VIETNAM - POL. GOV'T

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE - HANOI
COUP AFTER COUP IN SAIGON
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AFTER THE ORANGES ARE SQUEEZED DRY

On November 1, 1963 a coup d'état broke out in Saigon, all the details of which were made public by the New York Times of November 7 in a long report by its correspondent David Halberstam:

Many Americans in Saigon among them intelligence officers, soldiers and members of the Embassy staff, became convinced in recent months that the Ngo Dinh Diem regime would have to be replaced if the war against the Communist guerillas was to be carried on most effectively.

The climate in the country had also been affected by several other things mainly originating in changes in the American viewpoint.

In the past, the generals had been unsure of what American policy in Vietnam was.

Statements by Americans that there was no alternative to Ngo Dinh Diem left the military uncertain. Did this mean that if there were a coup, American aid would be cut off?

After the pagoda raids, the policy became clear. President Kennedy indicated that he felt South Vietnam would be a happier place without Mr. and Mrs. Ngo Dinh Nhu. John Richardson, the C.I.A. chief, who was believed by the military to be close to Ngo Dinh Nhu, was recalled.

It was known in Vietnam that the new United States Ambassador neither admired the Ngo family nor thought it could win the war.
Then the Americans had told Ngo Dinh Nhu that the Special Forces, who were led by Col. Le Quang Tung, were to receive no more aid if they remained on security duty instead of fighting the Viet Cong.

...The coup came shortly before noon on Friday when the navy commander, Cap. Ho Tan Quyen, was assassinated while he was driving along the Bien Hoa Highway.

...The President and his brother began broadcasting on a palace transmitter. The first broadcast called on all division commanders and province chiefs to send troops to protect the President.

The message asked for acknowledgement and there was none.

As time passed, the palace receiver got message from division commanders pledging loyalty to the military leaders.

The Presidential Palace became lonelier and lonelier. Ngo Dinh Nhu began calling the provincial chiefs to send irregular units to protect the President. The last of these messages, at 4 o' clock the next morning, called on the Republican Youth and para-military women's groups to move into Saigon to save the government.

The President asked the commanders to send a delegation to the palace to talk. The rebels feared this was a repetition of 1960 and did not agree.

It was reported that at 4 a.m. Ngo Dinh Diem called Ambassador Lodge. Mr. Lodge was reported to have told the President that he was concerned for the President's safety and would do all he could to insure that he and his family were honorably treated.

...At 8 a.m. the firing ceased and then marines stormed and took the palace.

But Ngo Dinh Diem and Ngo Dinh Nhu were gone.

...Armoured vehicles were sent to the church where the brothers were arrested. It was reported that they had a large sum of money with them. They were placed in an armoured personnel carrier.
Then an order was given to kill them and they were shot in the head and then were apparently bayoneted several times.

The coup had been staged and executed by a “Council of Generals” which dubbed itself afterwards “Revolutionary Military Council”, under the direction of Dương Van Minh, Trần Văn Đơn, and Tôn Thất Dinh, confidential agents in the service of Diệm’s dictatorship and former officers in the French Army, promoted by Diệm to the highest grades and posted to the highest offices. After sweeping away his boss, Dương Văn Minh made himself Chief of State, and signed a decree appointing the former vice-president Nguyễn Ngọc Thọ prime minister of the new government, Trần Văn Đơn minister of defence and Tôn Thất Dinh minister of security. The latter kept on his command of the Third Army Corps and the Third Military Zone.

At the beginning of January, Dương Văn Minh and Trần Văn Đơn sent Tôn Thất Dinh on an inspection tour to the province. During his absence, they proceeded to a thorough reshuffle of the leading junta. Dinh found himself stripped of his command of the Third Army Corps which controlled all the Saigon outskirts. Gen. Lê Văn Kim was promoted Chief of Staff. Dinh “had apparently been caught off balance by the news of the new command changes. He was reported to have been told about it as a fait accompli”. (Reuter, January 6).

While Minh, Đơn, Kim and Dinh were wrangling for power, a fifth thief appeared unexpectedly in the person of a little known officer, Gen. Nguyễn Khánh,
former brigadier general, promoted major general after the November coup d'état. On January 30, 1964 at 2.30 a.m. together with colonels Cao Van Vien and Nguyen Chanh Thi, he nicely nabbed at their residences the four generals of the "Revolutionary Military Council" of which he now made himself chairman. He reduced Minh to the rank of "adviser" whereas Don, Dinh, Kim and Mai Huu Xuan (a member of the "Revolutionary Military Council” and mayor of Saigon) were sent to jail where they could at leisure meditate upon the hazards of luck.

In less than 90 days Saigon was thus the theatre of two coups d'état.

"Questions have been asked in many countries," wrote David Halberstam after the putsch in November, "about how deeply these Americans may have been involved in the planning of the coup."

The same question was asked by all people after the second coup d'état in January 1964.

Should one know what had taken place behind the scene in November, the event of January 30 would become clear enough.

On September 2, 1963, under the headline "C.I.A. Financing a Coup d'Etat Planned for last Wednesday" the Times of Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Nhu's organ published in English in Saigon, despatched a S.O.S.

Now as the story comes out, it is revealed that C.I.A. agents in the Political Section of the U.S. Embassy, the Public Safety Division of U.S.O.M. and the G.2 section of the M.A.A.G. with the assistance of well-paid military attachés from three other embassies, had prepared a
detailed plan for the overthrow of the Vietnamese government. The C.I.A. plan, it is said, had the blessing of high officials in the "distressed" State Department.

Beginning in January of this year, it is reported American secret agency "experts" who successfully engineered the coup d'etat in Turkey, Guatemala, Korea, and failed in Iran and Cuba, began arriving in Vietnam, taking up duties mostly in the U.S. embassy, U.S.O.M., M.A.A.G. and various official and unofficial installations here.

Sources estimate the sum of money spent to overthrow the Vietnamese government was between 10 and 24 million dollars.

The money was in 3 banks, it is reported: Bank of America, Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, and Bank of Tokyo.

U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge had been due to arrive on August 26, there were unconfirmed reports that the date was postponed to August 28. But, immediately after the August 21 action of President Ngo Dinh Diem and the Army, Lodge received orders to come immediately, arriving in Saigon on August 22.

Certain diplomatic sources in Saigon report that essentially the whole diplomatic corps was aware of the plan in general if not in detail. All were alerted for the hour of 11 p.m. on August 28, they report. But, at the last moment, it was postponed because the Vietnamese knew about it and were organized to face it and to resist to the end, even if it meant fighting in the streets of Saigon.

The C.I.A. group who is reported to have complete control of U.S.I.S. is said to have gone "underground" and to be clandestinely calling on the armed forces of the Republic to demonstrate and to provoke the several-times postponed coup.

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*The day when Diem, after having discovered the coup then being prepared, had martial law proclaimed and launched his troops against pagodas.*
The millions of Americans who believe in the freedom and national integrity their government preaches are in for a big disillusionment if their government does not soon denounce the sinister cynics who almost turned Vietnam over to communists.

It was no longer the “communists” or “neutralists” complaining of the Americans, but the tandem Diem-Nhu, two lackeys most devoted to the cause of Washington for more than ten years, who called for pity. Unfortunately for them, after the oranges are squeezed dry...

The coup d’état which would sweep away Diem was studied for a long time, but the circumstances which would permit it to be carried out speedily without useless complications were not yet at hand. A new horse to be swapped for the old was not easy to be found because it must be as faithful and “able” as Diem but less hated by the people. Hence the hesitations in American policies which made Walter Lippman write in the *New York Herald Tribune* of August 18, 1963:

There is no way to make over Diem’s government in Saigon or to produce a new government which will be so beloved by the people that they will fight and die for... We have therefore no choice but to stay in South Vietnam and continue to subsidize and support Diem’s government, exerting such influence as we can.

It was these hesitations of the American government which accounted for the indecision of the plotters as has been emphasized by David Halberstam in the article we have just referred to.
Diem knew this and his sudden outbursts were only for bargaining purposes. One remembers that Ngo Dinh Nhu once went so far as to speak of setting fire to Saigon before leaving for "the maquis". This was sheer blackmail. The very men who for nine years had the South Vietnam peasants savagely massacred could not seriously think of seeking refuge in the countryside.

When in August 1963, the dictator proclaimed martial law and undertook to deal severely with those among the U.S. agents who did not support his clique, the American authorities began to bare their teeth. Officials known for their sympathy with Diem, like Richardson, C.I.A. director in Saigon, were called back; now specialists of subversion came. The Figaro Littéraire of August 23, 1963 reported that State Department emissaries had sought to contact elements of the opposition, then taking refuge in France, England, and Italy, in quest of an eventual candidate for the presidency.

The Saigon affair required an experienced man. Kennedy called back Ambassador Nolting and sent over Cabot Lodge whose record of service in Congo, Turkey and elsewhere was the best guarantee. Moreover, as wrote David Halberstam,

> It was known in Vietnam that the new U.S. Ambassador neither admired the Ngo family nor thought it could win the war.

More than a month before, an open letter bearing 70 signatures and published in many American
papers asked for rapid action by Kennedy to carry out a four-point programme which urged the government to show, without ambiguity, the intention of the U.S.A. to see a change of government in Saigon, and to send Cabot Lodge immediately to Saigon.

The first concern of the new ambassador on his arrival was to see to it that Nhu be dismissed. He spoke of this right at his first meeting with Diem and the American press made no secret of it.

Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, who arrived in Saigon immediately after the pagoda raids, urged conciliation, reforms and the dismissal of Ngo Dinh Nhu from the government.

Diem rejected these proposals: to yield to them would mean the end of his nepotic autocracy.

On August 27, the plotters were ready to act, but their preparations were uncovered which made them postpone the coup.

American reactions were sharp. On the evening of September 5, the Voice of America broadcasted that in an interview given to the radio on the previous Monday, President Kennedy had declared that he did not think that the Republic of Vietnam could carry the day in its present struggle against the "communist" guerrillas so long as its government does not win the confidence of the people which it has lost. President Kennedy had added that the only means to win back this confidence was a change of the policy of the government and some of its members.

However the White House set up a plan to spur on the generals to seize power.

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The American efforts were aimed essentially at freeing the army from Diem's control. In the first days of September, Kennedy sent McNamara and Taylor on a mission to Saigon to study the situation, encourage the generals and work out the plan in detail. While they cold-shouldered Diem and his brother Nhu, the envoys of the White House had direct contact with 25 out of the 28 military zone and division commanders.

On October 2, the American government made public a five-point declaration which was from beginning to end but a caustic criticism of Diem. It notably said that the situation in South Vietnam remained particularly serious and that the U.S.A. continued to stand against the repression (the repression is meant the measures taken against the new U.S. protégés). On his part Lodge openly charged the Saigon government of "damaging the war effort made by the U.S.A. in South Vietnam."

Simultaneously, the U.S.A. decided to cut the 250,000-dollar monthly aid granted to the special forces under the command of Le Quang Tung. These forces were in fact the mainstay of the regime made up of the most loyal elements of the army, their task was to defend the key governmental services in Saigon.

The commercialized 10 million-dollar monthly aid was cut purely and simply. Diem found himself driven to the wall. On October 31, Admiral, Harry Felt, Commander of the Pacific Fleet, came to Saigon for the last round of bargaining, but without achieving
any result. The die was cast. The U.S.A. took action. From many sources, it was affirmed that Duong Van Minh received a bribe of 100 million South Vietnam piastres. "Before flying to Washington, Admiral Felt sent Diem an ultimatum," wrote *La Tribune des Nations* of November 8, "an hour later, the putsch broke out”.

On November 2 at the time when the coup was taking place the American Pacific Fleet including many destroyers armed with teleguided missiles, in defiance of the Geneva Agreements on Vietnam and the indignant protests of Vietnamese and world public opinion, sailed in direction of the South Vietnam coast to bring pressure in favour of the rebel generals and intervene if needed.

Despite the awkward explanations of U.S. officials, the whole affair was easy to see through.

A commentary of the Japanese paper *Mainichi Shim bun* of November 7, 1963 summed up the views of foreign observers as follows:

"The overthrow of Ngo Dinh Diem had long been prepared by the U.S.A. which had deployed great efforts to organize the coup.

Even the U.S. press did not try to cover up the scheme. The *New York Herald Tribune*, known to be the unofficial mouthpiece of the State Department, wrote on November 4, 1963 when Saigon was still ringing with gunfire:

Despite the State Department’s flat denial that the U.S. government is involved in the uprising, this revolt is our revolt."
The Democratic party's weekly information bulletin of November 11, made known that the coup had been in preparation for two years and that Taylor gave Dương Văn Minh the green light when he came to Saigon in October 1961.

Clear enough, it was the U.S.A. who had signed Diệm's death sentence to put in his place a team of generals; it was the same boss who had kicked down "Big Minh" and his friends, to put Nguyễn Khánh in their stead.

The U.S.A. openly claimed the authorship of the second coup d'état which McNamara predicted before the U.S. Congress on January 27 saying that the war against the South Vietnam "communists" was taking a bad turn, in spite of the fact that Diệm had been toppled. The U.S.A. was ready to take the necessary measures to foil the victory of the "communists".

One of the measures in question was to be carried out three days after at 3.30 a.m. January 30. The same day, U.P.I. revealed that it was the Americans with whom Gen. Nguyễn Khánh had collaborated closely in the Ist military zone, who had advised him the coup to reorganize the revolutionary junta with a view to checking the neutralist current.

Not satisfied with giving advice, the Americans closely followed the affair, since on Wednesday evening, Ambassador Cabot Lodge was already informed of the coup which was to break out (U.P.I. of January 30). From an A.P. despatch of January 31, it clearly appeared that President Johnson had also been informed of the rebellion before it broke out and had "followed it closely".
25,000 American armymen being stationed in South Vietnam, how to explain the fact that a general of not much importance like Nguyen Khanh, whose troops were garrisoned some 400 km away from Saigon, could knock down a whole team of generals without the support or at least the benevolent indifference of U.S. high-ranking officials in Saigon?

Some ill-informed people would ask: Was this puppet show necessary? Why was the White House changing horses all the time?

Let us recall them that South Vietnam was not the first country to serve as a stage for U.S. puppet shows. A mere glance at U.S. satellites would be convincing enough.

In June 1954 the U.S.A. overthrew the government of President Arbenz in Guatemala. In South Korea Syngman Rhee, the great and faithful friend of the "free world", was thrown overboard one fine morning without any sentimental consideration. In Thailand, Phibul Songram, a creature of the State Department, experienced the same treatment from the same boss: he had to leave his post to another U.S. puppet in the person of Sarit Thararat. Within a few months, between July and October 1963, U.S. secret services staged three pronunciamientos, in Ecuador (July 10), the Dominican Republic (September 25) and Honduras (October 3).

To protect Cambodia from the schemes of U.S. agents in the so-called "free Khmer" movement Prince Norodom Sihanouk, Chief of State of Cambodia, had to reject American aid and expel the U.S. ambassador.
And it was certainly not by chance that the paper Dien Bao published by American services in Saigon wrote on November 18, 1963, under a big headline:

In the small hours of November 17, a military coup d'état against Prince Sihanouk broke out in Cambodia.
At present, no one knows what has become of Prince Sihanouk.

Roughly speaking it can be said that American subversive schemes follow three patterns according to the countries concerned:

With regard to the countries newly freed from the colonial yoke and having not yet time to consolidate their independence, American imperialism shamelessly seeks to enslave them by a neo-colonialist policy. It places their governments before a dilemma: either to fall in with the U.S.A. or to be overthrown.

As regards the countries which follow a progressive policy resolutely hostile to neo-colonialism, and aimed at safeguarding national independence and territorial integrity, the State Department will strive to relieve itself of these thorns in its flesh. Through economic aid intended to create a comprador class favourable to its plans of subversion and domination it undermines the independence of these countries from within, whereas military credits granted profusely help it buy over the most corrupt elements for the coup d'état to come.

In Latin American countries (except Cuba), which it considers as U.S. game preserve but where it faces both the opposition from local bourgeoisie and the greediness of other big powers, especially Great Britain, the State Department is obliged to create a
state of perpetual unrest in which pronunciamientos follow each other. Since the proclamation of its independence 74 years ago, Bolivia has been the theatre of 60 coups d'état whereas Venezuela has known 50 coups within 70 years, Columbia 27 coups, and Paraguay about one hundred, some of which provoked bloody civil wars.

Violence and coups d'force are ever present in American foreign policy. The Ghanaian Times of February 5, 1964 was quite right to make the following remark:

The history of Yankee foreign policy and diplomacy has been a long story of murder and assassination, of gun-running and coups d'état, of sabotage and subversion on a scale beyond the comprehension of decent mankind.

In the U.S. satellite countries, the State Department usually keeps two or three gangs of puppets who tear one another and vie with one another in making a show of zeal. When a puppet has finished playing his role, the lot of Diem and Nhu awaits him.

Two coups d'état in Saigon within 90 days, this is if not a record, at least a remarkable feat. However no wonder that it would be surpassed one day. The puppet capable of helping the Americans out of the South Vietnam “tunnel with no end in view” is not yet born.
In 1954 when the U.S. imperialists thought that the time had come for them to oust the French colonialists from South Vietnam, our people had to their credit the prestige of a nine-year-old revolution and the experience of a protracted resistance war crowned with the Dien Bien Phu victory. Under these circumstances, all neo-colonialist attempts, whatever their labels, were doomed to failure.

On June 26, 1954, a few weeks after Dien Bien Phu, Ngo Dinh Diem kept in reserve by Dulles in a New Jersey seminary, was brought back to Saigon to head a new puppet government, obviously intended for the systematic sabotage of the Geneva Agreements, which were about to be signed. Defeated on the battlefield the French colonialists could but yield and stand aside. Under the protection of U.S. bayonets and dollars, Diem proclaimed himself President of the Republic of South Vietnam on October 23 and laid the first foundations of a nepotic autocracy.

Chief of State and Prime minister, Diem was at the same time Minister of Defence and Commander-in-Chief of the army. His eldest brother, Bishop Ngo Dinh Thuc, tried to bring the catholic clergy under
his sway. Another of his brothers, Ngo Dinh Can, became governor of the northern provinces of South Vietnam.

His third brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu proclaimed himself adviser to the Presidency, leader of the "Labour and Personalism" party and head of the so-called Republican Youth, which he intended to use as the mainstay of the regime.

Ngo Dinh Nhu's wife, Tran Le Xuan, dubbed "First Lady of (South) Vietnam" ruled over the Saigon "National" Assembly, set up a women's association and feverishly set about militarizing the fair sex. Nhu's father-in-law, Tran Van Chuong, and Diem's youngest brother, Ngo Dinh Luyen, were appointed to the key embassies in Washington and London respectively. Let us pass over their nephews, cousins, relatives and friends.

This family cartel was surrounded by U.S. officials who called themselves "advisers" but in fact held all the control levers: Gen. Williams, adviser to the Army High Command, Ladejinsky, economic adviser and director of land "reform", Col. Lansdale, entrusted with psychological warfare and information. The various missions — M.A.A.G., U.S.O.M., and T.E.R.M. — which should have been disbanded after the cessation of hostilities were illegally maintained and strengthened. Supervising the whole machine, the U.S. Ambassador in Saigon was in fact a real governor of colonies.

Diem lost no time in proclaiming the adhesion of South Vietnam to the "free world" under the aegis of the U.S.A. and flatly disavowing the Geneva
Agreements. As early as 1955, Gen. O'Daniel took in hand the training of Diem troops, replacing the French instructors by U.S. officers, and Diem, in acknowledgement of these distinguished services, conferred on him the title of “Father of the South Vietnam army”.

The U.S. grip was tightened with the signing of a series of leonine treaties*. From January 1, 1956, the South Vietnam piastre, severed from the French franc, was tacked on to the already depreciated dollar.

The South Vietnam regime, a sheer smoke screen for Washington’s neo-colonialist grip, was since then dubbed U.S.-Diem regime by the population.

This anti-national power based on the support of the comprador bourgeois and landlords doomed to failure could survive only by turning fascist. After liquidating all his rivals by violence, Diem turned against the entire population whose aspirations for independence, unity and peace thwarted American rapacious plans. In the name of anti-communism, terror was unleashed. Raid of unparalleled savagery closely followed one another. Public campaigns

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* The agreements of April 22, 23, and of June 24, 25, 1955 stipulate:

1. The full and complete competence of MAAG for the organization and training of South Vietnam troops.

2. The Diem administration will do its utmost to contribute financially to the maintenance of its army.

The agreements of August 20 and 28, 1954 exempt U.S. goods imported “as aid and for equipment” from all duties and taxes.
to “denounce communists” were organized by the authorities, and former Resistance members ruthlessly persecuted. The Cach Mang Quoc Gia (National Revolution), the Saigon semi-official mouthpiece, made the following sinister appeal:

We must launch as soon as possible a campaign for the extermination of communists in the countryside. They are not human beings, let us shoot them down pitilessly! (March 4, 1959)

This monstrous slogan resulted in hundreds of villages being razed to the ground. In execution of Law 10-59, the guillotine roamed the countryside, beheading on the spot people denounced as communists.

South Vietnam became a huge prison, a gigantic slaughter house.

To try and throw some lustre on the blood-thirsty Saigon dictator, in 1957 the Eisenhower administration invited him to a rowdy trip to the United States of America. It was during this journey that Diem made the notorious declaration: “The frontiers of the U.S.A. extend as far as the 17th parallel.”

Not wanting to appear less generous the Americans appointed this “No. 1 enemy of communism in Asia” doctor honoris causa, and—ridicule not seeming to be fatal in this particular case—they dubbed him “champion of liberty”.

However, behind this brilliant facade, the U.S.-Diem honeymoon already looked spoilt.

The South Vietnamese people, who had just won a nine-year resistance war together with their northern brothers, would not let themselves be harnessed to the U.S. chariot,
September 1963 — Back from an inspection tour in South Vietnam McNamara and Taylor make their report to the American Congress.

An adviser, this U.S. officer at the head of his mercenaries?
The peasant masses rally round the banner of the L.N.F.

A U.S. "adviser" grins at the dead body of a peasant: he has played his part in this murder.
Saigon — As in other towns, neither barbed wire nor bludgeons, guns and tanks can make these empty-handed demonstrators fall back.

Saigon, November 1, 1963 — Diem still offers resistance to his rivals, but the crowd have already invaded the streets. Here the demonstrators are seen setting fire to a Diem newspaper office.
A unit of the Liberation Army

This U.S. helicopter will never fly again. Every month, tens of them meet with the same fate.
As early as 1955, their opposition showed itself in mass demonstrations and in petitions, and requests lodged with the International Commission for Supervision and Control demanding the correct and strict implementation of the Geneva Agreements, the holding of a consultative conference between North and South Vietnam with a view to free general elections for the reunification of the country provided for 1956 by the Geneva Agreements. Their struggle in the countryside tended to thwart attempts at eviction, requisition of manpower and systematic pressgangging. The plan for the concentration of the population in "prosperity zones" and "agricultural settlements" met with failure. In the towns intellectuals and students signed motions in favour of cultural exchanges, the restoration of normal relations between North and South, the use of the national language in higher schools. Industrialists and traders, victims of acute depression protested against the invasion of the market by U.S. products. Discontent even spread to the troops, revolted by the brutalities of U.S. advisers.

Corruption was rampant at all levels of the civil service, to everybody's knowledge. The Americans began to doubt the effectiveness of their placeman.

The first shot was fired on July 20, 1959, by the World Telegram and New York Sun. Under the title "A hidden scandal: the U.S.A. wastes millions of dollars in Vietnam", this American paper published an article by Albert Colegrove, a Scripps Howard correspondent, accusing Diem and his accomplices of embezzlement of U.S. aid funds.
Colegrove's article gave the signal for a general attack by 200 papers of the Howard chain against U.S. aid to South Vietnam. Diem was badly shaken.

The American Congress decided to send a commission to Saigon to carry out on-the-spot investigations. The Saigon authorities were on tenter-hooks, but the dark clouds soon cleared off as Washington politicians declared themselves in favour of the maintenance of U.S. aid to South Vietnam on condition of better management.

Diem got off with a scare, but the honeymoon was obviously ended.

Towards the end of 1959, U.S. deliveries of arms, naval craft and planes were practically made in broad daylight at a much quicker tempo. U.S. officers began to lead military operations directly. The raids, henceforth supported by artillery and tanks often involved as much as one division with the participation of U.S. "advisers".

Facing such outburst of violence — the troops were spurred on to pitiless repression — the population had only an issue to take up arms to defend themselves. Maquis were set up with a rudimentary armament which was gradually improved thanks to weapons taken from the enemy.

The resistance became more and more resolute. U.S. "advisers" could neither boost the mercenaries' morale, nor prevent them from deserting en masse.

In spite of his 350,000-strong army and American protection, Diem was no longer master of the situation.
The "purges" in the administration only increased his isolation. Dismissed ministers, senior officials and army generals denounced the dictator's nepotic regime. High-ranking, pro-French and pro-American officers, expert in the art of fishing in troubled waters who had been discarded, felt their hour come. The White House began weighing the pros and cons of the Diem card.

On November 11, 1960, at three a.m., tanks and armoured cars of the army closed on the presidential palace while paratroopers seized public offices. Diem finding himself in dire straits, undertook to carry out a cabinet reshuffle and under the auspice of McGarr, the new chief of the U.S. military mission, accepted to hold discussions. More anxious to gain time than to conduct negotiations, he in fact waited for the coming of reinforcements and, as soon as the military balance was in his favour, broke up the conversations and let the guns do the talking. A few hours later, the mutiny was crushed and Eisenhower hurriedly sent a telegram of congratulations to his dear protégé.

However, the same day, Le Monde published in Paris revealed:

Everything showed that, realizing the growing unpopularity and the gradual weakening of Mr. Diem, Washington was making preparation for a "change of horse in a more or less distant future".

In fact, if Washington had considered the possibility of a substitute for Diem, this was not yet considered imperative. For the moment it contented itself with frightening Diem into making concessions.
It was because of American indecision that the mutiny of paratroopers on November 11, 1960 met with failure.

Diem subjected his unlucky rival to harsh repression with the hidden thought of stealing a march on his U.S. masters. U.P.I. revealed that the number of suspects after the events of November 11, 1960 amounted to 30,000.

At the same time, Diem did his utmost to appear as an irreplaceable man in "the extermination of communists". In 1961 alone, his balance-sheet amounted to over one thousand mopping-up operations (against 700 in 1960) and tens of thousands of people killed.

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However, the regime was shaken to its foundations. The setting up of the South Vietnam Liberation National Front (L.N.F.) on December 20, 1960 and the publishing of its manifesto dealt a hard blow to the American policy. The L.N.F. undertook to

unite all sections of the people, all social classes, nationalities, political parties, organizations, religious bodies and patriotic personalities, irrespective of their political tendencies, in order to overthrow the rule of the U.S. Imperialists and their stooges — the Ngo Dinh Diem clique — and achieve independence, democracy, peace and neutrality as the first step towards peaceful reunification of the Fatherland.

(Manifesto of the L.N.F.)

The people rapidly rallied under the banner of the Front whose programme reflected their most profound aspirations. The struggle was intensified.
That is why immediately after taking office Kennedy sought to reverse the situation at all costs. Diem, maintained on his pedestal, received his last chance, on condition of favouring U.S. armed intervention. In May, 1961, U.S. Vice-President Johnson, on his visit to Saigon, named his protégé the "Churchill of Asia".

The people's struggle however entered a new phase. In the countryside, the people broke Diem's grip compelling communal authorities to take refuge in military posts or to give up all activities. "Prosperity zones" burst asunder. In the towns, strikes, meetings, demonstrations followed one another without respite. The "presidential" election was boycotted. 130,000 agents of the administration, policemen, and security agents, resigned. The prestige of the L.N.F., the inspirer and organizer of all struggles, rose.

The people's self-defence armed forces kept pace with the political struggle. The army of liberation took shape. U.S. - Diem raids began to end in disasters. Newsweek of November 6, 1961 had these bitter words:

Army morale is spotty... Most disturbing of all is the soldiers feeling that they are fighting on the losing side...

It brutally put the problem as follows:

If President Diem shows himself incapable of stopping the rot, the U.S. may have to reconcile itself to political changes at the top.

At the end of 1961, Washington increased its intervention by a massive dispatch of arms and troops and openly proclaimed its intention to lead a "special
war" in South Vietnam. The Staley plan *, completed by Taylor, foresaw the pacification of South Vietnam in 18 months. The U.S. "undeclared" war against the South Vietnamese people began.

On February 8, 1962, a U.S. operational command was set up in Saigon, under Gen. Harkins, deputy commander of the U.S. forces in the Pacific. U.S. troops, landed in Saigon, joined the mercenaries in countless raids aimed at concentrating the population in "strategic hamlets" — the cornerstone of the Staley-Taylor plan — purposely to isolate the patriotic forces and cut off their source of supply.

The challenge imposed on the L.N.F. was valiantly taken up.

"During 18 months," declared Liberation Radio at the end of the first period, "our people's armed forces have faced the frenzied attacks of the U.S.-Diem clique. Far from being put out of action as the aggressors had wished, they have become all seasoned and are now stronger than ever".

Despite the presence of 20,000 G.I.s., 14 U.S. generals and over fifty colonels in South Vietnam and an annual expenditure of 500 million dollars

* The Staley plan includes 3 stages:

In the first stage the U.S. joins its efforts to those of the South Vietnamese authorities for "the pacification of South Vietnam in 18 months" and the "creation of bases" in North Vietnam.

The second stage is that of "economic restoration, strengthening of the South Vietnam army, and sabotage of the North".

In the third stage the "economic development" of the South and the march to the North are envisaged.
Kennedy had to confess at a press conference on December 12, 1962, that the U.S.A. was facing big difficulties in the war against the guerillas in South Vietnam and was finding itself in a tunnel with no end in view.

1963 began with a series of resounding victories of the people's forces at Ap Bac, Pley M'rong, Loc Ninh... which showed the failure of U.S. strategy, and this made masters and lackeys saddle each other with the responsibility.

The ever more dissonant U.S.-Diem duet was entering its finale.

The struggle waged by Buddhists and school pupils made the contradictions still more acute. On May 8, 1963, in Hue mounted police opened fire on a crowd of believers celebrating Buddha's birthday: 14 wounded, 3 dead, including a child crushed under a U.S. tank. A wave of anger swept the country, submerging Saigon, Hue and other big towns. On June 11, Reverend Thich Quang Duc burnt himself to death at a crossroads in Saigon in a gesture of protest.

The Americans shifted the responsibility for all the crimes on to Diem, who in fact had only acted upon their instructions.

At a press conference on July 17, 1963, Kennedy did not hesitate to affirm that disagreements between the Buddhists and the South Vietnamese government had jeopardized the efficiency of U.S. aid in the anti-communist war.

That was a sentence to death, and Diem knew it. Getting wind of the coup d'état planned by the Americans for August 1963 the dictator had martial
law proclaimed, thinking he would kill two birds with one stone: to disorganize the plot and abate the boiling anger of the people in the towns and cities.

On the night of August 20, the police and army made an assault on Xa Loi pagoda in Saigon. Many other temples were also occupied on August 21. Over 100 dead and 100 arrests in Xa Loi pagoda alone. According to AIP's September 9, 1963 report the attacks on the pagodas and mass arrests of Buddhist leaders brought tension between Saigon and Washington to a climax.

In the eyes of the Americans, Diem had lost all utility and had even become an obstacle to their aims. The Saigon dictator and Nhu, his brother, were accused of having led their boss into "a tunnel with no end in view". Thenceforth Diem and Nhu had the knife at their throats.

On the morrow of his putsch, when declaring:

We would not have started a coup d'état if Diem's presence had allowed a victory over the communists. Duong Van Minh meant to reassure those who had fed from the same bin as Diem, and at the same time stimulate their zeal by a veiled threat. On November 8, 1963 Liberation Radio commented on Diem's death in these terms:

This death was not decided on November 2, but since the very day when the Diem-Nhu tandem had chosen to betray their people and fatherland.

By turning Diem and his brother into scapegoats and shifting onto them with the responsibility for all the crimes they had committed for nine years on U.S. instigation, the U.S. imperialists hoped to side-track
the wave of popular anger and label the new candidates trairors as "revolutionaries!" and "champions of liberty and democracy":

A week after the Saigon military putsch, Dean Rusk expressed his hope to see the new leaders of South Vietnam rally the country round them and successfully continue the war against the "Viet Cong". He added that the U.S.A. would do its utmost to help them.

A stupid hope, for "no government could rally the country round it while waging war against the people". (L'Humanité, November 9, 1963).

Obeying Washington's new directives the Saigon junta began taking various demagogic measures: release of Diem's pro-American opponents, arrest or dismissal of the most compromising officials. But this staging only deceived willing fools and Le Figaro of December 18, 1963, stated, not without some discreet irony:

Gen. Minh is undoubtedly sincere when he affirms: 'One must cease bothering the people.' But how can one do so when one continues, in extremely difficult conditions, a subversive war against people armed with such an efficient technique as the communists'? 'There lies a permanent contradiction.

The beard alone does not give its owner knowledge, as a saying runs.

How to keep up an appearance of democracy when the "Revolutionary Military Council", had, immediately after their victory, decreed "the interdiction of all meetings and demonstrations and the obligation of handing over all weapons to the authorities"? Basing