forces, especially when the latter invaded Laos in the spring of 1953. When Dulles met Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov in Berlin during February of 1954, he noted that the Russian diplomat used every opportunity to press for recognition of Communist China. Nor did Dulles fail to appreciate Molotov's hints of a willingness to trade peace in the area for concessions on Germany and the European Defense Community, a virtual admission of Soviet complicity.

Taking a hard line toward Peking also involved the delicacy of American relations with Japan. Eisenhower's "domino" theory comments on April 7 were followed by an elaboration that emphasized Japanese commercial interests in Southeast Asia. On June 21, the President lectured Republican legislative leaders. "If we don't assist Japan, gentlemen, Japan is going Communist," he warned. "Then instead of the Pacific being an American lake, believe me it is going to be a Communist lake. If we do not let them trade with Red China, with Southeast Asia, then we are going to be in for trouble. Of course, we do not want to ruin our own industries to keep Japan on our side, but we must give them assistance. It is a
delicate, difficult course we have to follow, but I am sure we can do it in the long run." The Japanese feared any relaxation of the American attitude toward Peking. Their dimension, of course, was just another aspect of the problem, part of the entire rationale for standing fast in Southeast Asia. All of this was emphasized in Eisenhower's first State of the Union Message.

The President's policies toward the French were tied to two objectives: One called for a new program for victory on the battlefield, which produced the Navarre Plan. That military scheme involved greater use of "native" forces, redeployment of military positions, and stepped-up American aid. The ultimate goal was supposedly to drive the Vietminh from its Red River Delta stronghold, but General Henri Navarre himself secretly warned that a draw was the most probable result. The other objective concerned French membership in the European Defense Community. In Paris on December 14, 1953, Dulles delivered his dramatic warning that French rejection of the EDC might lead the U.S. to make an "agonizing reappraisal" of the alliance.

American coercion against a negotiated political settlement, which Washington believed would open the door to Vietminh domination, risked provoking French opposition to EDC. Indeed, many Frenchmen manifested stronger antagonisms toward Washington than toward Moscow. Until the government of Premier Rene Mayer was toppled by a no-confidence vote in May of 1953, the French government was also headed by leadership dependent on anti-EDC nationalists. Finally, Joseph Laniel, an Independent, became Premier in late June. Laniel, together with Foreign Minister Georges Bidault, was far more sympathetic to Washington's needs. But his hold was also precarious. Any likely opposition would press for a negotiated withdrawal without much regard for the consequences. At a meeting of the cabinet on July 10, Dulles observed that Laniel's might be the last French government that would try to hold on in Indochina.
Accordingly, the incoming Eisenhower administration bolstered the French position. Immediately after his inauguration, additional political and military aid flowed toward Southeast Asia from Washington. Some $385 million was aimed at achieving military stabilization, virtually financed the entire French operation. American financial aid from fiscal year 1950 through fiscal year 1954 totaled nearly two and a half billion dollars. In response to an invitation from ex-Premier Mayer, Lt. General John W. O'Daniel headed a mission to Saigon, to discuss with General Navarre how American material and financial support of the French and armed forces of the Associated States could realize the objective of defeating the Communist forces. O'Daniel was also installed as head of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG). Sixty U.S. Air Force officers arrived in Saigon in early July to train and advise French airmen. Later that summer, the State Department reported that over 300 shiploads of military aid had been supplied to French and native forces. Such enlarged aid paralleled a substantial increase in the level of support for the insurgents that were being supplied by the Peoples Republic of China. That December, the Vietminh issued repeated offers, via radio, for truce talks. Laniel faced increased pressure to negotiate; but Washington, with Dulles expressing hopes for an end to the war by 1955, blocked any such movements.

Meanwhile, the Eisenhower administration faced little concerted criticism of its goals, especially in view of repeated assurances that the ultimate objective was the disengagement of French forces and independence for a non-communist Indochina. Whatever dissension may have been possible from Capitol Hill was also stymied by the lack of any strong doubts about the containment policy. There was little appetite for another military campaign.

As optimism about the Navarre Plan inevitably dissipated, the administration began 1954 with a multiple dilemma that may be summarized in the form of the following questions: 1) How can the French be induced not to abandon Indochina
before achieving sufficient military stability that would survive independence? 2) What sort of diplomacy can overcome their resistance to EDC? 3) How far would the United States be willing to commit its resources to prevent a communist victory? Such were the stakes that preoccupied the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the State Department, and the White House. All were reflected in National Security Council deliberations. NSC 162/2, with its "New Look" emphasis on air and nuclear power that could deliver decisive strikes while de-emphasizing the role of ground forces invariably helped to narrow the administration's options--unless we were truly prepared to fulfill the concept of massive retaliation. Meanwhile, the only feasible move consisted of material assistance to sustain the Navarre Plan. In early February, that enhanced support consisted of forty B-26 bombers and two hundred technicians.21

At Berlin, that February, Dulles was unable to prevent the inclusion of Indochina on the agenda of a conference originally targeted on finding a political solution for Korea. "If we succeed here in stopping French pressures for conference--which is by no means certain--and should thereafter also stop financial support or attach to it impossible conditions," the Secretary explained to Eisenhower via cable, "the anti-American reaction in France would be very severe and almost certainly defeat European Defense Community."22

At the same time, the NCS, the Joint Chiefs and the White House all accepted the need for some kind of military commitment to prop up the sagging French effort. The NCS reaffirmed the importance of Indochina to all of Southeast Asia.23 Eisenhower's mood was clearly one of frustration, wanting to stem the rebel tide but, at the same time, acutely conscious of the political difficulties. He told Jim Hagerty that he would like to see Chiang Kai-shek's troops brought into Indochina but feared countermoves by the Peoples Republic.24 Then, too, both he and Dulles were aware of the domestic sensitivities about using American personnel.
When congressional leaders voiced concern about the deployment of technicians, the President reassured them that the French had been forewarned that the men would be withdrawn by June 15, 1954. At the same time, Dulles came away from an appearance before the Foreign Relations Committee primed to anticipate domestic attacks for inadequate preparedness for French reversals. Paradoxically, the Secretary’s meeting with a bipartisan group of congressional leaders exposed him to Senator Knowland’s warning that the administration would not only be accountable for any "slip" toward diplomatic recognition of China but for actions that might commit the United States in an Indochina war. Fearful of "another Korea," Knowland was somewhat of a dove about new military intervention.

The level of Washington's commitment behind the French effort, beyond participation in its share of the Navarre Plan, had clearly become a major consideration. Still not totally settled to this day is much agreement about the Eisenhower-Dulles intentions. Was the administration sufficiently serious about salvaging the French position to justify unilateral intervention? Or was the preference merely for creating what might be seen as a tough bargaining position to establish some kind of diplomatic leverage at Geneva?

One report of a study group headed by retired Marine General G. B. Erskine (two have previously been published) that was submitted to Eisenhower’s Operations Coordinating Board on March 2, 1954, made a series of recommendations. The Erskine findings called for Americanization of the effort in concert with simultaneously remedying the French failure to mitigate the colonialist approach. Emphasizing the need to avoid actions that might lead "to involuntary U.S. combat participation," it urged the development "of indigenous leadership which will be truly representative and symbolic of Indo-Chinese national aspirations and [sic] win the loyalty and support of the people." Should all that fail, "the U.S. may wish to consider direct military action in Southeast Asia to ensure the maintenance of our
vital interests in the area. The key words were "should all that fail." Without the potential of a credible military response, as in Western Europe, there could be no containment in Asia.

Much has since been written about General Paul Ely's March 1954 trip to Washington and pleas for American assistance. Particular attention has centered on Operation VULTURE, the plan outlined to Ely by Admiral Arthur Radford calling for an air strike at enemy positions around Dienbienphu with B-29 bombers equipped with three small atomic bombs.

Closer analysis of the consequences of that dramatic proposal, made possible by additional information, de-emphasizes the imminence of intervention. It also illustrates what later became a characteristic of administration foreign policy, calculated uncertainty and bluff to protect strategic interests. Rather than actually desiring to implement VULTURE, the process was one important step toward the realization of what Dulles had already been talking about, collective action. From collective action was but a small step to mutual security, and that, of course, ultimately led directly toward the establishment of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). One day after Radford's plan had been exposed to decidedly skeptical (and hostile) congressional leaders, and before the British had declined participating in any kind of "united action" interventionism before the Geneva conference, Eisenhower had suggested to Churchill "the establishment of a new, ad hoc grouping or coalition composed of nations which have a vital concern in the checking of Communist expansion in the area. ... the coalition must be strong and it must be willing to join the fight if necessary." But the British held other exasperations for Dulles. They declined to participate in a joint military venture before the scheduled conference at Geneva, thereby scuttling the concept of "united action." Dulles, meeting with Sir Winston Churchill on April 12, 1954, heard the Prime Minister repeat "his usual line" -- only the English-speaking peoples counted.
Within the American military leadership far more of a consensus existed for believing that defeating the enemy could only be done by striking at the source of his power; in other words, China itself rather than fighting on Vietnamese soil. During the Geneva Conference that spring, a JCS memorandum to Defense Secretary Wilson stressed that "from the point of view of the United States, with reference to the Far East as a whole, Indochina is devoid of decisive military objectives and the allocation of more than token U.S. armed forces in Indochina would be a serious diversion of limited U. S. capabilities." The military was decidedly advisory, with less influence than popularly believed, often taking a back seat to political and diplomatic considerations.

Distaste for such an enterprise became unmistakable when Vice President Nixon made his "off-the-record" comments in mid-April before the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Nixon, responding to what was a hypothetical question about the use of American force to save Indochina, told the editors that "The United States as a leader of the free world cannot afford further retreat in Asia. It is hoped 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." The supposedly "off-the-record" statement, made to a roomful of journalists, hardly remained secret for long. The subsequent furor raised the specter of a new Korea.

Was Nixon's statement a trial balloon? Or was the Vice President attempting to clear the way for a new military move? The passage of years considerably dims either possibility. When interviewed on June 5, 1984, Nixon recalled that he had merely stated his own views but that they did reflect the administration's position. "This was a case of my sitting in the meetings with Eisenhower and having his views expressed," he said, adding that he had no doubt that the administration was not ready to countenance Admiral Radford's nuclear designs for Operation
VULTURE. Documentation now available substantiates his explanation. Even if they were more alarming than anything that had been intended, Nixon's comments were consistent with the administration's hard-line bluff.

Essential for all this was clear evidence of preparedness for action, and the United States mobilized its propaganda and military forces. When Premier Laniel informed Ambassador Dillon on May 10 about the urgency of American intervention, Eisenhower directed Dulles to prepare a resolution to present before a joint congressional meeting requesting authority to commit American troops in Indochina. Four days after the fall of the garrison at Dienbienphu on May 7, Dulles and the President discussed sending a cable to Ambassador Dillon in Paris that would imply "that we might conceivably go ahead without the active participation of the United Kingdom." The "practicability of US intervention" was kept alive, although the French might not necessarily make such a request until "the Geneva game is played out." But, Dulles warned, American willingness to take that step would be cancelled if there should be a "fait accompli" on the battlefields before the conference ends.

When, a few days later, the French asked for American ground forces, including some Marines, Eisenhower refused. The military and diplomatic situation had obviously deteriorated beyond the point where any benefit could come from American intervention. Everything pointed to the disintegration of the Vietnamese government, especially with the French contemplating a fall-back that would leave virtually the entire Tonkin Delta population in hostile hands.

In mid-June as military positions collapsed and, in conflict over both EDC and ending the war, the Laniel government was replaced by Pierre Mendes-France, who declared a self-imposed pledge to resign if he failed to reach a settlement by July 21. The settlement at Geneva, from which the United States virtually disassociated itself, was, in effect, written off as an unavoidable evil. Even before the conference
ended and agreements were reached, the U.S. position concentrated on two major objectives: increasing the resistance to the Vietminh, and, second, establishing an indigenous government that would function virtually as an American protectorate.

Eisenhower and Dulles could only try to minimize the diplomatic and political damage of Geneva. And when it was over, the denouement was a phased French withdrawal from the Associated States, independence for Laos and Cambodia, and the partition of Vietnam at the 17th parallel. The South was left under the leadership of a Vietnamese nationalist, Ngo Dinh Diem, who was appointed as Premier by Emperor Bao Dai in June. His ability to govern would be supported by an enhanced MAAG headed by Colonel Edward Lansdale, whose success against the Huks in the Philippines had apparently left few doubts about his qualifications for the job. Also for the long-term objective of containment in the Far East, as Dulles had contemplated many weeks before the fall of Dienbienphu, was the creation in Manila that September of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. Such were the fateful steps that sealed Washington's stake in the region.

As Stanley Karnow has observed, the agreement "postponed rather than achieved a settlement." Still, Geneva was far from a total loss. At least, Dulles reminded Eisenhower, the issue of colonialism should no longer confuse the Indochinese conflict. "The issue then will indeed be 'between Communism and liberty.'" But the partition at the 17th parallel was hardly something a Republican administration could cheer about, recognizing, as it did, the hegemony of Ho Chi Minh's communist regime in the North. Little wonder the treaty failed to carry an American signature. At the same time, it provided for elections in 1956 to reunite the country.

Once Geneva was out of the way, the U.S. could proceed with its objectives. Each in turn, the installation of Ngo Dinh Diem as South Vietnam's prime minister, the creation of SEATO, standing by Diem through his great crisis against the sects
in 1955 and supporting his decision to avoid elections in 1956, and, finally, the withdrawal of the French and full assumption of the American protectorate, firmly sealed the Eisenhower legacy to the next administration in Washington.

Diem was only one man, and, as events later showed, he could be and was replaced. Jean Lacouture, a French journalist who was an on-the-spot observer, later wrote about the inevitability that a military coup would have eventually unseated Diem. As seen from Paris, the first Indochina war also "ended in the greatest military disaster in French colonial history since the eighteenth century." Speculation about Diem's initial sponsorship has obscured his role in Franco-American relations. Much attention has been given to certain other aspects of his support, at the cost of ignoring some elements that were essential to the entire process.

For France, Diem was the political equivalent of Dienbienphu. For South Vietnam, his reign guaranteed not efficiency or the advantages of his much-valued honesty, but prolonged instability. From the outset, his government was viewed as a puppet regime of the United States. He was widely regarded as "being in the American pocket." The Americans were constantly suspected of simply trying to help themselves to the riches of France's colonial jewel.

There can be no question about Dulles's sensitivity to all this. To a considerable degree, too, he was well aware of Diem as a problem-child. He was, in fact, less ardent than Eisenhower about keeping him in power. As he cautioned Ambassador Dillon, "We do not wish to make it appear [sic] Ngo Dinh Diem our protege or that we are irrevocably committed to him." From Jean Daridan, French Deputy Commissioner-General in Indochina, Dulles heard that although Diem was "a man of good will, he is not a man of will." Finally, in May of 1955, French Foreign Minister Edgar Faure showed his exasperation by blurting out that Diem was "not only incapable but mad ... France can no longer take risks with him."
From the American point of view, then, Diem simply exacerbated persistent tensions. Throughout the period, whether dealing with the Mayer, Laniel or Mendes-France governments, annoyance with France was constantly evident. The U.S., and especially Dulles, were impatient with such policies that were regarded as breeding grounds for communism that fed on anti-colonialism. In France itself, there was much apprehension, especially from the left, about the EDC commitment, and a revived Germany. The potential "horrors" of a "red" Asia were minimized. Ironically, while emphasizing the need for stability in Southeast Asia, American officials were all too ready with barbed comments about political chaos in Paris. Nothing better illustrates this pique than Henry Cabot Lodge's letter to Dulles. Written from his post as UN Ambassador on June 11, 1954, Lodgé's comments may have been only partly jocular. "I cannot but believe," he wrote, "that Alger Hiss and a score of little Alger Hisses were at work helping the French communists get this Constitution when actually they should have been using the position of immense influence which the United States had in 1945 and '46 to get them a Constitution which would have given them a very strong government ... but [their] system of government puts such a premium on division that any kind of far-sighted strong action seems to be impossible."

Much has been written about how Diem came to power. Virtually all accounts mention the role of such American Catholics as Francis Cardinal Spellman, Mike Mansfield, Jack Kennedy, and the influence of the liberal Supreme Court Justice, William O. Douglas. Weight is also given to American economic leverage. By the time Dienbienphu fell, the U.S. was paying 80 percent of the French costs in Indochina, and there were promises of more money to come. That clearly figured in persuading the French to accept a feudal aristocrat whose virulent Francophobia could hardly have been deemed as potentially congenial to their interests. Indeed, as John W. Hanes, Jr., has testified, "Dulles' backing for Diem was rammed through
single-handedly, through our intelligence and military communities, although the intelligence community had originally found him." Richard Bissell, Allen Dulles's subordinate in the CIA, has recalled that support for the Diem regime was a move of desperation and "our agency was deeply involved at that time ..." Eisenhower himself, at the time Diem was battling against a coalition of sects in Saigon and was nearly deposed, bluntly told a meeting of legislative leaders that Diem "was the man we had backed to bring order to that country" to prove "our disinterest in colonialism." All this ignores one vital aspect of the situation, Diem's appeal to the large Roman Catholic population of Tonkin, in North Vietnam. "In Hue anti-Commies opposing national government still consider Ngo Dinh Diem, whom they continue to expect arrive in Vietnam, best candidate to head such a government," cabled Robert McClintock to Dulles on June 11, 1954, "and have continued activity to promote his advent to power, many trips to Saigon being made to propagandize with this objective in mind."

More than humanitarianism was involved. As a CIA report of August 23, 1954, noted, "the results of the Geneva Conference and partition have put a premium on nationalist leaders and not on administrators." Bissell, in his interview, cited Diem for one particular accomplishment: carrying out the resettlement from the North far more efficiently than anyone thought possible. Lacouture has written that the "one triumph of Diem's regime: the integration of nearly a million refugees from the North." As the French themselves understood, the presence of the refugees in the South was vital for bolstering the government, and, ultimately, for helping to establish Diem's legitimacy despite the traditional animosities toward the Catholic minority.
Friction took place almost immediately, with rumors of Diem's impending resignation circulating as early as the summer of 1954, only weeks after Bao Dai had obligingly designated the Prime Minister on June 17. The French were suspected of plotting, hoping to replace the leader so disrespectful of their interests with someone more amenable, possibly the corrupt playboy emperor himself. Furthermore, French rejection of EDC later that month, one year after Dulles's "agonizing reappraisal" comment, hardly helped soothe relations between Washington and Paris. Still, Diem continued to enjoy strong support from such people as Mansfield. Even the French agreed to go along with the situation at a Washington conference that September in exchange for promises of continued U.S. assistance.

For all the suspicions about French motivations, few were under any illusions that all Diem had going for him was honesty ("rare in Indochina," as Ambassador Donald Heath wrote from Saigon) and intense patriotism. The latter, it was widely recognized, suited American objectives but hardly accommodated the French. Beyond that, he was a poor administrator, a member of the historically despised Roman Catholic minority, feudal in outlook, and influenced by a limited coterie, notably his brother and sister-in-law, the notorious "Dragon-Lady," Madam Nhu.

Foster Dulles was clearly under pressure to make some sort of move; Diem's inability to handle the intrigues emanating from the various sects and factions was becoming scandalous. "He would need expert assistance that simply could not be found in Vietnam and probably could not be provided by France," advised Heath, adding that "he must endeavor to transfer Catholic and other anti-Communist elements from north to free zone of Vietnam." Heath also reported General Ely's belief that Diem would win the national elections if such a project of migration could succeed. The CIA's report of August 23 was decidedly negative, suggesting that the French were trying to play off Vietnamese leaders and sects against the government to get as many concessions as possible.
By then, Heath had already called attention to Diem's need for "a definite public assurance of American aid and support." As a direct response to his precarious position, the South Vietnamese Premier received an emphatic outpouring. Differences of opinion over U.S. training of indigenous Vietnamese forces had also been worked out. The Joint Chiefs had balked back in June, citing the necessary precondition of a "reasonably strong, stable, civil government in control." Dulles, however, persisted, arguing that reorganization and retraining of the army was "one of the most efficient means of enabling the Vietnamese Government to become strong." Action memorandum 5429/2 of the NSC, then supported the Secretary, although the actual program was slow in getting started.

In October, Eisenhower told Diem that America would help South Vietnam "in its present hour of trial. "He offered to "assist the Government ... in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempting subversion or aggression through military means." American money would also be given directly to Diem rather than through the French. Finally, a Democrat, Mike Mansfield, in his first Senate term after having been a member of the House, make a quick trip to Saigon. Mansfield, whose views were most influential with Dulles, returned and declared that there was no alternative but to support Diem to the hilt. The Senator could hardly have been more emphatic.

But Diem was still to weather his greatest crisis, which, ironically followed a negative report by Ex-Army Chief of Staff, General J. Lawton Collins, who, having been sent to Saigon, cabled that Diem had to go. At the moment, in early April, before Diem had become heavily embattled in his clash with the sects, Eisenhower stood firmly behind the American viceroy. He implored Dulles "not to give up on Diem until it is quite certain because we bet on him heavily. Furthermore, said the President, Collins was apt to be hasty and he should be cautioned to go slowly.

Then, as the situation in Saigon worsened, Dulles warmed to General Collins's
arguments, and there is evidence that he was prepared to go far toward accepting
his recommendations. On April 11, when a coalition of sects counteracted Diem's
efforts at stripping their power, the Secretary authorized General Collins to go
along with plans for Diem's replacement "in light of your reiterated conviction that
Diem cannot gain adequate Vietnam support to establish an effective government."
Most of all, Dulles wanted to avoid a civil war. That possibility was all too real if
Diem continued to forcefully attempt "to reassert his authority over the Binh
Xuyen."69 By the 20th of the month, Dulles drew back, obviously under pressure from
not only the President but Diem's other backers in Washington. He informed Collins
that the Binh Xuyen insurgency was "minor" and that he had been meeting with a
group of congressmen. "I told them that this was just the opportunity we had been
waiting for to find out whether Diem had the courage and determination to act and
whether he had the loyalty of the Army," but the French prevented his acting and
allowed the Binh Xuyen to defy him with impunity and to compel him to make a
'truce' which put the National Government on a parity with a bunch of gangsters."
Then he added, "This is a matter not just for the Executive but for the Congress
and those who have leadership in this matter, such as Mansfield in the Senate and
Walter Judd in the House," and they were "very strongly opposed to any shift. As
things now stand, they would, I think, throw their influence, perhaps decisively,
against backing any substitute that now seems in sight."70

Almost miraculously, Diem regained the initiative. As far as Washington was
concerned, the crisis had passed, Diem's National Army drove the Binh Xuyen back
into Cholon, the "overseas" Chinese counterpart of Saigon.71 The event brought
immediate relief to Dulles and Eisenhower. Five months later, aided by some of
Lansdale's ingenuity, Diem won a national referendum that dethroned Bai Dai and
made him President. Although Diem had been persuaded to settle for 60 or 70
percent of the vote, he was able to claim 98.2 percent. Even before that coup, Diem had signalled his intent to ignore the Geneva accords provision for a nationwide election in 1956 to achieve unification.

Despite some reservations, mostly pertaining to political legitimacy, Eisenhower and Dulles supported that decision. As early as June 13, 1955, in fact, the President had approved National Security Council recommendations that had the effect of upholding Diem's stand on the elections. The move foreclosed a significant unfinished piece of business from Geneva. It also narrowed the options under which Ho Chi Minh might achieve his unification. Politically, it spared Washington from having to preside over the extension of communism below the 17th parallel, which would have liabilities at home almost akin to the breaching of the Korean armistice line. Accordingly, the NSC recommendations also included the recommendation that the U.S. "take necessary military and other action to assist any state or dependent territory in the SEATO area willing to resist Communist resort to force."

The regional mutual security pact had already been signed at Manila in September 1954. Its ratification by the Senate on the 8th of that month was reminiscent of strong bipartisan endorsement of such military security initiatives, ranging all the way to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution of 1964. Of course, it lacked the military apparatus of NATO, and so one might emphasize SEATO's symbolic importance. Robert Komer has been quoted as having said privately in 1961 that SEATO was a "millstone" directed against non-existent dangers of overt aggression.

But it was Dulles himself who had serious misgivings. He feared the removal of American options, of freedom to respond as we saw fit. The U.S. would also be vulnerable to British and French objections. They "are blocking everything we want to do," Dulles explained to Livingston Merchant during one of his frequent moments of exasperation. Finally, would it really be useful considering the mood of the
participants? "The running away from the word Communist," Dulles complained, "--the unwillingness to allow unofficial observers to come from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and the objection to our having any military mission to Cambodia are examples. They seem to have no desire or intention to hold the balance of Indochina." Yet, for all his doubts, he had helped to deepen the American stake in the area.

And that stake seem inescapable, militarily as well as politically. A climate that featured the Formosa Resolution of 1955 and crises over whether the Communists would overrun the tiny islands en route to the Pescadores and Taiwan maintained the Cold War climate in the Pacific. Such circumstances only emphasized the importance of "containing" China.

Meanwhile, in South Vietnam, the French, having reached a total impasse with the United States, pulled out in 1956, leaving only a token liaison mission with the International Control Commission. Diem retained his feudal control, making but niggling land reforms. And Washington helped keep him alive with massive aid. The communist opposition, now known as the Viet Cong, accelerated activities with aid from the North, and the South Vietnamese President barely escaped an attempted coup d'etat in November 1959. In August of 1960, a special intelligence estimate reported that deteriorating conditions and the ripeness of Vietnam for Communist-led guerrilla operations made conditions "adverse to the stability and effectiveness" of Diem's government. At the end of that year, with the support of Ho Chi Minh, the National Liberation Front was organized to overthrow Diem.

The Eisenhower administration had, by then, begun to respond with counter-insurgency paramilitary programs. In early January, two weeks before the new administration took over in Washington Nikita Khrushchev delivered his famous exhortation in behalf of "wars of national liberation." Just three days before the end of the Eisenhower presidency, Edward Lansdale warned that the "free Vietnamese,
and their government, probably will be able to do no more than postpone eventual defeat -- unless they find a Vietnamese way of mobilizing their total resources and then utilizing them with spirit."77 Those final days of the Republican administration would have been distinctly inappropriate for an Indochinese collapse. Nixon, facing John F. Kennedy for the presidency, had more than his share of other Eisenhower administration liabilities to defend.

Just before leaving the White House, on January 19, 1961, Dwight Eisenhower briefed his successor in the Cabinet Room. Calmly, he underscored how the serious threat of communism in Laos was a potential threat to all of Southeast Asia. Thus, in marked contrast to 1954, the question was less one of Laos's importance than the urgency of preventing Pathet Lao control. So it went, from making the most out of a bad Laotian situation to the elusive search for stability in South Vietnam.

Kennedy had few options about maintaining Cold War initiatives. Even if they were not so limited, there is little evidence that they would have made striking new departures. If anything, it was even more important than under Eisenhower and Dulles to demonstrate the administration's firmness against the subversion of American interests. Few individuals within the New Frontier questioned the wisdom of Southeast Asian policies. Komer, of the NSC staff, just as Walt Rostow and Defense Secretary McNamara and Secretary of State Dean Rusk, were sold on the global implications. Komer, for example, put it very plainly that first July, shortly after President Kennedy had returned from his Vienna confrontation with Khrushchev. "I believe," he wrote, "it is very important that this government have a major anti-Communist victory to its credit in the six months before the Berlin crisis is likely to get really hot."78 At the same time, writing for
the new President's benefit, Rostow urged Sorensen that "the buildup of our forces should be related to contingencies in Southeast Asia as well as in Central Europe—and perhaps to contingencies elsewhere as well."79

None of this differed very much from the analysis of the Eisenhower people. The major change was that, by the nineteen-sixties and with a new administration, fewer questions remained about what had to be done. Securing the investment was the major priority. A complete array of justifications, including the creation of SEATO, were firmly imprinted on both paper and in the minds of those in positions of responsibility. As Sorensen later told an oral history interviewer, Kennedy "did feel strongly that for better or worse, enthusiastic or unenthusiastic, we had to stay there until we left on terms other than a retreat or abandonment of our commitment."80

In contrast to the leadership of the Secretary of State in the Eisenhower administration, it was the Secretary of Defense, McNamara, who became a key player during the Kennedy years (as he would later under Johnson). He was convinced of the importance of a non-communist Vietnam, just as he assumed its necessity for the maintenance of a strong anti-Soviet stance throughout the world. "We should be very clear as to the role of the United States in South Vietnam," he said in March 1962. "We are there at the request of the South Vietnamese Government. President Diem has asked that we supply training and logistical equipment to the South Vietnamese."81

The questions were "how?" not "should we?" What was more efficacious? Getting the proud and stubborn Diem to agree to accept American troops, or merely provide him with advisers to build up the Army of Vietnam? By 1961, an estimated five to seven hundred soldiers, supported by Chinese weapons, were infiltrating into
the South, a clear violation of the Geneva accords. Rejecting a reciprocal open
abrogation of the agreement, the Kennedy administration nevertheless accelerated
the counterinsurgency program.\textsuperscript{82}

Over the Pentagon's objections, Kennedy created the elite command known
as the Special Forces, which arrived in civilian clothes. By November of 1961, 900
American military men were in South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{83} The Kennedy role also involved
importing the strategic hamlet concept of Sir Robert Thompson, and eventually
raising the number of advisers to 16,500. Dealing with the Viet Cong and their
support from the National Liberation Front, which operated so freely throughout the
countryside of the South, from the Mekong Delta to the city of Saigon itself, was
one thing. Contending with Diem and his closed government was quite another.

Confronting the crisis in Laos inevitably helped strengthen the support given
to Diem. With a show of force in the China Sea and the Gulf of Siam, including
500 Marines deployed into Thailand across the Mekong River from Vientiane, Kennedy demonstrated some muscle.\textsuperscript{84} From SEATO, however, Kennedy received a
weaker response, with France in the forefront blocking strong military intervention.
Nevertheless, Kennedy increased U.S. aid to fight the Pathet Lao guerrillas. By
April, 300 American military advisers were in Laos, supported by $32 million in
economic assistance, triple the annual rate of 1955-1959.\textsuperscript{85} At least for the moment, Kennedy faced the inevitable solution for Laos: a coalition government headed by
Prince Souvanna Phouma. The process of putting together that regime began in
Geneva on May 12 and did not confirm creation of the new government until the
summer of 1962.

Acceptance of coalition rule was widely regarded as a temporary solution.
Assumptions were rife about aid from Moscow and North Vietnam, in particular,
ultimately working to create a pro-communist "neutralist" government in Vientiane.
Surreptitiously, however, in an effort to safeguard against a "neutralist" government,
the NSC approved and the President dispatched an enhanced MAAG force to counter North Vietnamese-supplied and equipped guerrillas. The Church Committee later reported that the Laotian operation "eventually became the largest paramilitary effort in post-war history. The 9,000 Meo tribesmen outfitted for such guerrilla activities were virtually decimated." 86

None of that was public knowledge at the time. What was known was that the youthful new American president had sustained serious setbacks. In April, the Bay of Pigs had resulted in a "perfect disaster." Then, with militants calling for a renewed offensive against Cuba and the political risks inherent in Laotian neutrality, Kennedy had to prepare for his meeting with Khrushchev. Berlin's future was the big issue, the potential flash-point, the most dangerous point of conflict between East and West. No other symbol was comparable. On May 5, the NSC accordingly urged "that efforts should be made to reassure Sarit [of Thailand] and Diem that we are not abandoning Southeast Asia." 87 As Komer advised McGeorge Bundy and Walt Rostow, "We must seriously consider precautionary measures to 'seal off' South Vietnam in such a way as to deter another Laos." 88 The immediate move was sending Vice President Johnson to Saigon. Johnson, who remarked that Diem was another Churchill, also left no doubt that the choice was to save Diem and his country or lose the entire region to the Reds. 89 From Saigon, the Vice President brought a request for more aid but not troops. Given the support from Washington, Diem insisted, the job could be done.

Once more, there was no doubt about the American mission. Kennedy himself, subscribing to the domino theory, addressed the Congress shortly after Johnson's return and declared that the battle of "freedom versus tyranny" was being waged in Vietnam. 90 Diem then followed through with a letter to Kennedy requesting American personnel to train his air force "officers and technical specialists." He also wanted a considerable expansion of the MAAG. 91
The biggest obstacle was Ngo Dinh Diem within the context of the society he was trying to govern. Dealing with him involved two approaches. The military, of course, took priority. Then there was the matter of his personal leadership. While his rejection of American troops could be appreciated and respected, there was the problem of keeping him in power and helping to turn the tide against the Viet Cong.

An upswing of Viet Cong attacks in September resulted in a spectacular raid on a provincial capital only fifty-five miles from Saigon, which included the public beheading of the local chief. During the first half of 1961 alone, there were more than 500 assassinations of officials and other civilians, in addition to one thousand kidnappings, according to a report from Rostow to the President. A report by William J. Jorden, a member of the State Department's Policy Planning Council, documented massive North Vietnamese violations of the Geneva accords. The CIA, modifying some of the report's more unreliable pieces of evidence, nevertheless estimated that some 10 to 20 percent of the Viet Cong's full-time strength of 16,000 consisted of infiltrated cadres. Such intervention from the North inevitably lead the United States to feel no longer bound by the Geneva restrictions on personnel and military equipment. A direct response to Diem's obvious military needs was sending General Maxwell Taylor and Rostow to Saigon that fall.

The Taylor-Rostow mission marked another vital step in the Indochinese escalation. With a theme that called for the U.S. to become "a limited partner" in the war, avoiding formalized advice while trying to supervise the war, it called for an 8,000 man logistical task force, which would serve as a "visible symbol of the seriousness of American intentions. Kennedy deliberated and then decided to go ahead. Action Memorandum 493 of the NSC, dated November 15, 1961, shows that, contrary to other reports, Kennedy did not waste much time.
Thus, the Kennedy buildup began. Less than one month later, two American helicopter companies, involving 33 H-21Cs and 400 men, arrived in Vietnam. The New York Times then documented the new aid program by reporting a formal exchange of letters between Kennedy and Diem. The American President, noting the Geneva violations, promised early increases in assistance.97 Visiting Saigon in February, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy summoned an airport news conference and said, "We are going to win in Vietnam. We will remain here until we do win." Asked whether the U.S. was involved in a war, he replied, "We are involved in a struggle."98 In Kennedy's mind, writes Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., were considerations involving "the truculence of Moscow, the Berlin crisis and the resumption of nuclear testing ... [and] the President unquestionably felt that an American retreat in Asia might upset the whole world balance."99 The effort initiated by the Taylor-Rostow mission continued to expand.100 By the end of 1962, 222 American aircraft were in the country, including 149 helicopters, and, that year, 2,048 attack sorties (officially described as training missions) were flown by American planes.101

The number of Americans killed and wounded had increased tenfold over the previous year. As he had often done before, Kennedy turned to Mike Mansfield. Mansfield, who became the Senate majority leader when Lyndon Johnson assumed the vice-presidency, went to Saigon at the President's request and confirmed the more downbeat reports being written by such correspondents as David Halberstam and Neil Sheehan. Indeed, it was true, said the Senator; there had not only been little progress since his last visit but the United States was succumbing to the same kind of morass that had defeated the French. Undoubtedly, Mansfield's findings were the most troublesome words the President had yet heard. "If I tried to put out completely now from Vietnam," Kennedy told him, "we would have another Joe
McCarthy red scare on our hands, but I can do it after I'm reelected. So we had better make damned sure that I am reelected."\textsuperscript{102} "It wasn't a pleasant picture I depicted for him," Mansfield said afterward.\textsuperscript{103}

Mansfield had learned for himself, as did Mike Forrestal and Roger Hilsman in a subsequent visit, that Diem was much of the problem. His intractability was crippling the war effort.\textsuperscript{104} "The Viet Cong actively exploited the government's domestic political shortcomings," said a CIA intelligence memorandum in January.\textsuperscript{105} Forrestal and Hilsman reported that the strategic hamlet program was mostly a sham, "inadequately equipped and defended," or "built prematurely in exposed areas." But their real concern was Diem's insistence on, in effect, governing through his family, especially "Brother Nhu and his wife, and Diem's reluctance to delegate is alienating the middle and higher level officials on whom the government must depend to carry out its plans."\textsuperscript{106} Diem himself was portrayed as the weakest link in the entire enterprise. Sending advisers, enlarging MAAG (it then become MACV, the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam), and deploying equipment and materiel were all much easier than moving Diem himself.

Instead of sensitivity toward the Buddhist opposition, he held on like a feudal monarch. He spurned the kinds of social and economic reforms that had been urged since the Eisenhower years. A group of economic experts sent to Vietnam in 1961 under Dr. Eugene Staley of the Sanford Research Institute had urged the importance of such reforms and recommended a 12 percent increase in the economic and social program previously earmarked for Vietnam.\textsuperscript{107} Rather than receptivity to such needs, Diem hardened his authority. A crowd in Hue gathered on May 8 to celebrate the anniversary of Buddha's birth was fired into by government troops, and hunger strikes followed. But the most dramatic protest, and, internationally, the most memorable, was the photographed self-immolation of a monk on June 11. From that moment, George Herring has written, "the Buddhist protest emerged into a
powerful, apparently deeply rooted political movement that threatened the very survival of the Diem government. Additional grizzly suicides made for other effective dramatizations of the grievances. "More Bonzi burning will cause domestic US reaction," Forrestal wired Bundy. "Suggest a demarche to Diem insisting on removal of Nhu and his wife to a post outside South Vietnam ..."

On June 16, against the backdrop "of sharply-increased Buddhist tensions and United States pressure," the Diem government signed an agreement with Buddhist leaders granting all their demands. Foremost among them was an end to religious prosecution. "This is, in reality," Secretary Rusk was advised, "a long-standing resentment by the Buddhist leaders of what they regard as the privileged position occupied by the minority Roman Catholic Church, of which President Diem and his family and a disproportionate number of civil and military officials are members. ... Buddhist demonstrations, led by monks, nuns have spread to Saigon and other urban centers and the SVN government has felt compelled to impose extraordinary security measures." Moreover, the June 16th agreement was seen as a test of the Diem government's sincerity.

Then, underscoring the dilemma, the memorandum from the Department of Intelligence and Research cautioned that removing the authoritarian government could lead to even more serious upheavals. The consequences could cripple the military effort. On the other hand, "Our silence over any period or implications that we regarded the revolt as an internal problem which we hope to see quickly resolved would probably be taken as support for the rebels." To counter such dangers by obvious American assistance for Diem would undoubtedly reduce the numbers willing to take on the Viet Cong. A rebel success against Diem, however, despite our efforts to keep him going, could result in "considerable hostility toward the United States in the new administration."
The memorandum, written by Thomas L. Hughes, was prophetic, and events moved to the inevitable solution. On August 21, just as Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., was to arrive to replace Frederick Nolting as ambassador, Special Forces, trained by the Americans and at the direction of Diem's brother, went on a rampage. Completely disregarding past assurances, they carried out massive raids in Hue, Saigon and other cities. More than 1,400 Buddhists were arrested during the ransaking of pagodas, and President Diem refused to disavow Nhû's actions. Only three days later, Washington learned that Nhu, with the knowledge of the opposing South Vietnamese generals, was negotiating with the communists. That weekend, with Kennedy at Hyannis Port, an affirmative response to a cable from Lodge giving the green light for American acquiescence in a coup was vetoed. The effort to depose Diem, led from Washington in the President's absence by Averell Harriman, was killed by Kennedy's own indecision and opposition by his chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Maxwell Taylor and McNamara. Both protested that the intended maneuver had been done behind their backs.

After that hectic weekend, nothing conclusive resulted from the stormy White House meeting of August 27. Kennedy, back from Cape Cod, confronted Nolting, just recently returned from Saigon. Under persistent questioning by the President, Nolting reiterated his confidence in the South Vietnamese leadership. But Nolting's most important point was that Nhù "can command people and the Vietnamese are respectful of those who can command." During the next few days, haste should be avoided. "If the smouldering resentment of the Vietnamese people grows and begins to show up in the Vietnamese military units to such an extent that the war effort is blocked, then we have an entirely different problem of creating an acceptable political base."
Barely one week later, the President appeared on Walter Cronkite's CBS television program. Although his words have since been repeatedly misrepresented to make them appear as an indication of future American withdrawal, what he actually said constituted a reaffirmation of the commitment. Asked about whether Diem would change his pattern, Kennedy replied: "We hope that he comes to see that, but in the final analysis it is the people and the government itself who have to win or lose this struggle. All we can do is help, and we are making it very clear, but I don't agree with those who say we should withdraw. That would be a great mistake." Even as the President was taking his public stand, a series of meetings in Saigon between Lodge and the anti-Diem plotters sealed the decision. Washington had only to give the word that aid would be cut off, and that would be the signal for the coup. Diem's supporter, CIA Station Chief John Richardson, had already been recalled. The situation in Saigon was only worsening, especially among the urban elite, which, Roger Hilsman explained, "supplies both the military and civil officers on whom the war effort depends." From Saigon, at the same time, Lodge was pressing for action. "THE DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE SCHOOLS ARE TO ME EXTREMELY CURIOUS AND IMPRESSIVE MANIFESTATIONS," he cabled on September 11. "OUT OF NOWHERE APPARENTLY APPEARS A BANNER AND A PLAN TO PUT UP A ROADBLOCK OR A SCHEME FOR CONDUCTING A PARADE. PERHAPS THIS IS THE WORK OF COMMUNIST AGENTS, EVEN THOUGH THE STUDENTS ARE UNDOUBTEDLY NOT COMMUNISTS. ... THE GOVERNMENT IS OBVIOUSLY CUT OFF FROM REALITY ... THE SHIP OF STATE IS SLOWLY SINKING." Aid should be suspended, then anti-American hatred might be lessened. We want to be careful lest we "SUBSTITUTE A CASTRO FOR A BATISTA." And, in a final warning, Lodge urged, "WHAT IS EVEN MORE DANGEROUS IS THAT THE SITUATION HERE MAY NOT WAIT FOR US. THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS IN
SAIGON, FOR EXAMPLE, ARE PROFOUNDLY DISTURBING. AT THE VERY LEAST, THESE REFLECT IN A MOST UNMISTAKABLE WAY THE DEEP DISCONTENT OF THE MIDDLE AND UPPER CLASS POPULATION OF SAIGON. THEY'RE ALSO THE CLASSIC VEHICLE FOR COMMUNIST ACTION.117 But Dean Rusk advised patience, urging that nothing be done to stimulate plotting of a coup "PENDING FINAL DECISIONS WHICH ARE STILL BEING FORMULATED HERE."118

In a series of cables, some of which have only recently been made available, Lodge continued to press the point. "Yet," as I have previously noted, "even at that point Kennedy wavered, suffering a recurrence of earlier doubts. He told Bundy that the U.S. should be in a position to blow the whistle if it looked as though the coup was failing."119 But, as with so many situations, he was overtaken by events. General Taylor had already prepared a tabulation showing the probable loyalties of key military units and commanders "in the event a coup d'etat is undertaken in South Vietnam in the near future."120 Worried about Diem's personal safety, Kennedy urged the embattled President to seek refuge in the American Embassy.121

Only three weeks before Kennedy's own assassination, on November 1 (Saigon time), Diem was forced to flee the presidential palace and go to a hideout in the Chinese quarter. The next day, after having been supposedly guaranteed his safe return, he and his brother were shot according to a prearranged plan. Kennedy's fury at hearing the news has been widely documented: a dead Diem was the last thing he had wanted. Ambassador Lodge soon afterward wired some cheerful news: a member of the British Advisory Mission in Saigon had told him that "the coup should help very much to win the war."122

What would have happened had Diem remained in power can only be speculative, although Lacouture's point about his inevitable downfall is as valid as any. We also know that Diem's death was followed by findings that his regime had sys-
tematically falsified military reports and the progress of the strategic hamlet program, which had developed into a most unfortunate undertaking. The military situation was far worse than anyone had imagined.\textsuperscript{123} As a result of the rapid turnover of leadership in Saigon within the next few years, the conventional wisdom is that Washington, having acted as a handmaiden for the coup, had thereby deepened the American commitment far beyond anything in the past.

Could Kennedy -- at that moment -- have responded by writing off the U.S. responsibility, disassociating himself from both the coup and South Vietnam's future? When viewed with the perspective of two decades, it hardly seems possible. American involvement in the coup was too transparent, almost like the Bay of Pigs. Retreat from a Cold War commitment was simply not regarded as a realistic option. Having undermined what Washington had underwritten, dismissal of the entire project was unthinkable, certainly not in 1963.

Then, too, with his own re-election campaign due the following year, Kennedy was not that secure at home. At no point in his presidency, including immediately after the Cuban fiasco, was his leadership so precarious. The administration was in a serious deadlock with the Congress over legislation, and that was in large part caused by its endorsement of significant civil rights legislation which, in turn, had lowered his national popularity. Conservatives, if not already agitated by such social changes and by Supreme Court decisions that had the President's support, were also agitated by the ratification of the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Agreement. During those weeks before Dallas, while the new situation in South Vietnam had yet to be resolved, Kennedy could only hope for the best -- and for Barry Goldwater as his opponent in 1964.

Even then, only events like Diem's death were likely to place Vietnam on the front pages. Southeast Asia was more important for what might happen not for what was happening. Few doubted its international implications, and there was just
enough evidence that Ho Chi Minh, through materiel assistance from both the Soviets and Communist China, was trying to extend Marxist rule throughout the area. Throughout the period, there is precious little contemplation that Ho Chi Minh would become another Tito, or that the Peoples Republic of China would follow the Yugoslavian precedent. What had happened in Cuba, and the path taken by Fidel Castro was a far more prominent fear. Public opinion in the U.S. was far too sold on the need to stop communists everywhere. Had any national political leadership failed to respond, their replacements were ready to come in from the bullpen. As Major General Jack N. Merritt has noted in his introduction to Colonel Harry S. Summer's study, On Strategy, military strategy was subordinated to the "national policy of containment of communist expansion."\textsuperscript{124}

Finally, one decade of the Diem experience should have been sufficient to signal the fallacy of the enterprise. But, alas, Vietnam may have had to be endured to make future Vietnams less likely. Presidents Johnson and Nixon, having inherited the quagmire, found that their fortunes, like those of Eisenhower and Kennedy, were irrevocably tied to popular perceptions of Cold War diplomacy. Replaying the record of the '50s and '60s will not produce a different tune.

THE END
Key to Abbreviations

DDRS........... Declassified Documents Research System
DDEL............ Dwight D. Eisenhower Library
JFKL............ John F. Kennedy Library

4 Memorandum from J. N. Greene, September 19, 1953, Dulles Special Assistants Chronological Series, Box 5, DDEL.
6 Dulles to Eisenhower, February 1, 1954, Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series, Box 2, DDEL.
7 Public Papers of the Presidents ... Eisenhower, 2:383.
8 Hagerty Papers, Diary Entries, Box 1, DDEL.
9 J. F. Dulles telephone conversations with Allen Dulles, August 13, 1954, Dulles Papers, Telephone Conversations, Box 2, DDEL.
12 J. F. Dulles to W. Bedell Smith, February 9, 1954, Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series, Box 2, DDEL.
15 New York Times, September 11, 1953; Leslie H. Gelb and Richard

"U.S. Assistance for Indochina," March 26, 1954, Dulles Papers, White House Memorandum Series, Box 1, DDEL.

Department of State Bulletin, June 29, 1953, in Dulles Papers, Subject Series, Box 9, DDEL.


Ibid., August 19, 1953.


Dulles to Eisenhower, February 9, 1954, Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series, Box 2, DDEL.


Hagerty Papers, Diary Entries, February 8, 1954, Box 1, DDEL.

Notes of President's Meeting with Congressional Leaders, February 8, 1954, Sherman Adams Papers, Baker Library, Dartmouth College.

Dulles memorandum, February 24, 1954, Dulles Papers, White House Memorandum Series, Box 1, DDEL.


Cf., J. F. Dulles, Memorandum of Conversation with the President, May 19, 1954, Dulles Papers, White House Memorandum Series, Box 1, DDEL. There is reason to believe that Knowland's private apprehensions about the renewed use of American troops were in some contrast to his more public remarks, such as on the Senate floor.

General G. B. Erskine to The Executive Officer, Operations Coordinating Board, March 2, 1954, Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series, Box 2, DDEL.


Memorandum of Dinner with Sir Winston Churchill, April 12, 1954, Dulles Papers, White House Memorandum Series, Box 1, DDEL.

Vietnam, 60.

Parmet, Eisenhower, 368.


Dulles, Memorandum of Luncheon Conversation with the President, May 11, 1954, Dulles Papers, White House Memorandum Series, Box 1, DDEL.

Dulles to Dillon, May 17, 1954, Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series, Box 2, DDEL.

Memorandum of Conversation, Dulles and Eisenhower, May 19, 1954, Dulles Papers, White House Memorandum Series, Box 1, DDEL; Telephone Call, Dulles to MacArthur, May 20, 1954, Dulles Papers, Telephone Series, Box 2, DDEL.

Dulles to Smith and Dillon, June 14, 1954, Dulles Papers, Subject Series, Box 9, DDEL; Parmet, Eisenhower, 379.


Dulles to Eisenhower, June 5, 1954, Whitman File, Dulles-Herter Series, Box 2, DDEL.


Ibid., 34.


Telephone Conversation, Dulles and Kalijarvi, December 6, 1956, Dulles Papers, Telephone Call Series, Box 5, DDEL.

Dulles to Dillon, August 18, 1954, Foreign Relations . . . XIII, 2:1957.

Ibid., 2:2013

Gravel, The Pentagon Papers, 1:183.

Lodge to Dulles, June 11, 1954, Dulles Papers, General Correspondence and Memorandum Series, Box 2, DDEL.


John W. Hanes, Jr., John F. Dulles Oral History Interview, Princeton.

Richard Bissell, John F. Dulles Oral History Interview, Princeton.


Foreign Relations ... XIII, 2:1681.

Foreign Relations ... XIII, 2:1978.

Loucouture, Vietnam, 24.


Gravel, Pentagon Papers, 1:235.

Foreign Relations ... XIII, 2:1872.

Ibid., 2:1979.

Ibid., 2:1872.

Gravel, Pentagon, 1:215.

Ibid., 1:216.

Ibid.

Herring, America's Longest War, 47; Parmet, Eisenhower, 392; Douglas Kinnard, The Secretary of Defense (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1980), 91.

Foreign Relations ... XIII, 2:2351.

Telephone Conversation, Dulles and Eisenhower, April 1, 1955, Dulles Papers, Telephone Series, Box 10, DDEL.

Dulles to Collins, April 11, 1955, Dulles Papers, White House
Memorandum Series, Box 3, DDEL.

Dulles to J. Lawton Collins, April 20, 1955, Dulles Papers, Subject Series, Box 9, DDEL.

Gravel, Pentagon, 234.

Gelb and Betts, Irony of Vietnam, 64.

Ibid.


Telephone call, Dulles to Livinston Merchant, August 30, 1954, Dulles Papers, Telephone Series, Box 2, DDEL.

Warren I. Cohen, Dean Rusk (Totowa, New Jersey: Cooper Square Publishers, 1980), 177.

Herring, America's Longest War, 66-69; Parmet, Eisenhower, 562-563.

Gelb and Betts, Irony of Vietnam, 70.

Rostow to Sorensen, July 20, 1961, Sorensen Papers, Box 60, JFKL.

Theodore C. Sorensen, JFKL Oral History Interview.


Parmet, JFK, 153-154.

NSC Action Memorandum 2425, May 5, 1961, NSC Papers, Box 313, JFKL.

DDRS, 1984 (#216), May 4, 1961, JFKL.
Gravel, Pentagon Papers, 2:56-59.

LaFeber, America, Russia and the Cold War, 235.

Gravel, Pentagon Papers, 2:11.

Gravel, Pentagon Papers, 2:4.

W. W. Rostow to Kennedy, November 8, 1961, President's Office File, Box 65, JFKL.

Lewy, America in Vietnam, 23.

Gravel, Pentagon Papers, 2:14-15, 652-654; Herring, America's Longest War, 80-81.

NSC Report of Actions, November 15, 1961, Box 313, JFKL.


Schlesinger, Thousand Days, 548.

Gravel, Pentagon Papers, 2:18.

Lewy, America in Vietnam, 24.

Cohen, Rusk, 189.

Herring, America's Longest War, 92.

Gravel, Pentagon Papers, 2:717-725.

DDRS, 1984 (#96), January 11, 1963, JFKL.

Parmet, JFK, 329.

Gravel, Pentagon Papers, 2:3,11; DDRS, 1978 (#128A), August 1, 1961, JFKL.

Herring, America's Longest War, 96.

Forrestal to Bundy, July 2, 1963, DDRS, 1984 (#735), JFKL.

Thomas L. Hughes to Dean Rusk, June 21, 1963, DDRS, 1984 (#461), JFKL.

Ibid.
Parmet, JFK, 330–331.

Herring, America's Longest War, 99.

Memorandum of Conference with the President, August 27, 1963, DDRS, 1983 (#733), JFKL.


Memorandum, Roger Hilsman, September 11, 1963, DDRS, 1984 (#483), JFKL.

Telegram, Lodge to Rusk, September 11, 1963, DDRS, 1983 (#531), JFKL.

Telegram, Rusk to Lodge, September 15, 1963, DDRS, 1983 (#533), JFKL.

Parmet, JFK, 334.

Maxwell Taylor to Kennedy, August 30, 1963, DDRS, 1984 (#155), JFKL.

Parmet, JFK, 335.

Telegram, Lodge to Rusk, November 3, 1963, DDRS, 1982 (#1103), JFKL.

Cohen, Dean Rusk, 191–192.

Harry G. Summers, Jr., On Strategy (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1982), xiii.