

## THE AMERICAN ENCOUNTER WITH VIETNAM

By KENNETH T. YOUNG

This is the story of why and how the United States became involved on its own in Vietnam. It is the drama of two very different peoples engaging together for the first time in an encounter full of accident and irony, achievement and tragedy. Two nations—one small with 2,000 years of history and the other powerful with only 200 years, from divergent backgrounds and opposite sides of the earth—have spent a tiny fraction of time, just eleven years, coping with each other while confronting the collision of cultures in the crossroads of Asia's wars and cataclysms. In the fall of 1954 the United States began its lonely odyssey in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. It has been a journey of contradictions between the large and the small, the old and new.

This encounter has reflected good intentions and naive ignorance, acts of careful responsibility as well as blunders of impulsive action. Yet on the whole, this story of the United States-Vietnamese partnership shows Vietnamese and Americans conceiving policy on a large scale, not on a parochial basis. It also shows us both moving obscurely in what William James once called the "cloud banks of ancestral blindness."

On the one hand, American policy has for a decade related its

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objectives and operations in Vietnam to the complex tapestry of world peace and security, or at least to the Asian design for national independence and modernization. We have not pigeon-holed Vietnam nor treated it in a haphazard manner, separate from the great issues and events of our time.

On the other hand, those who make and those who execute American policy have reached decisions and undertaken activities regarding Vietnam sometimes in ignorance or intolerance of Vietnamese ways of thinking and acting. All of us have often insisted on our American analysis and our American pattern, although usually with the best of intentions. Few of us knew Vietnam's long history or understood Vietnam's sensitive culture. Partnership has been trying for both parties.

What were we up to? The fact of the matter is that we have been trying to inspire and promote change from the centuries-old pattern of life to a modern mode of existence. Call this social revolution if you will, because that is exactly what it was. The United States government for eleven years has been vigorously—if not always successfully or articulately—on the side of revolution in Vietnam, but without communism. We have sponsored and supported nationalist reformation. The simple theme of original United States policy in Vietnam was nationalism and reform.

The genesis of this policy tells the drama of how we Americans have comprehended and misunderstood revolution and nationalism inside Vietnam since 1954. We made serious and grievous mistakes. We often were right. The historic elements of chance and choice faced us in 1954 as they do today. For us in 1954, as today, the real challenge has been to know the basic question. As Archibald MacLeish once wrote: "We have learned the answers, all the answers. It is the question that we do not know." What was the crux of the Vietnam question eleven years ago?

Could the Vietnamese manage to put together a nationalist revolution with real reform without communism? Would they come to terms with the 20th century? Would they sustain that same vitality and energy which had kept them independent of China and made Vietnam such a distinctive nation and culture for at least 1,000 years? Or would they succumb either to chaos or communism? And for us in Washington: what was Vietnam's importance in Southeast Asia? What was the interest of the United States there? How much would it take to realize our objectives? Were they attainable at all?

*The Geneva Paradox*

United States policy started with the aftermath of the Geneva agreements of July 20, 1954. The United States did not sign them. However, American policy has had to operate within the framework of those agreements even though the United States has never been legally bound by the three agreements on the cessation of hostilities. The United States government stated its attitude clearly in 1954. We would not use force and we would refrain from the threat of any force that would disturb those agreements. However, the United States notified the world that it would view any renewal of aggression in Vietnam with grave concern and take action accordingly because any aggression in Indo-China or in Vietnam would seriously threaten the peace and security of the United States or of the world as a whole. We declared our intentions in 1954, not ten years later. The United States also sought the unity of Vietnam through free elections, supervised by the United Nations, to insure that they would be conducted fairly. We tried to bring the United Nations into the Vietnam question in 1954, not just in 1964 or 1965. Our efforts looking towards a solution under the United Nations were spurned by all sides.

The Geneva framework made possible at least one thing—the sovereignty of South Vietnam. France, Great Britain, the United States and many other governments considered it a sovereign state before the Geneva agreements were signed. Since then there has been no legal or diplomatic quarrel over that sovereignty. The three governments had worked together during the conference at Geneva to insure the survival and growth of what Sir Anthony Eden referred to as the “retained area,” meaning South Vietnam. It was not just a question of its legality. What could be done socially and economically for its continuation was the issue after the Geneva Conference.

Unfortunately, the so-called Geneva governments did not guarantee the agreements. Failure to do so was one of the major mistakes which the United States made in Asia. The agreements have never been enforceable by international action. Yet they have had a profound impact on Vietnam and American policy. The agreements, of course, partitioned Vietnam temporarily in two at the 17th parallel. This was part of a secret deal made between Hanoi negotiators at Geneva and the French. It was bitterly protested by the representatives of South Vietnam. In the last few days of that hectic confer-

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ence it shocked many people. The agreement was essentially a bargain. There was a cease fire and Vietnam was divided; but the elections to be held in a year or two would doubtless insure Communist electoral “victory” in all of Vietnam as cheaply as possible. The Geneva Conference created this paradox of the “retained area”: subsidize it against Communist take-over on one hand, but dispose of it on the other.

The agreement on Vietnam laid down many military prohibitions in addition to the cease fire. It established the demilitarized zone along the 17th parallel. It was supposed to have stopped all kinds of new military equipment and personnel from entering both Vietnams. It proscribed military bases and the renewal of hostilities of the South against the North, or the North against the South. It forbade both sides from undertaking any aggressive policy against the other “zone.”

The United States had to observe those provisions even though not legally bound by them. We did. For several years we held the size of our military mission in Vietnam to 342 men. We helped reduce Vietnamese armed forces. We supplied only replacements for worn-out equipment and arms. With the honor of fools or the fooled, we played the game by the rules.

The real challenge in 1954 was the chaos in Vietnam and demoralization in Asia which the Geneva Conference and Communist aggressiveness were engendering. American policy required a series of decisions under almost the worst possible circumstances. There was no real leadership in South Vietnam. Effective government and rural administration had collapsed. French colonialism had disintegrated, and it was long past time for its dissolution. Vietnamese refugees were beginning to pour out of the North. Social and economic breakdown in South Vietnam was increasing. We found ourselves in the crossfire of the intrigues of the French colonialists in Saigon, as distinct from Paris, and various Vietnamese parties, particularly the Communists. At the same time, an immediate build-up of military forces began in North Vietnam, as well as an increase of aggressive expression on the part of the People's Republic of China.

All of this—the confusion caused by the Geneva agreements, the chaos in Vietnam, the military build-up—seemed in the summer and fall of 1954 to be leading headlong to the submergence of Vietnam, the disintegration of Southeast Asia, and disunity in the Free World. In Washington, columnists and Congressmen wanted to write off

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Vietnam as hopeless. But President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles, the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and many others said: "If you write off Southeast Asia you write off the Western Pacific, and the immediate defense line of the United States from the Aleutians to Australia." In 1954, let us remember, Japan seemed fragile. It had only had two years of sovereignty since war and occupation. Its immediate future was questionable, its economy unsure. An uneasy truce prevailed in Korea slightly more than a year after savage fighting with the Chinese Communists who showed no interest in a political settlement on anything but their terms and who were turning their attention and resources to Southeast Asia. All these considerations led the United States, Great Britain and France to put together the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization which was signed on September 8, 1954. With eight members, it was to try to hold the line and create some kind of stability in Southeast Asia. The Treaty explicitly covered Vietnam. That was a key factor in considering our choices then in Southeast Asia as a whole, and making a commitment on Vietnam.

### *The Strategic Interdependence of Asia*

As we looked at Vietnam, we considered more than a truncated country in chaos and in torment. We endorsed a central concept of the interdependence of the countries in Southeast Asia—interdependence in the sense that a power failure in Ottawa affects New York City, that what happens in Thailand will affect Vietnam, that what happens in Malaysia or Indonesia will affect the Philippines and that what happens in the Philippines will affect India and Japan and vice versa. The indivisibility of Southeast Asia and all Asia gave rise to what President Eisenhower unfortunately called the "domino theory." That metaphor has given the wrong impression. If you ask a Thai whether he is automatically a falling domino because of Vietnam, a Thai will answer: "Of course not." If you ask a Vietnamese whether he is certain to go down like a domino if Laos goes, a Vietnamese will answer: "Indeed not." Yet, Asians feel that there is some truth in the "domino theory." Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson have all endorsed it.

Asian psychology has much to do with it. There always has been a kind of "winner" outlook in Southeast Asia—the winner being China, some big power, and now the United States. The small coun-

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tries prefer to pick winners—not losers. There is a kind of ranking of authority and force in gradation or hierarchy of power in the political sense. This is traditional for Asians. They do it today. They have been viewing the Sino-American confrontation as a match to pick the winner.

The basic decision in 1954 on our Vietnam involvement grew from the conviction that American disengagement and disinterest would produce a calamitous shock wave throughout Asia. To "write off Southeast Asia and Vietnam" would create a shock wave in Tokyo and in New Delhi, as well as another kind of shock wave in Peking and Moscow. The Communists would declare: "The Americans really don't mean what they say. We can do as we please." Independent Asians were as worried in 1954 and 1955 as they are now. It was vitally important for President Eisenhower, as it is today for President Johnson, not to have that kind of shock wave occur in Asia, particularly in Peking and Moscow. In 1954 a kind of fatalistic fear of engulfment for China, the looming menace, gripped Asia. This has been a psychological fear which goes back over the centuries. China has periodically played the dominant role in Asia, and seeks it again today. Asian distrust and dislike of militant, hostile Communist China are stronger today than they were eleven years ago.

The genesis of American policy took this fear very much into account. Such fright could have eroded Asia and weakened Europe. There was a sense in Washington that Asia and Europe were related. The more solid Asia could become, the stronger would be the security of the Atlantic community. The solidity of Asia could change the outlook and motivation of Chinese leadership. If Japan, India, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam are progressive, stable, well-governed societies, healthy and immune to subversion, if China cannot push them around, in other words if there is political cohesion and solidity within Asia, then the Chinese, being practical whatever their ideologies may be, will accommodate themselves to live with the world at peace in a family of Asian nations. They will be constrained to put aside their obsolete reactionary notion of a "Chinese Asia" and accept an "Asian China."

Vietnam has played a critical role in the interdependence and solidity of Asia. It is tragic that it is the Vietnamese people whom history and geography have cast in this key part between Japan, India and China. It so happens that a combination of cultural, geo-

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graphical and political forces have converged in Vietnam. The Vietnamese have had a long harsh history with China. They possess great dynamism and energy. They have demonstrated vitality of freedom and independence on their terms for 2,000 years. The confrontation of the West with Asia and China has come to this point of impact in Vietnam, this hinge of fate.

### *The "Magnet" Policy of Reform and Security*

Now our question in September and October of 1954 was hard to answer. What do we do about applying the strategic concept? After much analysis and deliberation we developed the idea of getting behind nationalism with reform to create what we sometimes called the "magnet of Vietnam." We Americans, being inexperienced, naive and optimistic about Vietnam, wanted not only to bring about a tenuous cessation of hostilities but also to create conditions for preventing a major collision which could escalate into a big war. If Vietnam were the point of impact of a confrontation with Peking and Hanoi, how could it be de-escalated militarily and de-fused politically? Perhaps the magnet of nationalist reform might be a way of balancing the odds of the North against the South and establishing its terms of engagement with Communist ideology and organization. The reconstruction of a nationalist Vietnam within the traditional shape of its culture but with modern institutions of administration and technology could create a new equilibrium in that ancient nation and provide a demonstration of development in rural and urban Southeast Asia.

We knew only a little about Vietnam then. Aside from French studies, we found little guidance but our own pragmatism to take us beyond our "ancestral blindness" on Asia. It seemed that we had to deal with what appeared to be the Confucian pattern of society, behavior and thought in Vietnam. We wanted to move with orderly change from chaos to nationhood. It also seemed to us then that the villagers of Vietnam, although we knew very little about them, were the key element in the process. They wanted land reform, social justice and security.

And so we looked for three instruments on which to base the "magnet policy" for American involvement—a leader, rural reform, a national army. First must be found a leader with a new government to establish a new direction of nationalist reform in a pattern

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familiar to a Confucian society and Confucian philosophy. In 1954 after he had beaten the French, Ho Chi Minh was obviously the most popular single man in Vietnam. And as President Eisenhower has written (and has often been misquoted) Ho could have won an election from Bao Dai during that fighting. The South Vietnamese wanted a new leader of unquestioned nationalism, not Bao Dai but not necessarily Ho either. But, as important as a leader, were the people in this rural country, the farmers who had little land of their own and hardly any schools left. That meant that land reform, resettlement of refugees, rural credit, education and a whole effort to reconstruct the rural society or the rural economy of Vietnam were required. That was the second element in American support in 1954 for nationalism with reform and even revolution in South Vietnam. But even with a nationalist leader and nationalist reform, how could the country survive on the very frontier of such danger and threat? North Vietnam had six well-trained, experienced divisions in August 1954. South Vietnam had nothing. According to intelligence, military power in the North was already increasing. Its divisions tripled in two years. There was a good deal of subversion going on in Laos and some in Thailand. Perhaps the magnet might attract the wrong kind of attention from the North to the South, not political co-existence or economic competition, but military subversion and aggression.

### *The Drama of Diem*

This led, of course, to the major issue for the United States in Vietnam, the search for a leader and acceptance of Ngo Dinh Diem. In fact, he was more the result of chance than of choice. He was the only available and qualified nationalist. There was no "conspiracy" of American Catholics, as some have foolishly alleged, to foist him on Vietnam. No key policymaker in Washington knew him personally before the critical autumn of 1954. He was made Prime Minister in June 1954 by the French, to be the scapegoat for a few months. They had no intention to have him remain or be supported as a nationalist leader.

But in the fall of 1954 our crucial question was whether to stay with Diem or leave Vietnam. As far as we could learn, Ngo Dinh Diem had always been respected in Vietnam as an authentic nationalist, an honest and incorruptible man, dedicated to his people,



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knowledgeable about his country because of his own experiences in a way that very few Vietnamese of his generation were. He was by all accounts a man who had never compromised with the French colonialists on the independence of his country, nor with the Communist "dictatorship of the proletariat." Ho Chi Minh, it seems, always respected Ngo Dinh Diem for integrity even though they disagreed on so many principles. Diem was the only Vietnamese nationalist left in 1954 who seemed to have the qualifications needed to conduct a nationalist reform program in South Vietnam. The United States government—the President, the Secretary of State, the Senate leadership—decided that the United States should back Ngo Dinh Diem although it was apparent that he was not the perfect man. He had his faults. Other nationalist leaders might have emerged in Vietnam had they not been eliminated in the political meat grinder of the two dictatorships—colonialism and communism.

We had to start somewhere. The genesis of United States policy in Vietnam really was to start with Diem. This was not an easy job. He was difficult—suspicious, dogmatic, reserved. He monopolized conversation and personalized his power like a Mandarin. Perhaps we should not have overlooked some of the deficiencies in his personality—his exclusiveness and the Ngo family conceit. As Americans accustomed to the total separation of Church and State, we were not conscious enough of the varieties and roles of religion in Vietnam. Perhaps a Catholic leader in a Confucian-Buddhist nation was a contradiction which eventually could lead only to total failure.

### *Our First Confrontation with the French*

However, our primary problem in 1954-1955 was not so much with Diem as with the French. Nearly a year elapsed before we succeeded in negotiating at least a paper agreement on the magnet policy of which the elements were Diem, reform and security.

In 1954 the Americans and the French adopted quite different approaches and styles in South Vietnam. We thought of Saigon as a "magnet for Hanoi." The French conceived of Saigon as a "bridge to Hanoi" for protecting French cultural and economic interests in the South and North, and for leading to an accommodation with the Communist Party in Hanoi so that the Geneva elections, the bargain made in Geneva, would be carried out on schedule. A bridge from Saigon would smooth the transfer of the South into the North.

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The first meeting with the French was held in September 1954. We reached agreement after three days of hard discussions, only after we had consulted with Senator Mansfield, who was then in Berlin, concerning our decision to back Diem independently when the French delegation appeared intransigent. He was asked in effect whether the United States should continue aid to Vietnam if Ngo Dinh Diem was not to be the Prime Minister, or was removed by the French. Senator Mansfield emphasized that Prime Minister Diem was an honest, incorruptible and dedicated nationalist and stated that, if he was forced out or abandoned, the consequences in Vietnam could be disastrous; the Congress of the United States might cease supporting further aid to Indo-China. The French were shocked. The issue of Diem was settled, or so we thought. We issued a joint communique on September 29, 1954, supporting Diem and establishing Franco-American assistance to Vietnam. American involvement in Vietnam on our own began that day. The French urgently wanted us to increase economic and military aid to Vietnam, but they also wanted to keep control of the politics there.

However, the French Minister did not carry out the agreement reached in Washington. In Saigon, he began looking for someone to replace Ngo Dinh Diem. That action provoked intense discussion on whether we should disassociate ourselves completely from the French as far as Indo-China was concerned and have no further relationships with them in carrying out what we felt in United States interests was necessary to move ahead with our Vietnam policy. On balance the decision was taken to work with the French if possible but only along the course we had set together at the September meeting. If that were compromised, we decided to go it alone or get out entirely.

### *Our Initial Decision and Commitment*

The month of October 1954 was the moment of truth and the time for decision in Vietnam for the United States. After careful deliberation of the interests of the United States in Vietnam, and Vietnam's relation to the rest of Asia, the determination was made that Vietnam and Southeast Asia were of critical importance to Asia and to the United States interests. The National Security Council recommended to the President the policy of supporting a truly nationalist government, built around Ngo Dinh Diem, in a

combination of reform and security. The policy was founded on two pillars of American support—a broad land reform for the farmers who made up 80% of the people and a vigorous program of military training under American guidance, not French, for a new Vietnamese security force to meet any threat of subversion or aggression.

The specific result of that decision of the National Security Council and the approval of President Eisenhower was his famous letter of October 23, 1954 to President Diem, which President Johnson has often quoted. It opened the way for an "intelligent" program of American aid to be given directly to the government of Vietnam. I rather laugh now in rereading that word "intelligent" when I recall some of the unintelligent things which American legislators and American officials have done to Vietnam, but at least our intentions were always sound. It is important to remember that the letter of October 23 made American aid to Vietnam provisional and conditional. That seems to have been forgotten. The aid was to be given provided the government of Vietnam would give assurances as to the high standards of performance that it would maintain. The purpose of United States policy and the intent of the President's letter were to assist the government of Vietnam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression. We sought a strong, responsive government but not American-style democracy. State-building, not nation-building had first priority. The United States hoped that its aid, combined with the efforts of Prime Minister Ngo Dinh Diem, would contribute effectively toward a strong government which would secure and sustain an independent Vietnam. The key sentence in the President's letter, the core of the genesis of American policy toward Vietnam, read: "Such a government would be so responsive to the nationalist aspirations of its people, so enlightened in purpose and effective in performance that it will be respected both at home and abroad and discourage any who might wish to impose a foreign ideology on your free people." That sentence emphasized the aspirations of the Vietnamese people for social justice, a better livelihood, institutions of their own choosing and national independence free from any sort of alien control. And the letter set the goal of enlightened social development, not just military containment, as the best means to prevent Communist subversion or aggression.

If the South did become a "magnet for Hanoi" by achieving a nationalist revolution in the villages, in the army and in urban

groups, then the farmers and workers in the North would press for similar reforms there. The Communist dictatorship might change from within. Eventually the political "magnet" might draw the two halves of divided Vietnam together, if each adhered to a non-aggressive military policy and did not try to subvert the other by force. At least a successful program of viable government, social reform and effective nationalism would enable Saigon to compete on better terms with Hanoi in the consultations and elections called for in the Geneva declaration. This was the philosophy underlying the letter of October 23 and of subsequent American programs and actions.

Our provisional commitment in Vietnam began with that letter. Two sets of secret instructions implemented it. First, we sent directives to our embassies in Saigon and Paris to enact the policies of the National Security Council; namely, to support and encourage the nationalist leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem and the new political institutions, to promote rural reform in the villages, to build up a small army and police force, to take over the training of these security forces from the French and to negotiate a working agreement with the French on these policies. The second instrument concerned personnel. The President chose General Lawton Collins to take on a temporary assignment in Saigon to get urgent programs, particularly in security and military training underway rapidly, and to work with his friend and former military colleague, General Paul Ely, a fine officer who was French High Commissioner in Saigon. The letter of instructions from the President to General Collins, borrowed form and language from President Truman's letter to General Marshall when he went to China, and incorporated the substance of the National Security Council instructions to Saigon and Paris together with the general line of the President's letter to Diem of October 23. When General Collins and his special team arrived in Saigon in early November, and when the French Prime Minister, M. Mendès-France, came to Washington in mid-November, a comprehensive American policy was authoritatively documented.

The policy of nationalism with reform, the "magnet," raised a serious military question in theory. Would Communist aggression or aggressive actions take place? Would we have to fight in South Vietnam? What was our actual military commitment and what should be our specific military response in the event of Communist

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aggression or war by infiltration? Was our commitment automatic if requested by the Vietnamese government or was it unilateral dependent only upon the pragmatic decision of American authorities in Washington? It has always seemed to me to have been a somewhat ambiguous and equivocal combination of both a moral obligation and a strategic necessity.

We were not legally bound by treaty or law automatically to send our combat forces to fight in Vietnam. On the other hand, our commitments under SEATO and many statements by President Eisenhower (later by Presidents Kennedy and Johnson) all added up to a predetermined commitment. The United States initiated and joined in establishing for itself a treaty basis under SEATO for military action in Vietnam if its independence were seriously threatened by subversion or aggression, and if the United States government should decide, at the request of the Vietnamese government, to take military action. However, even if the latter had so requested, the United States legally could have refrained from such actions if that were the President's determination. On the other hand, if the President had weakened or rejected this moral obligation, the repercussions in Vietnam and Southeast Asia would have produced a tremendous shock. The Senate hearings on the Treaty, the advice and consent of the Senate, and the first communique issued by the SEATO Foreign Ministers in February of 1955, added up to an obligation for us not only to provide equipment and advice to Vietnam but also to commit our own military forces there to preserve its survival for independence. In fact, in 1954 the Eisenhower Administration was conditionally prepared to commit and use United States military power in Southeast Asia, particularly in Indo-China.

In its genesis, the policy of the United States government of assisting free Vietnam was undertaken not only in line with the strategic concept of Asia's indivisibility but also under the aegis of possible military commitments under the Southeast Asia Defense Treaty. The massive program of economic and military assistance to Saigon to execute the "magnet" policy and our indirect military obligations there were complementary. It would have made no sense to have become so heavily involved in Vietnam without either a strategic concept or a legal basis through a treaty. By the same token, the umbrella of protection for South Vietnam would have been meaningless without American and allied efforts to help create the substance of internal morale, political strength and economic growth,

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the objectives of the "magnet." It would have been a wrong use of American resources not to have been prepared in advance to use our forces if there were no other choice. The meeting of the SEATO Council of Ministers in February of 1955, after all eight members had ratified the Treaty, confirmed the protective umbrella of our allies and ourselves over Vietnam. Article IV of the Treaty required only consultation of the members, in the case of Vietnam, but the purpose of such consultation was to decide on action. We did not expect war in South Vietnam, but we looked hard and straight at that contingency all the time in the early years.

In our first year in Vietnam, 1954-1955, we moved quickly to initiate nationalist reform. On January 1, 1955 our agreement with Vietnam to disburse dollars and other aid directly to Saigon and not through Paris went into effect. Land reform, the central pillar of the "magnet" policy, began in January and February when two basic ordinances were promulgated by the Vietnamese government to improve the welfare of farm tenants by rent reduction, security of tenure and cultivation of new land. These measures were designed to alleviate landlord-tenant relations, strengthen the rural community and limit the effect of feudal landlordism. We hoped that a true rural revolution ultimately would take place in South Vietnam and that it would appeal to the farmers in all Vietnam, North and South. On February 12 we took over the training of Vietnamese military forces from the French and began the fateful process of trying to create a Vietnamese responsibility and capability for fending off Communist infiltration in rural areas and across frontiers. I say that this has been a fateful operation because here we have made most of our mistakes, because our policy in Vietnam and Southeast Asia now depends so largely on the ability and morale of the Vietnamese military forces. On March 7, 1955 we signed a new agreement on economic assistance with Vietnam. At that time we began an annual series of what then seemed very large programs of assistance, amounting to over \$200 million. The mission of General Collins was to work out the tripartite implementation of all these policies and programs. Joint committees were set up on land reform, administrative reorganization, military training and security, education and labor, and even cultural matters. A great deal of momentum was generated in offices and many good plans were typewritten. Unfortunately, increasing opposition and intrigue in Saigon nearly wrecked our policy and efforts.

*The Test of Decision in 1955*

Historic events in the spring of 1955 solidified our commitment and involvement in Vietnam. There had been strong disagreements within the United States Mission in Saigon over whether to support Ngo Dinh Diem or turn to Bao Dai, or someone else. The dispute had reached such a point that General Collins had returned to Washington to advise President Eisenhower that the United States probably could not support Diem any longer, that he was too stubborn and difficult to deal with, and that he had very little support in Vietnamese political circles. In Washington we, too, had begun to feel that perhaps a different formula might be preferable. We had come to the notion that Diem's key role as a patriot might best be cast symbolically as "Constitutional President." His weakness was his refusal to trust other people to administer what was becoming a managerial state. His fatal defect was arrogation of responsibility—not arrogance of power. That flaw could wreck the performance of the Vietnamese government and the purpose of our policy if not corrected. Executive management had to be entrusted to somebody else who could work with Diem in mutual confidence and at the same time bring in young nationalists. We thought that perhaps Dr. Quat, who finally became the Prime Minister of Vietnam temporarily in 1965, might serve as a kind of "executive president" or "executive vice president," for the Vietnamese have a history of such a dual arrangement. The Diem-Quat formula was agreed to by Washington too. But it never was tried out. The Vietnamese never knew about this. It might have saved us from so much if it had been put into effect.

On the day that it was agreed to in Washington, civil war coincidentally broke out in Saigon. The famous battle began—Diem against the Binh Xuyen, the sect which controlled the police, and the opium and prostitution rackets and everything else rotten in Saigon. We had been prepared to back Diem's use of force against this sect as part of the policy of helping to create a strong, viable state in Vietnam. Despite efforts to negotiate the take-over of police power in Saigon from the Binh Xuyen, the showdown came at the wrong time for Washington and we had to defer the new formula. It was hardly the time to encourage a change of leadership. The battalions of the Vietnamese army fought unexpectedly well, with excellent leadership, contrary to French and some American predic-

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tions. Diem immediately rallied the army and destroyed the Binh Xuyen in his first real test of political strength. His courage and his command in that crisis proved that he did have capacities for leadership which Americans had not fully realized.

He, his brother and his colleagues also demonstrated political skill in leadership and organization, converting Vietnam from a monarchy to a republic and bringing some political unification out of what was then total political chaos. Two other powerful sects, supported by French elements, were also trying to get rid of Diem, to keep Emperor Bao Dai, or to set up a neutralist regime which would deal with Ho Chi Minh and Hanoi. The Diem forces took swift counter-action. Two kinds of "rump" congresses met in early May, before our Paris confrontation with the French, to call for a revolutionary nationalist transformation of Vietnam from a monarchy to a republic. The "People's National Revolutionary Committee," comprising some 4,000 representatives of political parties from all over South Vietnam, adopted a program for the elimination of Emperor Bao Dai; the establishment of a republic, with a socialist, democratic and nationalist government, and a new National Assembly; the social and economic strengthening of the South against Communism; and the collaboration with anti-colonialist, anti-Communist and anti-feudalist forces in Southeast Asia. The congress of provincial and municipal counselors, although in disagreement so typical of Vietnamese politics, called for elections for a national assembly to determine Vietnam's political system, to transfer Bao Dai's total authority to Diem and to establish peace and order under the auspices of Diem. Both "congresses" backed Diem.

When we went to Paris in May 1955 for a NATO meeting we knew that this was to be the encounter with the French over Diem. It took place on three separate occasions. In the first meeting, the Prime Minister of France told us that if we did not stop supporting Diem, France would withdraw completely from Indo-China, not just from Vietnam but also from Laos and Cambodia. At the second meeting, Secretary of State Dulles, having consulted with the President and many advisers, responded in a calm, matter-of-fact tone that the United States would prefer to have the opportunity of withdrawing from Vietnam. France should stay, he said. If it were agreeable with the government of France, the United States was prepared to leave the whole economic and military responsibility for the future of Indo-China to France. He put it bluntly: "The Vietnamese are



not puppets," he asserted. "We can't tell them what to do, and we don't want to tell them what to do. If you think in Paris that we can, just because of \$300 million in aid, then you are completely mistaken about the Vietnamese. We don't want puppets. And if that's what they are like out there—and you should know them far better than we do—then it would be better for us not to try to do anything in Vietnam and just give up our effort right now," he concluded. Again taken aback, the French immediately acknowledged that the Vietnamese were anything but puppets, for France had had a good deal of trouble with them for 100 years, which, the Prime Minister wryly noted, accounted for France's present predicament. That was an official position. At the third meeting in this diplomatic drama, at midnight, the French Prime Minister said that there might have been some misunderstanding. The matter perhaps should be reconsidered so that neither France nor the United States would withdraw from Vietnam. Ngo Dinh Diem was indeed a very honorable and honest man. Perhaps the best thing was for both France and the United States to get behind a new program of support for Vietnam. If the United States would persuade the Vietnamese not to be quite so anti-French in their propaganda, and if the United States would remove some of the Americans in Saigon who seemed to have a particular prejudice against the French, then everything might work out satisfactorily. In any event the French and British governments wanted the United States to stay involved in Vietnam and all of Indo-China. They discouraged any notion of American withdrawal.

The Prime Minister and Secretary of State approved parallel but not identical instructions to our respective embassies in Saigon, to convey the concrete undertakings which they had negotiated. The British Foreign Secretary, Harold MacMillan, had concurred. Our instructions, which were accurately revealed by American, British and French journalists in Paris, and which the French version followed faithfully, covered the following points: (1) the United States and France would cooperate in backing the legal government of Ngo Dinh Diem; (2) the United States hoped that this government would be strengthened and broadened by bringing in really capable officials and technicians rather than representatives of conflicting political groups, but the manner of such political reformation would naturally be left to Diem and not imposed on him; (3) elections for a constitution and for national and provincial representa-

tion should be undertaken rapidly so as to assure, in the American and French view, both political legitimacy and popular support either to the Diem government or to its constitutionally based successor and also develop sound, reliable democratic procedure and experience in South Vietnam to handle the issue of the "Geneva elections" or plebiscite called for in the seven-nation declaration at Geneva; and the United States in Paris indicated that these "Geneva elections" should be held but under conditions of completely genuine freedom with the United Nations supervising them in South and North Vietnam; (4) to avoid a military vacuum in the strategic concept, the French military forces in Vietnam of about 75,000 would not be immediately withdrawn but would be "harmonized" in their phasing out of Vietnam with the retraining and reorganization of Vietnam's National Army to assure adequate forces for the defense of Vietnam under SEATO against potential aggression from the rapidly increasing forces of North Vietnam in blatant violation of their obligations under the Geneva agreement on the cessation of hostilities in Vietnam; (5) the United States and France would cooperate in promoting the rapid social and economic advancement of South Vietnam; (6) the United States would use whatever influence it had with Diem to halt anti-French propaganda and activities, although Mr. Dulles had bluntly told the French that such a strong, ardent patriot as Diem was not "our man" and never had been "in our pocket"; (7) the issue of Bao Dai and a monarchy or a republic was to be settled legitimately by the South Vietnamese in their own way, although the United States held no brief for Bao Dai and preferred his exit.

This *détente* with the French ended the rift over Diem and established a tripartite policy on the phased reduction of French forces and the radical transformation of Vietnam's political institutions. Saigon was not altogether happy with these "Big Three" decisions taken without its knowledge. The government there officially requested a conference of the Foreign Ministers of France, Great Britain, Vietnam and the United States to meet in Saigon to agree on a common policy for withdrawal of French forces, for providing measures to assure the security of Vietnam under SEATO and for the conditions and procedures for holding elections according to the Geneva declaration. Washington, Paris and London unfortunately declined the request.

In the summer and early fall of 1955, the focus was on the con-

tinuing civil war with the sects. The Diem government partially won it and achieved political unification. Land reform and social reform were, unfortunately, put backstage. On October 23 a national referendum was held in South Vietnam to choose between Bao Dai and Diem. There apparently was not much choice. Most of the eligible voters threw away the Emperor's ballot. Diem won 98.2% of the vote, an embarrassing plurality in what many observers called a genuine selection of the only alternative. But at least we felt that a referendum had chosen Diem while Ho had never had one! On October 26 the State Department recognized this new state, the Republic of Vietnam, with the comment: "We are glad to see the evolution of orderly and effective democratic procedures in an area of Southeast Asia which has been and continues to be threatened by Communist efforts to impose totalitarian control."

The referendum eliminated Bao Dai's control over the military sects, while the establishment of some republican institutions cleared the way for concentration on our program of nationalist reform with security—to make the "magnet" policy work. Only one major political step remained—to establish a constitution and national assembly.

On March 4, 1956 a large majority of the electorate again went to the polls in what was described as a relatively free and honest election to create a national assembly of 123 members. While 90 to 100 of the representatives were affiliated with the national revolutionary movement and several other parties associated with Diem and his brother, 20 to 30 genuine independents were also elected. According to unbiased observers, the people in the electoral districts did have a choice of different candidates although the range of political views did not extend all the way to include the Communists, colonialists or monarchists. Most observers concurred that this election expressed genuine support for Diem and his policies, and for a nationalist reformation in South Vietnam. This election also represented a fair expression of Vietnamese opinion against elections with North Vietnam to turn over the South to the Communists. A measure of self-determination had begun. The reality of a politically independent South Vietnam was emerging.

Looking back at the record it is hard to find official American pronouncements describing the policy of reform with security or support for genuine and radical nationalism in South Vietnam after

1954. I have even been told by current opponents of President Johnson's policy in Vietnam that the United States never supported reform and nationalism in South Vietnam in the early days of our involvement and that, if we had, the United States would not be in its present predicament. The fact of the matter is that a Republican Administration in Washington did vigorously support genuine democratic nationalism and authentic reform in South Vietnam. And that reform even had a certain socialist coloration to it. As one proof of our conscientious support for the nationalist aspirations of the Vietnamese people, which President Eisenhower emphasized in his letter of October 23, 1954, may I point out that this policy was stated, for example, in an officially cleared talk I gave in August 1956, which was published in the State Department Bulletin. I made the following comment regarding this policy in Vietnam:

Finally, the survival of freedom requires our sympathy, encouragement and support for those groups and movements sharing our broad purposes and generally enhancing our interests. The critical developments in South Vietnam in 1955 confronted us with a dramatic challenge. The political issue turned on the continuation in office of Ngo Dinh Diem whom many Vietnamese and foreigners, officially or otherwise, considered finished. Without his stout-hearted leadership at that moment, Vietnam could have collapsed. A somewhat unconventional revolutionary nationalism quickly organized itself in Vietnam supporting Ngo Dinh Diem's leadership. Other forces in Vietnam and in the Free World stood by him. At this crucial confusing moment of trial in Vietnam the Department of State, pressed for an opinion on the situation, declared that: "The United States has great sympathy for a nationalist cause that is free and effective. For this reason we have been and are continuing to support the legal government of Ngo Dinh Diem."

#### *The "Geneva Elections"*

The really difficult diplomatic policy issue in 1955 and 1956 concerned the "Geneva elections." This matter came up constantly in discussions with our allies, with Saigon, with the Communists and with the press and public opinion. The seven-nation declaration of July 21, 1954 had provided that "general elections shall be held in

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July 1956, in order to ensure that sufficient progress in the restoration of peace has been made, and that all the necessary conditions obtain for free expression of the national will." The declaration also stated that the settlement of political problems in Vietnam "shall permit the Viet-Nameese people to enjoy the fundamental freedoms, guaranteed by democratic institutions, established as a result of free general elections by secret ballot." This document also provided for consultations after July 20, 1955 between the "competent representative authorities of the zones" and that such general elections should be supervised by an international commission composed of Canada, India and Poland. At Geneva the United States and the Republic of Vietnam did not join in this declaration, were not bound to carry it out; the United States at Geneva and ever since has advocated all-Vietnamese elections with effective supervision and genuine freedom under the auspices of the United Nations.

We believed that the government in Saigon should participate vigorously in those consultations which would have been held in the demilitarized zone. Our French and British allies were, of course, bound by their adherence to this declaration. French opinion at the time did not seem to put much stress on fundamental freedoms and democratic institutions, although our British colleagues did. Nevertheless, during the spring and summer of 1955 we tried in Saigon to persuade Diem and his colleagues to engage in those consultations with Hanoi in order to inform all the Vietnamese people about the general nature and exact details of democratic procedures for genuinely free elections. We assembled a large amount of documents, books and source material on elections held all over the world for the Vietnamese nationalists to use. However, they held a diametrically opposed view about consultations with Hanoi. They felt that it would signal to all Vietnamese the capitulation of the Vietnamese nationalists to the Vietnamese Communists. If the nationalists went to the demilitarized zone, the Confucian psychology of the population in the South would have read this as a sign of surrender for Diem and a mandate of victory for Ho. Diem and his colleagues refused to accept a "death warrant." We urged and urged them to seize the initiative. The "ancestral blindness" of the West and the East collided. Diem and the Vietnamese nationalists won this argument with us. We did not and could not force them to commit political suicide. Perhaps we did not try hard enough or use the right technique with Saigon, such as a high-level conference. But Diem was

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no puppet. The Vietnamese are proud, independent, tough people. They do not take orders, whether Nationalist or Communist. When they feel strongly, they often act adamantly. They believed that the Geneva declaration would have killed nationalist freedom, nationalist reform and nationalist independence in South Vietnam and ultimately in Southeast Asia. That was not "self-determination," and that was the real issue then; it is still the critical issue in Vietnam. Diem knew it. Ho knew it. Dulles knew it.

We were not legally obliged to help carry out elections in 1956. We were certainly not going to murder the South by political suffocation in rigged polling booths. Everybody knew that the arithmetic of "general elections" in all Vietnam would automatically guarantee Communist control of the entire country, for many more Vietnamese lived north of the 17th parallel than south. The people in the North would have been given only one choice and one slate of candidates in view of the monopoly of power held by the Communist Party and the North Vietnamese security forces. But arithmetic was not the only issue in the "Geneva elections." The issue then, as now, was the kind of free general elections to be held, real or rigged. Under what circumstances of political freedom and choice? With what kind of supervision?

In 1955 the three allies agreed in general on the necessity for going through with the consultations and even the elections if we could persuade Saigon to do so and if they would be really free and effectively supervised. However, we were surprised to find that Soviet representatives—Khrushchev, Molotov and Gromyko—did not seem particularly concerned about having consultations take place for elections in Vietnam. As I recall, the question really never came up. Rather, the Soviet representatives dismissed Vietnam and hinted that pressure on our part to discuss it would upset consideration and prevent conferences on other subjects. The Russians were saying that we should not make too much of these issues. As to Western-style free elections, with multiple parties and choice of candidates, the Russians were as unyielding then as the Communists have been during the past year. In 1955 the Americans were given to understand in no uncertain terms that there were not going to be any free elections in North Vietnam, North Korea or East Germany. There could be no elections in Vietnam in the Western sense of the term despite the language of the Geneva declaration. There would be no United Nations supervision either. The Communists did not

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seem anxious to have political supervisors and political elections in 1956.

By the spring and summer of 1956 several other factors combined to defer the "Geneva elections" indefinitely. The International Control Commission had become completely hamstrung in North Vietnam in supervising the military aspects of the Geneva agreement on the cessation of hostilities. The North Vietnamese had violated this agreement in many major respects, as the British government pointed out in its report of April 1956. If Canada, India and Poland could not supervise a military agreement, what reason was there to suppose that representatives of the same three countries could supervise and guarantee free elections in North Vietnam? Moreover, even if the Commission had been more effective, the United States felt that its election policies in Vietnam should conform to those in Korea. There it was essential to maintain the position in and out of the United Nations that all-Korean elections should be under the supervision of the United Nations, although the Communists and others insisted on "international" rather than United Nations supervision. Washington considered it necessary to be consistent and not compromise its principles in either Korea or Vietnam. Finally, Hanoi rejected the repeated appeals of Saigon to liberalize conditions in the North to permit fundamental freedoms, democratic institutions, secret ballot, and free expression of the national will, as called for in the Geneva declaration. If Hanoi had shown any disposition to move in that direction during 1955-1960, Saigon would have joined in consultations. However, Hanoi tightened rather than loosened its grip over the people. General Giap, Communist Minister of Defense in Hanoi, has conceded that terrorism, torture and political control went too far in 1955-1956.

Washington realized that postponement of the "Geneva elections" was a momentous decision which could lead to a major political and military confrontation with North Vietnam. As many people pointed out at the time, the by-passing of the 1956 "Geneva elections" might provoke Hanoi to attack the South by subversion or aggression in order to unify Vietnam by force, if Ho could not get it by political means. That is just what happened. The United States continued to suggest to Diem that he develop some relationships with the North in trade, exchange of persons, mail and such other ways as would not compromise the integrity of the Republic of Vietnam. The government in Hanoi made many such overtures for a few

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years. Diem turned them all down while expressing willingness to discuss and carry out genuinely free elections as soon as the authorities in the North permitted genuine freedom, i.e., whenever the Communist regime ceased being Communist. In the meantime some efforts were undertaken to accelerate and strengthen the "magnet" policy of reforms with security to promote the nationalist revolution and satisfy the aspirations and discontent of the people.

### *Ten Years of Success and Failure*

During 1955-1960, the American policy of nationalist reform achieved substantial economic and social progress in South Vietnam. The record is clear and convincing in material terms. The fact of the matter is that the "magnet" policy of the United States worked too well in those years. Hanoi could not stand the comparative advantage of progress in the South. The "magnet" policy inevitably set in motion Hanoi's campaign to extinguish nationalism in South Vietnam by terror and guerrilla warfare in the countryside. It was at this point in America's odyssey in Vietnam that failure in political and military partnership on the part of Vietnamese and American officials undermined their substantial social and economic achievements in those years and unwittingly served to facilitate the Communist campaign of violence.

Diem's refusal to hold local elections for village chiefs in 1956 perhaps began the unraveling of his support and contributed to the disappointment and apathy of the rural population. Communist agents cleverly exploited this. We were concerned at the time about Diem's resistance to holding village elections which would allow the farmers to choose their own leaders in unions and local councils. In addition to this local problem, Diem's refusal to broaden his government with respected, capable and dedicated Vietnamese nationalists, his resistance to attracting people of the younger generation with educational and professional background, and his failure to build a popular nationalist movement throughout South Vietnam weakened and narrowed his base of support by 1961. He became more conservative and dictatorial when his friends pleaded with him to be more of a liberal, popularist national leader. There was no meeting of minds—no partnership—in politics or in reform.

Another serious mistake made in 1955-1960 was the American failure to understand and anticipate the Communist war of terror



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and insurgency among rural people which became likely when the "Geneva elections" did not take place in 1956. The murder of village officials signaled the beginning of the so-called second Indo-Chinese war in 1957. We all saw this coming. We Americans insisted on our pattern of conventional economic aid and orthodox force. Both have been a grievous mismatch in Vietnam. Another case of "ancestral blindness."

The Saigon government under Diem and the Americans did not seriously or effectively "bottom-up" United States aid for village participation and mobilization of the farmers in the defense of their own interests. The "government gap" and the "security gap" overlapped in a rural vacuum of apathy and defenselessness which the Communist technique of rural warfare has skillfully exploited and effectively filled during the past six years. Reform and change descended in the traditional way, from a paternalistic, insensitive, old-fashioned authority which continued the "government gap" between urban and rural, ruled and ruler. That is Asia's ancestral problem. In Vietnam the gap of apathy and suspicion in the villages was not closed in 1955-1960. Material progress came to the rural people in "top-down" education, health and agriculture. But political morale did not "bottom-up." Protection and security, the villager's touchstone for deciding who wields authority and to whom to show allegiance "bottomed out." There was less and less protection as the Communists began destroying the village authorities and all people with links to Saigon. The villagers had to bow to the gun and the knife.

The American military objective was to create a Vietnamese army like the Korean army which we had built up to defend the 38th parallel and demarcation line in Korea. The targets in Vietnam were ten divisions and two corps, in the image of the American establishment, to be deployed along and south of the 17th parallel. That was the myth of the parallels, but the parallel was not there for two reasons—and it is not today. Our commitment under SEATO did put an umbrella of massive air and sea power over Vietnam to deter a conventional visible invasion across the line and our power did discourage a clear-cut aggression across a demarcated frontier. Second, Vietnam, unlike Korea, has a long, vulnerable, porous land frontier with Laos and Cambodia and a long, open seacoast. Many South Vietnamese "hard-core" Communists had remained in the South or gone North. During four critical years the United States

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government could not cope with this dilemma of "aggression by seepage" to train counter-guerrilla forces outside or even within the Vietnamese army. The task was left to the civilian aid mission and its police training component, neither of whom was equipped for the challenge.

In 1959-1960, Hanoi stepped up its program of revolution by murder to capture the South and was succeeding by 1961, because the "magnet" was working. Hanoi recognized that by 1959 Diem was well on his way to "consolidating" the South, as Communist publications have stated. Hanoi then openly organized three instruments for conducting a "people's war" to counter the national revolution: the "National Liberation Front," the "People's Revolutionary Party" and the "Vietcong." Hanoi accelerated the assassination of village and government officials by the thousands and increased the southward filtration through Laos of former Vietminh partisans who had been regrouped in the North after 1954. This was not a truly indigenous popular uprising or peasant insurrection, despite much rural discontent. When President Kennedy came to office he was confronted with a rapidly mounting and extremely serious challenge of terror and guerrilla warfare in South Vietnam which threatened Southeast Asia. When he was asked in 1963 if he doubted the "domino theory," he replied that he believed it and declared:

China is so large, looms so high just beyond the frontiers, that if South Vietnam went it would not only give them an improved geographic position for a guerrilla assault on Malaya but would also give the impression that the wave of the future in Southeast Asia was China and the Communists.

He renewed American backing for Diem and reasserted the strategic concept in Southeast Asia after a thorough analysis of the "Diem problem" and our strategic interests in Vietnam as well as Southeast Asia.

In his effective visit to Southeast Asia in May 1961, Vice President Johnson made a major effort to persuade Diem to take real action to advance the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Vietnamese people. He also proposed that new social and economic measures be undertaken in rural areas to go along with the anti-guerrilla effort, so that the people could benefit promptly in their villages from the restoration of law and order.

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The Taylor Mission of 1961 and the Kennedy policy on Vietnam assumed that the large commitment in resources to underwrite Vietnamese efforts and responsibilities would not necessarily lead to a war with the Communists to hold the line in Southeast Asia. General Taylor apparently did recommend to President Kennedy a limited deployment of United States forces in Vietnam to guard key installations, defend the Lao-Vietnamese frontier, relieve the Vietnamese army, and reassure the Vietnamese people, which several of us had recommended. However President Kennedy and some of his other advisers decided against a commitment of United States troops to Vietnam and Southeast Asia. If the United States government had made this highly selective employment of its forces then, we might not be in our predicament today. The United States left the Lao corridor wide open for a continuous and expanding flow of North Vietnamese infiltrators and supplies. The tide began to turn in 1962 and 1963. According to the Australian journalist, Wilfred Burchett, who usually takes the Communist viewpoint, the Vietnamese Communists conceded that 1962-1963 was Diem's "year." Other observers now agree that the Communist assault was blunted and reversed. It might have collapsed if again a conjunction of military and political oversights had not occurred. The seepage into Vietnam from Laos and the sea might have been reduced substantially after 1963 if Diem and his brother had not ruined themselves politically. Diem, and his brother in particular, so mismanaged the Buddhist movement and alienated so many urban people, that they lost their mandate and their lives. Diem proved incapable of meeting the protest or mastering his family. The "ancestral blindness" of his kinfolk destroyed this proud but good man who had overshot his place in history. The "magnet" of the Americans and the mandate of Saigon collapsed with Diem's assassination.

For the past two years we have had to start all over again in Vietnam to avert defeat and disaster and to revive the nationalist revolution. Hanoi's revolution by murder almost killed South Vietnam. America's superior technology was mismatched against Hanoi's superior organization—and Saigon's anarchy. Conditions have changed in Asia and in Vietnam from what they were in 1954-1955. President Johnson has confronted almost an entirely new situation where new challenges demand new solutions.

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### *Conclusions*

We can learn several lessons from the American encounter with Vietnam. The partnership cannot be an easy one; it may not even be viable. The Vietnamese background and outlook are so different from ours, and the Vietnamese experience has been so harsh and unhappy, that a healthy, workable association with the most powerful Western nation may be outdated or premature. Vietnamese have no reason to welcome foreigners or alien influence in view of Vietnam's experience with the Chinese, the French, the Japanese and to some extent the Americans. The United States will continue to have a difficult time in grafting its ideas and techniques into the hard grain of Vietnamese individuality. The decade of exposure suggests that we do best when we stick to our aptitude for personal contacts and small-scale help in health, education and rural reform.

Our encounter also demonstrates that Vietnam has become an even more important, vital linchpin in the crescent of Asian interdependence than it seemed in 1954. Developments have confirmed the validity of our strategic concept toward Vietnam. It cannot be separated from the regional defense of Southeast Asia. Most Asians know that the test there will determine whether the same rural war by proxy will come to Thailand, Burma, Nepal and India, for covert cadres are being organized and trained to undertake "people's wars" in each of these countries along the Himalayan mountain massif of China's southern frontier. The Communist take-over of power failed in Indonesia only by a slight miscalculation. Communist success in Vietnam would certainly lead to psychological erosion and military ventures in other parts of Asia. Vietnam is more than ever before the point of impact in the decisive test for Asia's future course. The question for us in 1966 is how to produce a verdict for lasting peace and stability.

First, political reform should have priority over prosecution of the war, or at least be equal with it. Where there is no substitute for politics, progress with protection is the yardstick. There must be rice, reform and rifles. Instead of worrying about the composition of governments in Saigon, we should focus more on the villages, as the original "magnet" policy of reform with security attempted. Vietnam desperately needs dynamic political leaders and professional social cadres in the villages to close the "government gap" and spark a village revolution.

Second, we should have learned that, in this process, economic development is not the primary factor or best instrument in situations like Vietnam. American bias, our ancestral blindness, overstates economic development and underplays nonmaterial incentives, morale and allegiance. These are the governors of revolution, solidarity and change. All the rice seed, health clinics, school buildings, village roads, animal husbandry—and more cash—will not by themselves put the Vietnamese humpty-dumpty back together again. The lesson for us is to start promoting “new political men” with new “ego-incentives” and a new behavior. The place to start is in mutual revolution of the “attitude identity” of villagers and officials toward each other to close the “government gap.” That is the strategic point to spark a movement of rural resurgence in Vietnam—and rural Asia for that matter. Then economic satisfactions and social improvements will provide energy for forward acceleration of the people. Popular resurgence can reverse the decline in Vietnam where counter-insurgency, civic action, strategic hamlets, pacification and reform with security have mismatched needs and responses. By a long-range and systematic plan for recasting the entire context of the political struggle, the two Vietnams could eventually come to terms, negotiate their differences in a federal solution and join with their neighbors in the unification of Southeast Asia.

Third, we can and must insist on joint adherence to those essential principles and procedures which should govern United States aid, and ensure its effectiveness and mutuality. We should have insisted on village elections and free farmers' unions in 1956, and democratization and decentralization of our aid in the provinces in 1961 instead of giving in to Diem and Nhu. We should now adhere to the principles of the Eisenhower letter of 1954 stressing nationalist aspirations and effective performance by the Saigon government in rural resurgence. If genuine political reforms and effective political action are not accepted and practiced this time, we should withdraw from Vietnam.

Fourth, we should on our part change our styles of communication and operation in order to adjust to Vietnamese ways and reduce our “ancestral blindness.” Instead of doing things on a very large scale and very quickly, we must learn to deal with smaller dimensions, different styles and changed tempos. We should recast all our operations, military, economic and political, into small, simple units which will deal with village reform and security on Viet-

namese terms, not American. We should revise our system for selecting and assigning personnel to Vietnam in order to bridge the cultural gap. And we should drastically realign the organization in Washington and Saigon for dealing effectively with Communist warfare and for promoting rural resurgence.

Fifth, we should have learned by now to stop counting the clock in Southeast Asia. The end of the game is years away. Americans are naturally always asking when it will be over. In the late 1950's the United States even put a time limit on its aid program in Vietnam. Accomplishment of our objectives is a long and complicated task, much involved with the confusions and cross-currents of Asia's disorders. If we Americans can learn to treat the problem as one of 10 or 20 years, we will not find ourselves then in the dilemma which we face today. In fact, we may even be on our way out of it—successfully.

Sixth, we have a lot to learn about how Asian Communists fight and negotiate. They use any available means and show no scruples in maneuvers of pure deception or delay. They set up false issues to exact real concessions and even try to make their adversaries pay twice for the same compromise. In fact, to negotiate means just the reverse to them as it does to us. The Communists demand, they do not trade. They seek to destroy, not to accommodate. Power is the only test which they respect, and propaganda the tool which they exploit. No quarter is given, no time limit asked. Wishing for negotiations with them or bombing them will not bring them to the table.

Seventh, we will reach a verdict in Vietnam only when we change the political context within all Vietnam and within the perspective of movement toward Southeast Asian unification. Vietnamese leaders and people—South and North—need newer and different options than satellization from China or dependence on America. The answer will be a new political order for integrating and guaranteeing Southeast Asia.

Finally, our original policy of nationalist reform with security in support of a “free and effective” nationalist movement can still be the best strategy for eventually discouraging Hanoi and bringing a truce with justice and security for the suffering Vietnamese. We must get rid of the mismatches of our technology and get on with resurgence of Vietnam's youth and Vietnam's authentic revolution. Asia is in disorder, yet Asian nationalism wants to prevail. It will go down if we disown our strategic concepts and withdraw our po-

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litical commitments. The abandonment of the Vietnamese nationalist revolution would open Asia—the world's most populous and convulsive continent—to disintegration. Without prudent force now, there will be no place for healing diplomacy later. In the long sweep of history our journey with Vietnam has just begun. We are participants now and no longer just advisers. How we conduct ourselves in Vietnam is the key question to our success and an acceptable verdict.