



## SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE



### To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese Culture

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#### A COUNTRY STAYS ALIVE WHEN ITS CULTURE IS ALIVE.

- SACEI Newsletter updates you on the latest news about Vietnamese-America.
- It serves as a LINK between SACEI members and those who are interested in the Vietnamese or Vietnamese-American culture.

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## Editorial Note

This newsletter is dedicated to two of the 1963 most important South Vietnamese personalities: President Ngo Dinh Diem and his sister-in-law, Mme Ngo Dinh Nhu aka Tran Le Xuan.

The lead paper was written by Doctor Geoffrey D.T. Shaw who earned his PhD in History at the University of Manitoba, a Master of Arts in Military History at the University of Victoria (joint program with Royal Roads Military College) and his Bachelor of Arts double major in History and Political Studies at the University of Manitoba. Dr. Shaw is currently the President of the Alexandrian Defense Group/www.counter-insurgency.com and, previous to this, a professor for American Public University System.

### NGO DINH DIEM: THE ENIGMATIC CONFUCIAN

*Geoffrey Shaw*

Immediately preceding Ambassador Frederick Nolting's mission to the Government of South Vietnam, the United States government's concerns about how best to match its diplomatic and military responses to the evidence of growing strife in the former French colony were beginning to expand at a prodigious rate. While there had always been some concern over what kind of a man they had allied themselves with, in the person of Ngo Dinh Diem, there had been little doubt about his leadership ability. In these early years, when near absolute political and civil chaos reigned in the country in 1955, Diem had produced, by 1957, a tenuous stability which was, quite rightly, referred to as a miracle in the American news media publications of the day. Yet, there was a dissatisfaction amongst some American statesmen with the actual character that Diem possessed, for this was a man who seemed aloof and impervious to American and French "deal-making." Diem, in fact, scared many Westerners as he was a man dedicated to a firm religious and philosophical belief that seemed to give him a quality similar to that of leaders from medieval times. He was not a modern and, compounding this problem, most assuredly not "Western" in his outlook. He could not be bribed; he could not be forced to surrender on principles; he could not be appealed to in terms of practical politics; and he could not be coerced. He was dangerous because he had all the hallmarks of a dedicated martyr made so manifest in his unrelenting pursuit of Confucian order in the face of both revolutionary Marxism and Western democracy and capital. Devout Roman Catholics, such as Francis Cardinal Spellman, were drawn to the man's otherworldly spirituality while the practical soldiers, such as General J. Lawton Collins, were concerned about his inflexibility. What the likes of Spellman and Collins had difficulty in understanding was the fact that Diem's character and leadership style had proved efficient, practical, and moral, at least for the local Vietnamese, as he had been very successful as a village and province chief in his early twenties. Thus the American concerns about his ability

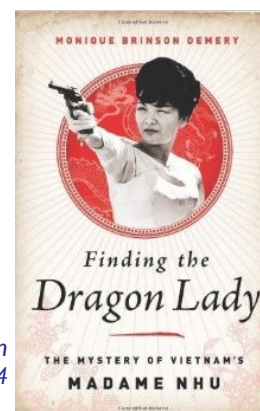
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## Finding the Dragon Lady: Monique Demery

In November 1963, the president of South Vietnam and his brother were brutally executed in a coup that was sanctioned and supported by the American government. President Kennedy later explained to his close friend Paul "Red" Fay that the reason the United States made the fateful decision to get rid of the Ngos was in no small part because of South Vietnam's first lady, Madame Nhu. "That goddamn bitch," Fay remembers President Kennedy saying, "She's responsible ... that bitch stuck her nose in and boiled up the whole situation down there." (From Amazon.com)

*Available on Amazon*

<http://www.amazon.com/Finding-Dragon-Lady-Vietnams-Hardcover/dp/B00FK8K3Z4>



## Madame Nhu: Nghia M. Vo



She was President Diem's sister in law;  
The fact that Diem was single  
propelled her into the role of First Lady,  
which she eased into without problem.

Any Vietnamese woman would feel  
daunted by the huge expectations,  
the burdens and challenges that came  
with the new role and title.

Not her; she loved the limelight  
above all, she loved power.  
She once proclaimed, "Power is wonderful;  
total power is totally wonderful."

She did not feel trapped by motherhood,  
the lack of education, the opposition,  
the politicians, the generals,  
the bonzes or the Americans.

While Vietnamese women with their unconscious  
desires and anxieties were bound by Confucian  
societal rules that forced them to submit  
to father, husband, son, she had none of these.

She started her own revolution by being a woman,  
a mother, the First Lady of a nation,  
the Representative to the National Assembly,  
the head of the Women's Solidarity Movement.

She was an outspoken and fierce fighter  
one of the first feminists in Vietnam,  
an extrovert woman who did not mind  
about what society would say about her.

She showed up and beautifully played the role  
she was cast for. To the Vietnamese women,  
she was the emancipationist who pushed  
through laws outlawing concubinage and divorce.

To the enemies of Vietnam, she was  
a dreaded adversary for she argued, "If one has  
no courage to denounce, if one bows to madness  
and stupidity, how can one fight the evils of this world?"



### Editorial...continued

to govern, such as those expressed by General Collins, were not founded upon Vietnamese experience but upon American preconceptions of what good government should be. The American Roman Catholics made their own error in judgement when they assumed that Diem's Catholicism would necessarily weld him to their view and thus make him more amenable to American direction. Diem was a Roman Catholic Confucianist who was most decidedly non-Occidental in his outlook on the spiritual realm. Indeed, he had even warned French scholars who interviewed him that his sympathies were not with French Catholicism but more closely linked to the stern mix that was to be found in Spain. Nevertheless, it is fairly easy to discern how Americans dealing with Diem would expect certain responses and how they became flummoxed and annoyed when the man responded in what, to them, could only be seen as a bizarre or quixotic fashion.

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Regardless of the concerns expressed about the enigma of Diem's character, he had managed to produce order out of chaos in a relatively short period of time. Diem's communist adversaries were realists, and by 1958 they understood that they had a problem on their hands. South Vietnam was not disintegrating into the kind of chaos which would have made a reintegration with the North a foregone conclusion. They also understood that there were many grievances which they could exploit and organise in the form of an indigenous political movement in the South. No emerging nation, at least in Southeast Asia, was immune from such problems. But political action with a duly subordinated military/terror campaign was what was required to break the bonds being formed between the Diem government and the people. This took the form illustrated below:

*After penetrating the village, the Dang Lao Dong set about to destroy the 'social adhesive' that had traditionally integrated the villager into his society and provided him with a sense of identity....the South Vietnamese Government enjoyed at the outset...an "inertial relationship" between itself and the village. Simply put, the village was to respond to the demands of the Government, no matter how weak the presence, because there were no other authoritarian demands from other directions. This relationship, undisturbed, integrated the Government and the villages into a single social structure....The Party's intensified campaign to break those bonds began on a nation-wide scale in mid-1957. By March 1958, Bernard Fall noted that the Party had assassinated more than 400 village officials. In Dinh Tuong Province, the first mention of systematic destruction of Government presence appeared in early 1959, when the Party embarked on the assassination of schoolteachers. This campaign, which was concentrated in the key Mekong Delta provinces of Long An, Kien Hoa, and Dinh Tuong, contributed to the subsequent lack of schooling for nearly 30,000 children – children who, to the advantage of the Party, were no longer in contact with the Government of South Viet-Nam.*

*The first wave of Party terror was called the Destruction of the Oppression and marked the partial emergence of the Dang Lao Dong from its organisational phase. Most knowledgeable sources agree that the Destruction of the Oppression moved into full swing in late 1959 or early 1960 in Dinh Tuong.*

The communists intentions, through the means of terrorism, were not merely "selective" but overarching, as they were designed for the purpose of frightening the people away from helping and supporting the government. Indeed, as they testified themselves: "Our purpose was not only to eliminate those who could be harmful to the movement but also with a view toward making the people afraid and to prevent them from co-operating with the government."

Thus the Communist assessment was correct and precise in exactly who had to be targeted in order that the "Diem miracle" be brought to an end and, indeed, the political legitimacy of his government challenged to the point where it would become not viable. Specifically, the communists were targeting Diem's leadership, which had a thorough and unique legitimacy in Vietnamese culture.

French scholar Paul Mus was well-acquainted with both Ho Chi Minh and Ngo Dinh Diem and he had acquired an insight into what constituted Vietnamese leadership legitimacy: these were moral qualities that both men had, and both knew it. "Only one man could ever hope to challenge Ho Chi Minh for leadership – Ngo Dinh Diem. Because he alone has the same reputation for virtue and austerity as Ho. Vietnamese will only follow a man who is known to be virtuous and who leads an austere life." Paul Mus gave Ellen Hammer this revelation when she interviewed him in Paris; he was an individual who had grown up in Vietnam and had acted as an official French emissary to Ho Chi Minh early in the war. He was well acquainted with the Vietnamese, and his expertise was held in the highest regard by the French government. Mus' expert observations on Diem had been related to the Americans in 1948, and, as such, they constitute praise for the man and leader that Diem was, while simultaneously warning the Americans that Diem could not be used as "their man."

The "Destruction of the Oppression," as the terror campaign was called, spanned the gamut between few (or no) killings to outright massacre and slaughter which even the Americans at their undisciplined worst would have been hard-pressed to match:

*At other times, in different circumstances, the terror of the Destruction of the Oppression, which apologists for the Party have often excused on the grounds that it was 'selective,' could take on the appearance of a charnel house. In a Cai Lay village that had changed hands between the Front and the South Vietnamese Government four times in as many years, twenty per-*

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sons, including women, were accused of being Government spies: 'They all had their heads cut off and their bodies were thrown in the street. On them were pinned the charges written on a piece of paper. Government cadres were terrorised... and slow[ed] down their activities.'

*The scene of another particularly bestial execution was visited by Malcolm Browne: 'The hamlet chief in this instance had been tied to a stake in the middle of the market place in full view of the assembled villagers. The man was slowly disembowelled, his children decapitated, and his pregnant wife then tied to the same stake and similarly disembowelled.'*

The communists understood that terror worked best when it paralysed the greatest amount of people, and thus it was most effective when it would seem to be only partially selective to the villagers, much like lightning, wherein no-one could predict who would get hit next.

*The Party at times accused and then executed or humiliated certain persons for their pro-Government activities when even a cursory examination would have revealed the charges to be baseless. Had the Party been consistently discriminatory, eliminating only those persons widely known to be class enemies, then the terror would have become highly predictable and incapable of creating the desired level of anxiety response among the villagers.*

In his studies, tours, and interviews within South Vietnam, analyst William R. Andrews, determined that the killings of village officials, schoolteachers, public-health workers, and other civil servants reached its peak in the year 1963, with a definite decline noticed in 1964. Andrews has argued that the sharp drop in killings of government civil workers in 1964 was owing to a combination of factors such as: in the first place, by 1964, the "Destruction of the Oppression" had been effective in eliminating government workers from areas that had been penetrated by the Party earlier on; secondly, he argues, that the South Vietnamese officials in the rural areas, by this time, were no longer exposing themselves to the Party cadre and thus were avoiding death. By doing so, the officials were no longer exposing the population of the rural villages to the government. Here are the figures which Andrews has drawn attention to and, indeed, which are relevant to the arguments being made:

Year	Assassinations
1957 – 1960	1,700
1961	1,300
1962	1,700
1963	2,000
1964	500

(These figures of Andrews are supported by the studies of Douglas Pike and warrant careful consideration in light of the thesis at hand.)

There is, however, a third explanation which has primary strategic implications and is linked directly to the central thesis of this study and, hence, is linked to the central tenets of insurgency warfare. This is that by 1964 it was no longer necessary to kill civil workers and discredit the GVN to the same extent, because the government's most powerful and substantial pillar of political legitimacy had been removed: Ngo Dinh Diem. Accordingly, even with military power attempting (in futility) to fill the political vacuum left behind by the demise of Diem, it was just a matter of time before the whole structure collapsed. Communist though they were, the insurrectionists were also Vietnamese, and they knew that soldiers could never take the place of a moral, ascetic-scholar, Confucianist leader like Diem in the hearts and the minds of the average Vietnamese. The importance of the strategic political victory gained in the murder of Ngo Dinh Diem cannot be minimised.

Probably not even in their wildest dreams could the communists have imagined that it would be the Americans who would help them the most in undermining Ngo Dinh Diem and bringing down his government. Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap both knew the quality of their adversary. They knew that the moral example set by this scholarly gentleman cut across all levels of Vietnamese society, including the newest and shallowest imposed through contact with modernity (i.e., during the World War and during their increasing contact with things Western brought in by the French), and that his example as a true Confucian leader who had the mandate of heaven was the most formidable obstacle they would face in transforming and integrating all of Vietnam under their revolutionary government. They both had tried, Giap on a number of occasions and Ho on one important attempt, to win Diem over to their cause and they had failed. But they also sensed that the Americans were Diem's Achilles-heel and that through them a successful assault on Diem's legitimacy was their best hope.



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All of this has a great deal of bearing upon just who was responsible for the insurrection in the South, incompetent administration or a carefully planned communist stay-behind or “sleeper” organisation. Douglas Pike has the most and the pre-eminent supporting evidence in his argument (duly noted in the introduction) that confirms that all evidence points toward a superb communist insurgent organisational infrastructure being in place even before Diem had truly taken up the reins of power. Certainly the communists in the North made no attempt to hide the fact that they controlled the insurrection in the South. This was made manifest in their clandestine proposals to Ngo Dinh Nhu in 1963, when they put out feelers to the beleaguered Diem government for a cease-fire in exchange for the beginning of an American withdrawal from Vietnam. Indeed, Seymour M. Hersh predicated his understanding that the Kennedy Administration engineered and supported the coup which removed Diem from power in November of 1963 upon the argument that Kennedy and his officials became alarmed at the evidence that the Ngo Dinh were, in fact, going to come to such terms with the North. Hersh, of course, made this point very clear and quite compelling in his book, *The Dark Side of Camelot*, quoting from Mieczyslaw Maneli, a Polish diplomat, who sounded out Hanoi and Saigon government leaders for the purposes of bringing about ‘negotiated’ neutrality:

*How does it happen that the National Liberation Front is...less active now than during the period before the [present Buddhist] crisis in the Diem regime? At the present time, the Diem-Nhu regime is so weak that a larger partisan offensive could end up in the liquidation of the South Vietnamese administration, leaving only American units on the battle-field. Hanoi must be aware of this, as are many outside observers. If the government in Hanoi does not undertake an offensive designed to remove Diem and Nhu from Saigon, this is certainly because it wishes them to survive for a time yet – long enough to come to an agreement with them behind the Americans’ backs.*

In his studies concerned with the late 1950’s in South Vietnam, scholar Dennis Duncanson confirmed the Douglas Pike argument. He observed that the communists had not been idle during and since President Diem’s initial triumphs over the sects (Binh Xuyen, Cao Dai, and Hoa Hao). According to Duncanson they had left a “sleeper” or a hidden party base in most villages, and threats, coercion and selective assassinations kept peasants in a perpetual state of terror. The excuse of not holding the Geneva Accord’s designated re-unification elections was a convenient propaganda tool for the communists as they increased the pressure on the Diem government in the form of ever-escalating terror:

*There was no period when selective assassination of village authorities, incautious about concealing their antipathy to the DRV, ceased to occur frequently; but after Ngo Dinh Diem repudiated demands for all-Vietnam elections, the rate at which murders were committed (hardly ever humanely) seems to have increased faster; although the Government’s limited administrative control obscured much of what was going on, it is now generally thought that during the nine years that Diem was in power close on 20,000 people lost their lives in this way - the equivalent of an annual murder in every administrative village.*

Sir Robert Thompson noted that the published figures for murders and abductions, that were part of the insurgents’ terror campaign, exceeded 12,000 civilians and government workers for the one year period between 1960 and 1961. But what had really prompted the terror campaign was the fact that Diem’s government had been so successful in bringing about a relative sense of peace and stability in rural South Vietnam during the three-year period after 1955. Another British counter-insurgency expert, P.J. Honey, who was attached to Robert Thompson’s advisory mission to President Diem, had made a precise note of this:

*The country has enjoyed three years of relative peace and calm in which it has been able to carry on the very necessary work of national reconstruction. The most destructive feature in the national life of Vietnam throughout recent years has been the lack of security in the countryside, which obliged farmers and peasants to abandon the ricefields and to flee to the large cities for safety. Today it is possible to travel all over South Vietnam without any risk. The army and security forces have mopped up most of the armed bands of political opponents of the Government, of Communists and of common bandits.*

The purpose of the terror, then, was not to seek retribution, as some leftist scholars would have it, for the failed re-unification elections of 1956, because the communists in the North were in no position to hold such elections, but instead to break the growing bonds between the people and the government of South Vietnam. This, in turn, would bring about strategic paralysis in the governing of South Vietnam, as the people would be deterred from taking action in support of the Saigon. In essence, it was the beginning of an all out effort to destroy the legitimacy of Ngo Dinh Diem and his government.

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While this attack on the political and moral legitimacy of the Diem government was already underway at the tactical, village level in South Vietnam, in May 1959, at the fifteenth plenum of the Communist Central Committee, the leaders of North Vietnam made the formal decision to direct strategically the entire insurgency campaign in the South. The North Vietnamese Communist leadership had a number of options to consider in undertaking this action, as author William R. Andrews noted:

*By 1956, the strength of President Ngo Dinh Diem's political base and the apparent economic progress in South Viet-Nam made the likelihood of the fledgling Government folding upon itself remote. After 1956, it seemed that only force could unite the two halves of Viet-Nam. A conventional attack by Ho Chi Minh's People's Army of Viet-Nam patterned after the invasion of South Korea probably would have succeeded because the Army of the Republic of Viet-Nam was weak and fragmented, but two factors mitigated against such a move: world opinion and the alternative means possessed by the Lao Dong to destroy the South Vietnamese Government...The alternative means possessed by the Dang Lao Dong bypassed the difficulties of conventional military action; that means was revolutionary guerrilla warfare. Conditions in South Viet-Nam, no matter how improved, were advantageous for such an undertaking.*

William Colby's observations on the progress that Diem had made support the argument that the communists had little choice but to attack with political terror and violence if they were not to lose the South but, potentially, the North as well. Colby noted that the communists were well aware of the fact that their campaign to win the people over was going nowhere in the face of the GVN's programs to rebuild the basic rural infrastructure of the South. He called what the Diem government was managing to do, between the years of 1956 to 1959, "the total social and economic regeneration of South Vietnam." Villages that had been abandoned during the Viet Minh war were re-populated, and new schools were being built in rapid order. For example, Colby noted that in one particular province he visited, at the end of the Viet Minh war, there had only been two or three schools, all in the province capital. Yet by the spring of 1959, there were approximately forty new schools spread throughout the province. As such, these were practical and thus powerful indicators to the ordinary Vietnamese peasant that Diem had their best interests at the forefront of his focus on rebuilding the country. They were also powerful indicators to the communists that their campaign was finished unless they somehow could separate the people from the GVN. The communists were left without hope of assuming political leadership and authority in South Vietnam unless they turned, yet again, to violence and insurgency. In this context, then, Colby told his interviewer that he had personally verified this regeneration that was so devastating to the communists:

Ted Gittinger (LBJ Library): Did you verify that?

Colby: **"Yes. There's no question about it, that that had happened. In other words, there was a revival of the economic life [my emphasis]. You saw it in the rice production, for instance, totals, the increase of rice being sold and so forth. A variety of things of that nature were going on. The land reform that's been criticised, the land reform did take the land away from the French owners, and very substantial quantities of it. The program of industrialisation, building up a little industrial zone around Saigon,...the country had an enormous amount of momentum....And of course the communists' conclusion out of this was, no chance. No chance of playing a role, and we're being crushed by the momentum of the government, by this positive momentum of the economic and social development that was in the process. And I think that is what led them to the decision, we've got to go back to the war. Otherwise we've lost it, and we've not only lost it in South Vietnam, we may lose it in North Vietnam as well [my emphasis]. Because it was going through its terrible problems of land reform and not getting anywhere and stagnation and all the rest of it. I think that's really – now, some people say they were compelled to undertake the fight. Well, they were compelled if they wanted to take South Vietnam, and that they had no hope of taking South Vietnam if they let the natural process go."**

The time for substantial Northern assistance for the stay-behind cadres in the South was at hand, and it became manifest to most observers that by 1960 the Viet Minh were embarking upon another major war, the political target being Ngo Dinh Diem who was more assailable through the Americans than the Vietnamese.

The educated and articulate classes of South Vietnam, the urban elite, were painfully aware that a renewed struggle would mean more years of sacrifice, and they were aware through past experience that any struggle with the Viet Minh would be decidedly violent, bitter, and unrelenting. Furthermore, the new urban elite (nourished, indeed established, by American money) resented much of what Diem and his family represented, as the Ngo Dinh's were upper class or mandarin, French speaking

## Editorial...continued

and Catholic, and not associated with “trade money.” A representative of these new urban elites, Dr. Phan Quang Dan, told *Life* reporter, John Osborne, that they feared Diem was building “a Ngo Dynasty.”

These new social elites put forward their own manifesto of grievances, which they first enunciated at the Caravelle Hotel in Saigon, and thus they became known as the Caravellistes. In the “Manifesto of the Eighteen,” which they gave to the international press, they claimed that Diem and his brother, Nhu, were playing into the hands of the communists with their “state-of-emergency” methods of government. Furthermore, they argued that Diem was being insulated from the truth by members of the government’s executive branch and that he needed to act upon Caravellist advice if the country was to be spared from complete destruction at the hands of a rebellious populace.

American military intelligence reports indicated that the large majority of the Caravellist “Eighteen” were suspect in terms of their objectivity (i.e., their position in Saigon’s ever-festering partisan politics) and that none of them had a proven “track-record” for commitment to anything other than their own careers.

President Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, who served in an advisory capacity to the President, were not easily swayed by the arguments of the Caravellistes. They took the protests as a sign that the government was not tough enough. Colby paraphrased, in succinct Western terms, the Diem/Nhu argument on this issue, for Ted Gittinger:

*This put him [Ambassador Durbrow] into conflict frequently with Diem’s concept that you’ve got to hold a strong line of authority here, or your whole thing will come apart. And yes, [Diem’s argument here] we’re building a new structure and base for our government, but we’re not going to do it next week, and we’re not going to do it by giving it away to some of these liberal opposition groups [i.e., the Caravellistes] in the Saigon area who have no base in the countryside, none, and who are just a pain in the neck and have no real political force and really don’t understand what we’re trying to do in this country in terms of building it and strengthening it. They’re talking about loosening when it needs to be tightened and aimed toward a very significant objective.*

Once they were convinced that the Caravellistes were terminally foolish, Diem and Nhu set about intensifying the very measures that had initially caused such severe criticism to be directed toward them. Meanwhile, although the Caravellistes were unable to come up with any practical method for dealing with the communists, American advisors continued to urge Diem to implement democracy in order to gain the confidence and support of the people. But the net “effect of the [Caravellistes’] petition was to start a political war within Saigon to go along with and complicate the guerrilla war in the countryside.” It should also be noted that this was a “war” that simmered in the back-rooms and coffee-houses of Saigon, percolating with intrigue, upon rumour, upon more intrigue, until it boiled-over under the guise of religious persecution, in tandem with the Buddhist Crisis, in the summer of 1963.

American criticism at this time seemed to be concerned with Diem’s land reform problems as well as his apparent intransigence with regard to democratic government practices. Historian George C. Herring in this regard espoused a classic orthodox view of Diem’s failure. Having buttressed his argument from known orthodox school critics of Diem, such as Bernard B. Fall and Frances Fitzgerald, Herring proceeded to claim that Diem’s land reform program was implemented half-heartedly and really did nothing to meet the rising expectations for land in South Vietnam. In Herring’s estimation, as in the orthodox interpretations that he relied on, no understanding of what Diem was up against and what he was trying to accomplish was ever given. Indeed, Diem was derided as being callous toward the peasants and not caring with regard to their political and land expectations.

William Colby gave a completely different perspective than that of the orthodox historians on the problems of land reform in South Vietnam. He gave full recognition to Diem’s earnest struggles to effect national land reform. Secondly, Colby had the imagination necessary to pick up on what Diem was telling the Americans who were disappointed with the slow pace and mistakes of his land reform directions. His message was, in effect, “Be patient, we have to work with an awkward system and the political reality that there will be some remaining landlordism in this interim period.” Colby explains as much in an interview with Ted Gittinger of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library:

## Editorial...continued

*Ted Gittinger: "We've discussed Diem's reform, progress-minded activities. How good were our estimates on such reforms as land reform, the agrovilles and so on?"*

*William Colby: "Well, the land reform worked according to the way most of the successful land reform programs had worked in the past – the one in Japan, the one in Taiwan, various others – in which the government took the land from the larger landowners, and particularly the French, and then loaned the peasant the money, which he then repaid over the next few years. Now the communists very intelligently focused on that as just a way of insisting on further payment of taxes. Because during the intervening years, the years of the war, there were no taxes collected because the backcountry was in a turmoil and in an uproar, and so the peasants weren't paying any taxes. So that the interpretation successfully put forward by the communists, which was in a sense accurate, was that this legal mumbo jumbo meant that the peasants would be required to pay taxes today that they hadn't been required to pay before."*

*Ted Gittinger: "Weren't there charges – perhaps not at the time but later – that the land reform was really too much of a facade? That landlordism was still very prevalent?"*

*William Colby: "The point there is that whatever the maximum size of holding was set at – I don't know, let's say a hundred hectares or something like that, I think that's what it was, which is two hundred and fifty acres, which is quite a lot – too large. And we went to Diem at one point saying, 'Well, you know, you've got to cut this down and make it smaller, because there were still landlords and you still had landlordism.' His response was very interesting, as again, the politics is the art of the possible. He said, 'You don't understand, I cannot eliminate my middle class.' When you think of his position at that particular time, what he was saying was the same decision he made in 1954 to 1956: 'I'm going to use the apparatus of social order that exists in order to conduct this longer-term transition. And I'm not going to dispense with it and try to create a new one in a hurry.'"*

The orthodox claims vis-à-vis land reform and, particularly, Diem's interference in village democracy were nothing much more than pat explanations that simply were not commensurate with the reality of who Ngo Dinh Diem was and the depth of his near-obsession with land-reform. Anyone who knew anything about the background of Ngo Dinh Diem, as a village and later province chief, knew that he was most at home attending to the small details of peasant and village life. His reputation as a Vietnamese nationalist was built upon this understanding. Relatedly, the criticism levelled at him, by scholars and journalists like Bernard B. Fall – that he had foolishly destroyed the natural democracy of the village elections -- becomes preposterous in the face of the facts. These facts, which constituted political reality in South Vietnam, dictated that prior to Diem's attempts to effect government control in the villages, the communist stay-behind cadres had already been hard at work, thus necessitating the GVN's interference.

Here, then, is the standard explanation of Diem's alleged anti-democratic maladministration as put forward by the orthodox school's Bernard B. Fall, but also adhered to by a few non-orthodox historians including such authors as Larry Cable:

*And in June, 1956, the South Vietnamese government made perhaps its most fateful decision. In defiance of one of the most hallowed Vietnamese traditions, according to which the power of the central authorities stops at the bamboo hedge of the village, the Saigon administration abolished by a stroke of the pen elected village chiefs and village councils and replaced them by appointive members."*

What Fall and Cable neglected to mention was that Diem was trying to short-circuit the communist influence in the villages. This was an influence which, of course, made elections, at best, irrelevant and, at worst, useful communist propaganda. Fall tried to claim that even the communists in the North had not been so stupid as to attempt to interfere with the villages. Yet this explanation studiously ignores the fact that there had been massive rebellions against Ho Chi Minh's "land-reform" (i.e., Stalinist collectivisation) in the villages in Northern Vietnam during 1956. Indeed, the Northern rebellion was so out of control that Ho sent in the army with the result that approximately 10,000 Vietnamese peasants lost their lives. Lansdale stated that the communist officials who were adept at running guerrilla war proved to be terrible bunglers in running the Hanoi government. In fact, Lansdale claims that the Northern Communists were so unpopular at this time that they would have been soundly defeated by Diem had the 1956 plebiscite/reunification elections been held – as prescribed by the original 1954 agreements in Geneva.



## Editorial...continued

The orthodox school deliberately ignores or makes light of such claims. Bernard Fall admits that there had been a substantial stay-behind communist organisation in the South, but then he fails to ascribe any thorough going revolutionary capabilities to it. In short, there is no explanation given in the orthodox interpretation vis-à-vis the threat that these communists posed to Diem's GVN, nor is there any consideration given to how he was supposed to deal with such a threat. The fact was that Diem's interference at the village level was necessary; and it eventually translated into the Strategic Hamlets Program, wherein village or hamlet elections were encouraged by the GVN, because the protected peasant communities were no longer subject to the intimidation of the communists. In effect, the orthodox historians set Diem up in order to knock him down while studiously ignoring all the facts that were pertinent to the context of Communist insurgency in the villages.

The Caravellistes' Manifesto/petition and the rural problems associated with land reform and who would have legitimate authority in the villages also marked the beginning of a serious schism, of strategic proportions, that began to develop in American policy toward the government in South Vietnam and the burgeoning guerrilla threat. The CIA was caught in the middle of what would turn out to be a long and bitter fight over "turf" between the Department of Defense and the Department of State. Accordingly, the eyewitness testimony of William Colby, again, becomes very valuable and worth considering as he was in a unique position to observe that quarrel. According to the Colby recollection, the Department of Defense took a predictable stand by viewing the rising Viet Cong insurgency as the outbreak of war. As such, officers in the US military, such as General Sam Williams, argued that the South Vietnamese army needed to be shaped up and reorganised in order to meet the possibility of an invasion from North Vietnam. Consequently, the American military advisory in Vietnam reorganised the command structure of the ARVN in 1959 and called for an increase in men from 150,000 to 170,000 soldiers. It should be noted, at this point, that regardless of the varying views on the design of the force necessary to meet and defeat the communists -- more soldiers versus more policemen -- Diem and his officials had quite good relations with the American military for the most part.

The problems that arose between Diem and Washington found their source in the American political/diplomatic arena. Colby recalled that the American Embassy and State Department objected to the direction that the Diem and US military were taking. They saw the problem as finding its solution only in Diem is making his regime more democratic and less authoritarian. Thus the State Department viewed the military build-up, and corresponding US military aid that would make such a build-up feasible, as a lever that should be applied to Diem in order to secure the reforms the American diplomats thought he should be making. Quite naturally, the American military advisors were infuriated with the State Department's officers presuming to know which the best way was or means for deploying armed forces in South Vietnam:

*Thus, the 'country team' meetings at the Embassy became barely civil, as "Hanging Sam" vented his fury at AID's Gardiner and State's Mendenhall for presuming to interfere in such military matters as determining the proper force levels with which to defend the country, while Gardiner and Mendenhall argued for reforms, especially the removal of Nhu.*

Observing the fight between the Departments of Defense and State, Colby -- who had an excellent grasp of what was going on at the village level in South Vietnam -- formed his own conclusions on counter-insurgency, which did not agree with the DOD or DOS. Colby admitted to being heavily influenced by the British successes and the French failures. The communist strategy, Colby surmised, was anything but a traditional war-fighting direction. The CIA Saigon station-chief intuited that what was at hand in 1960 was the beginning of "people's war." He recognized all the telltale indicators of the first stage as the mobilisation and organisation of insurgent communist forces was clearly under way. Since the challenge was a political and subversive one, it could not be easily addressed by the sorts of standard military doctrines that the American military advisors were advocating. He was quick to add to this realization, however, that the calls for a more democratic or honest or just government in Saigon were for the most part irrelevant to the task at hand. I talked to Colby about this very issue, which he, quite humorously and quite accurately, translated as something akin to: "It's difficult to talk about draining the swamp when you are up to your --- in alligators."

The real battleground that Colby noted was the same one that Sir Robert Thompson had drawn attention to in his now famous statement that it was a struggle for "the hearts and the minds of the people." Thompson made this fundamental understanding plain when he stated "An insurgent movement is a war for the people." Indeed, the similarities between how both Colby and Thompson viewed the nature of the struggle were remarkable. Accordingly, the following excerpt from Colby's

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writing on this issue would find immediate recognition and support (and vice versa) in Thompson's seminal work on the subject, *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences From Malaya and Vietnam*. Written by Colby, the following could have as easily been the work of Thompson:

*The real contest, it seemed to me, was in the villages, where the issues were more fundamental. Did association with the Saigon government offer a better future, both economic and political, for the villager? Or did the national and revolutionary appeal of the Communist organiser, reinforced by the authority of guerrilla squads, convince the villager or leave him no alternative but to join the revolt? My travels in the countryside had shown how wide was the gap between the French-influenced urban class and the traditional Vietnamese villager. But it had also shown the latter's enthusiastic acceptance of economic and social development and his willingness to work hard toward it. In the long term, villagers would certainly insist on more of a voice in their national affairs, even along the lines advocated by the oppositionists in Saigon, but in the near term, they were far more interested in the practical improvements that could be made in their lives and in the life-and-death issue of protection from the armed bands circulating in their regions. Thus, the real way to contest the Communists, it seemed to me, would be to mobilize, organize and involve the villagers in the economic and social improvements that the government was providing and to strengthen them so that they could help defend themselves against Communist pressures. The question was which side they would join, and whether they would be free to join the government's if they wanted to. The answer, I was convinced, would be found only in the villages, not in the political circles in Saigon or in General Staff Headquarters.*

With reference to Colby's analysis, Thompson pointed out that the government could win over the people without being a Western-styled democracy. He believed, with a considerable wealth of experience to intelligently support such belief, that an authoritarian government which applied the rule of law equally to all while engaging in constructive and progressive national policies, very much like what Diem had done, could win the people over. What was required of the government was that it firmly establish in the people's minds that legality-plus-construction-plus-results were what flowed from the government, while illegality-plus-destruction-plus-promises equalled communist insurgency.

Unfortunately, the very fact that a communist insurgency had begun to spread through rural South Vietnam in the late 1950's caused many Americans to take a critical view of Diem. By 1960, American experience with Ngo Dinh Diem and the GVN had created much controversy in Washington, and this was a controversy that would not go away. To many American liberal democrats Diem was an enigma and one that they suspected was unsympathetic to their secular liberal-humanist worldview. Between the lines of what men like Averell Harriman and John Galbraith said and wrote about Diem and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, one can detect a subtle but definite partisan or political-philosophical distaste. This distaste blossomed without restraint into a very definite hatred of Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother. Irrational though it was, it was couched in the finest reserve and wording that Kennedy's "best and brightest" could very adroitly bring to bear. These critics, as the reader shall see, were not as straightforward or blunt as the early American critics, such as General Collins. "Their tracks were covered" with intellectual sophistry, intrigue and manipulation which proved, in the end, far more destructive to the process of indigenous government than Collins' or Durbrow's straight-forward approach with the Vietnamese leader. Ambassador Frederick Nolting explained many years after the fact that he could never entirely plumb the depths of this malice, but he saw it spelled Diem's demise and, undermined sound and patient US policy in the region.

- i. It was in this year that Eisenhower had praised Diem as the "miracle man" of Asia and had pledged further American support (John S. Bowman, ed., *The Vietnam War: An Almanac* [New York: Random House, 1985], 45). Contemporary printed news-media articles, such as those written in *Foreign Affairs*, *Life*, and *Time*, portrayed Diem in a very favourable light. One of the most ironic articles was that of William Henderson in *Foreign Affairs*: "We cannot claim credit for selecting Diem or having pushed him into office, but we have since been his most ardent and effective champion." (William Henderson, "South Vietnam Finds Itself," *Foreign Affairs: An American Quarterly Review*, 35/1-4 (October 1956-July 1957), 286.
- ii. In order to placate factions that had been supporting the French against the communists in the South, pressure had been brought to bear on Diem to accept a working relationship with certain unsavory sects or gangs. "Collins and Ely repeatedly urged Diem to seek the broadest possible support among all Vietnamese factions in the South." David L. Anderson, "J. Lawton Collins, John Foster Dulles, and the Eisenhower Administration's 'Point of No Return' in Vietnam," in *Diplomatic History*, 12/2 (Spring 1988), 132. On this issue alone, a fundamental misunderstanding about Diem's character was evident, for both Collins and Ely expected Diem, the devout Roman Catholic-Confucian known for his incorruptible and rigidly pious nature, to accept members of the Binh Xuyen into his government. The Binh Xuyen, it should be noted, "was a Mafia-like gang that controlled the vice establishments -- brothels, casinos, opium dens -- in Saigon and its suburb, Cholon." Ibid., 132. Collins' mind became set against Diem as he noted in his memoirs: "I had wrestled

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with this decision for weeks, torn between our commitment to Diem -- along with my personal agreement with his objectives -- and my growing conviction that despite Diem's many admirable attributes he did not have the leadership and political know-how to unite the divisive forces of Vietnam in the face of the unity and tough efficiency of the communists under Ho Chi Minh....I had come to admire Diem's spiritual qualities, his personal incorruptibility, dogged patriotism, and tenacity, but these very qualities, linked with his stubborn reliance on the venal ambitions of his brothers, his lack of political sense, his inability to compromise, and his distrust of anyone who disagreed with him, convinced me he would never make the grade as leader of his country." General J. Lawton Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 404.

- iii. On April 25, 1961, Brigadier-General Lansdale sent a memorandum to Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell L. Gilpatric. This memorandum was concerned with the subject of Ngo Dinh Diem's character - a factor that had been causing a great deal of consternation in American planners' minds and, indeed, seemed to be undoing what Americans thought was the best direction for the Government of South Vietnam to follow. Yet, in Lansdale's singularly perceptive assessment of Diem and his character American impatience and immaturity is brought to light as it contrasts so sharply with Ngo Dinh Diem's steadfastness. Accordingly, while the excerpt from the memorandum is lengthy, it is essential reading as it is the very best rendering ever given of the man Ngo Dinh Diem was - by a Westerner and an American no less. This excerpt can be read in Appendix B. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Brigadier-General Edward Geary Lansdale, "Memorandum For Deputy Secretary Gilpatric - Subject: Ngo Dinh Diem," (25 April 1961), V.B.4. U.S. Involvement in The War - Internal Documents, The Kennedy Administration: January 1961 - November 1963, in United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945 -1967, Book I within Book 11 of 12, Study Prepared by the Department of Defense, Leslie H. Gelb, Chairman OSD Task Force, 92<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., (Washington, [DC]: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), pp. 36 - 41. [PPapers, Part V-B-4-Book-I, pages 64ff.]
- iv. Spellman was not the only one drawn to support Diem along Roman Catholic lines and his firm anti-communist commitments, as this group included such very powerful allies such as Senator John F. Kennedy, Senator Mike Mansfield, Kenneth Young of the State Department, Edward Lansdale, Allen Dulles (Director of the CIA), and John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State. Robert Scheer, "The Genesis of United States Support for Ngo Dinh Diem," in *Vietnam: History, Documents and Opinions on a Major World Crisis*, Marvin E. Gettleman, ed., (New York: Fawcett Publications, 1965), 251-252.
- v. General J. Lawton Collins was a very competent soldier, proven under Eisenhower's direct command in Europe, and highly trusted by the United States President. Accordingly, Eisenhower had given Collins a special mission to South Vietnam, essentially to assess the situation with Diem and report back with recommendations of what to do. In this capacity of special envoy, Collins temporarily replaced United States Ambassador Donald Heath in Saigon. Collins had Eisenhower's express authority to oversee the implementation of the entire United States government aid program in Vietnam. Collins, *op. cit.*, 381-382.
- vi. Ellen Hammer had noted that Collins was "unprepared for this Confucian Catholic patriot who accepted help from Washington, yet resisted American advice when it ran counter to his own strong convictions." Ellen J. Hammer, *A Death In November: America in Vietnam, 1963*, (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1987), 71.
- vii. At the age of twenty (in the year 1921), Diem was given the charge of 225 villages, wherein he immediately displayed genuine leadership qualities as he developed an efficient counter-strategy to Ho Chi Minh's fledgling Communist Party and its agents. Bernard Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 239; "South Vietnam: The Beleaguered Man," *Time*, April 4, 1955, 24. In 1929 the French rewarded Diem for his efficient work by appointing him (at age 28) governor of Phan Thiet Province. During the next four years, Diem became well known for honest and competent administration and formidable opposition to violent revolutionaries. Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 239. Significantly, Diem depended on following the rule of law in order to maintain order and coercion or oppression were completely rejected, all of which would impress the Vietnamese with regard to his Confucian mandate. Denis Warner, *The Last Confucian: Vietnam, South-East Asia, and the West* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 89. These crucial legislative features gave Diem a legitimacy that was never doubted by the rural Vietnamese, and they were tied very closely to what the British understood to be the most salient issue of countering communist insurgency.
- viii. Father Piero Gheddo identified another aspect of the problem for modern Westerners to understand the faith of Vietnamese like Diem: "We [i.e., Westerners] now live in a secularised world, while they [i.e., the Roman Catholic Vietnamese] are still in a sacral period, like our Middle Ages." Piero Gheddo, *The Cross and The Bo-Tree: Catholics & Buddhists in Vietnam*, trans. Charles Underhill Quinn (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1970), 72.
- ix. Bernard Fall thus noted: "Ngo Dinh Diem's...faith was made less of the kindness of the apostles than of the ruthless militancy of the Grand Inquisitor ...To a French interlocutor who wanted to emphasise Diem's bonds with French culture by stressing 'our common faith,' Diem was reported to have answered calmly: 'You know, I consider myself rather as a Spanish Catholic,' i.e., a spiritual son of a fiercely aggressive and militant faith rather than of the easygoing and tolerant approach to Gallican Catholicism." Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 236.
- x. William Colby phrased the issue this way: "The communists basically had gone into a holding pattern in 1954, believing that Diem was going to collapse. So did most of the rest of the world. The communists had withdrawn some fifty thousand of their people back to the north. They had put their networks into a state of stay-behind--suspension--and there really wasn't much problem." William Colby, "William E. Colby on Vietnam, Interview I." Recorded interview by Ted Gittinger, June 2, 1981, p. 1., Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Oral History Program; (Transcript copies available from the LBJ Library Oral History Program, University of Texas at Austin).

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- xi. Sir Robert Thompson gives a competent overview of these problems in his *Defeating Communist Insurgency: Experiences from Malaya and Vietnam* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), see esp. 21-23.
- xii. William R. Andrews, *The Village War: Vietnamese Communist Revolutionary Activities in Dinh Tuong Province, 1960 - 1964* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 51, 54-55. Andrews' contentions are supported by Rand Corporation and Military Assistance Command, Vietnam J-2, *Studies of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Saigon: Mimeographed); DT-86, 2; DT-99, 2; DT-84, 2; DT-88, 1.
- xiii. Quotation in Vietnam J-2, *Studies of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam*, DT-99, p. 2. Found in the notes of Andrews, *op. cit.*, 51, 54-55.
- xiv. In this regard, it is useful to revisit Alexander Dallin and George W. Breslauer, *Political Terror in Communist Systems* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1970), 5. The authors go on to note (p. 7) why communist systems are so dependent on the use of terror: "Most instances of massive political terror under Communism appear to have served the functions of destroying or inhibiting all rival authorities, and of insulating the population from all incongruent value systems. The net effect is to eliminate all organised political opposition and to facilitate socialisation by exposing the population to a single, unchallenged system of values."
- xv. Hammer, *A Death In November*, 47.
- xvi. General Nguyen Khanh told this writer virtually the same thing in an interview. When asked what lay at the core of Diem's greatness, Khanh answered without hesitation: "The number one thing was the example of the way of his life; how he lived his life. He sacrificed himself! He didn't even have a good bed to sleep on - he slept on an army cot!" General Nguyen Khanh, "Interview with General Khanh." Recorded interview by Geoffrey DT Shaw. June 16, 1994 (USAF Special Operations School, Hurlburt Field, Florida), 61. Transcript available through the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech or USAFSOS.
- xvii. Hammer, *A Death In November*, 47.
- xviii. Even what went on at My Lai 4, many years later, paled in comparison to what the communists demonstrated they were capable of during their campaign of the "Destruction of the Oppression."
- xix. W.P. Davison, *Some Observations on Viet Cong Operations in the Villages* (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, 1967), 25.
- xx. Malcolm Browne, *The New Face of War* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965), 103.
- xxi. Andrews, *The Village War*, 57-58.
- xxii. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- xxiii. See Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966), 102. The population of South Vietnam at this time was
- xxiv. Ho and Giap knew exactly where Diem was placed in terms of Vietnamese custom and respect: "The Confucian ethic and the Taoist concept of universal harmony and universal order totally disregard material wealth. In the Vietnamese hierarchy of values, a rich man is a troc phu (filthy rich), and a poor scholar is thanh ban (immaculate poor). The traditional Vietnamese social order followed this scale: first, the si (scholars, men of letters); second, the nong (peasants, farmers); third, the cong (workers); fourth, the thuong (businessmen, merchants); and fifth, and last, the binh (soldiers)." Tran Van Dinh, "Why Every American Should Read Kim Van Kieu," in *We The Vietnamese: Voices From Vietnam*, Francois Sully, ed., (New York: Praeger, 1971), 236-237. If anything, the upstarts against Vietnamese tradition were more truly found in these two communist revolutionaries, who certainly managed to maintain the Confucian veneer - which they realised was so necessary in order to assure political legitimacy in the eyes of the Vietnamese people. But in Diem, Ho and Giap were up against the genuine article, Diem's family and background placed the mantle of Confucian authority on him and his character confirmed what Vietnamese wisdom and tradition had anointed by birth. Thomas A. Marks, in his *Counterrevolution in China* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), has detailed that. These same characteristics were noted by the only non-Western advisory mission to be present in South Vietnam, that of the Republic of China (Taiwan).
- xxv. During the immediate pre-Second World War years (and during the war itself), Diem met with Vietnamese nationalists from across the political spectrum at secret meetings in Saigon. Their talk was of revolution, but no concrete plans emerged. In fact, the only significant event that occurred at these meetings in terms of Diem's political development was his opportunity to meet, assess, and influence Vo Nguyen Giap, the later successful commander of the Viet-Minh. Resisting Diem's non-socialist approach, Giap, attempted to convert Diem. Neither was successful, although they did earn each other's mutual respect and admiration. Robert Shaplen, "A Reporter In Vietnam: Diem," *The New Yorker* (Sept. 22, 1962), 108.
- xxvi. In September 1945, the Vietminh had murdered Diem's brother, Khoi, and, having been captured himself, Diem was brought before Ho Chi Minh. Ho tried to convince Diem to work with him and the Vietminh. Diem refused, bluntly stating that he could never work with the murderers of his brother and that he had nothing in common with the destroyers of his country. Deeply impressed with Diem's raw courage, all the while protesting that he knew nothing of Khoi's murder, Ho informed Diem that he was free to go. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking Press/Penguin Books, 1984), 216 - 217. Karnow was able to have this story confirmed in early 1981 by the propaganda chief of the Vietnamese Communist Party, Hoang Tung. Tung indicated to Karnow that Ho's leniency toward Diem had been a mistake.
- xxvii. The "sleeper" or stay-behind argument, as noted earlier, is strongly endorsed by William Colby.
- xxviii. Pike also makes abundantly clear that, even before there was a Ngo Dinh Diem government, the communists had an overarching strategy which was based upon the reunification of all Vietnam under the Party. See Douglas Pike, *History of Vietnamese Communism, 1925 - 1976* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 115-118.



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- xxix. "Allen Whiting, a China scholar who was a State Department intelligence officer in 1963, told me that he and most of his colleagues 'all thought that this Nhu-Diem tie with the North was a very live possibility.' The talks posed risks to the senior officials making policy, he added: 'You don't want Diem and Nhu to cut a deal with the North and tell us to get the hell out.'" Seymour M. Hersh, *The Dark Side of Camelot* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1997), 423.
- xxx. *Ibid.*, 422.
- xxxi. The sects, the Cao Dai, the Hoa Hao, and the criminal Binh Xuyen, had been a challenge to Diem's political legitimacy right from the beginning of his government. Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 239. For these sects not only had access to a bounty of arms and soldiers willing to fight in their hire, but also, at least in the case of the Binh Xuyen, officials and police in Saigon. Dennis J. Duncanson, *Government and Revolution In Vietnam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 220-221.
- xxxii. Diem's victory over the sects was not a foregone conclusion. By March of 1955, with the loyalty of the army still in question (the fledgling ARVN), Bao Dai turned against Diem and sought to have Bay Vien replace him. Hammer, *A Death In November*, 71. Despite threats of a violent coup (Edward Geary Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars: An American's Mission to Southeast Asia*, [New York: Harper & Row, 1972], 258), Diem resisted those ambitions and even decided to challenge the Binh Xuyen's control over the police. He knew that "as a matter of both government integrity and his own survival, the police must be under his control." Anderson, "Point of No Return In Vietnam," 132. Meanwhile, with the Cao Dai controlling the country west of Saigon, the Hoa Hao holding the southern delta, and the Binh Xuyen in charge of Saigon, the Viet Minh commanded large areas of South Vietnam where "Diem had nothing with which to enforce his authority." Warner, *The Last Confucian*, 99.
- xxxiii. Duncanson, 252.
- xxxiv. Understanding terror and how it can be used effectively is to comprehend, perhaps, the most salient foundation stone of Communist insurrection. Mao was right when he noted that power came from the barrel of a gun, but he neglected to refine this philosophy any further to the fact that communist political legitimacy was founded on terror. Terror has several facets and can be manifested in a variety of ways, but political/military terror has a specific purpose in its application. The pre-eminent military historian and thinker, JFC Fuller, first duly noted this purpose. In formulating the foundations of what became known as "Blitzkrieg," Fuller had described the precise military benefits of terror in what he described as "strategic paralysis." Carefully selected targets, attacked and destroyed, transmitted the psychological phenomenon of paralysing terror wherein large groups of people, soldiers, or civilians, were rendered incapable of organising resistance, at least in the short term. Thus for a very low expenditure in resources and wastage of human life, a great number of potential adversaries could be knocked-out without destroying them. To facilitate this transmission of paralysis, Fuller advocated that armies attempt to destroy their opponents' command and control centers (what he called a blow to the brains of the body) while leaving the actual communication links between units untouched in order to spread the terror of rumors and false orders. all the faster. All that the Communists did, when down-sizing this kind of direct military strategic paralysis for civilian insurrectionist use, was to target key government employees in the villages and hamlets and make sure that their horrific demise was transmitted to all the surrounding areas so that everyone got the message and was thus rendered helpless (it also helped if this terror seemed to have no method so as to appear as if a strike by lightning, so that no-one could feel safe in a pattern of non-commitment). This was an intelligent, cost-effective, and cold-blooded way of destroying the bonds between the incumbent government and the people in the field. It was also completely beyond the pale of moral restraint as it moved outside the areas prescribed by international laws in dealing with non-combatants in a time of war. This communist insurrectionist strategy drew non-combatants into the line of fire in more ways than one, not least of these being the simple fact that government troops would eventually grow tired and angry at the constant sullen responses they got when interrogating civilians in the villages and hamlets about the presence of insurgents (remembering that these villagers were being sullen and quiet because they had just witnessed the disembowelling of a village chief or even a relative and they did not relish the same fate for themselves). Government troop reprisals against civilians would eventually occur, which would then allow the insurgents to take on the new found role of protector of the oppressed peasant. The civilian was clearly marked as the cannon fodder for this kind of deliberate action-reaction terror campaign provoked by the communists.
- xxxv.
- xxxvi. Duncanson, *Government and Revolution in Vietnam*, 252.
- xxxvii. Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 27.
- xxxviii. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *Rebellion Against My-Diem, Evolution of the War - Origins of the Insurgency, 1954 - 1960 in United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967*, IV. A., 5. Tab 2., Book 2 of 12, Study Prepared by the Department of Defense, Leslie H. Gelb, Chairman OSD Task Force, 92<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), 46.
- xxxix. Edward Geary Lansdale had predicted that just prior to the planned 1956 elections, the North itself would probably find a convenient way around the process and blame the South for ruining the agreement -- because they had serious political problems of their own making. Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 346. Perhaps, the most thorough-going examination of the land-reform bungling which lead to open revolt in the North is in Pike, *The History of Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1976*, 108-113. In addition to land-reform excesses and brutalities, the Ho Chi Minh regime was hardly in a position to be accusing Diem's government of Geneva Accords violations as, indeed, the Communists had been involved in several serious violations not least of which included the fact that they had been building up the offensive capabilities of their armies: "The United Kingdom had cited in 1956 an increase in the DRV armed forces from 7 to 20 divisions and evoked the 1958 denunciation of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs for the DRV's increasing its military strength from a 1954 total of 200,000 to 550,000. The White Paper castigated Hanoi for 'introducing 600 to 700 Chinese instructors' and noted that 'the number of Russian and Chinese advisors amounts to several thousand in all echelons of the Army.'" Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *Failure of the Geneva Settlement, Evolution of the War - Origins of the Insurgency, 1954 - 1960*, in *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967*, IV. A. 5.

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- Tab I. Book 2 of 12, Study Prepared by the Department of Defense, Leslie H. Gelb, Chairman OSD Task Force, 92<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), 29-30.
- xl. Andrews, *The Village War*, 20.
  - xli. "Disorientation is the objective par excellence of the terrorist removing the underpinnings of the order in which his targets live out their daily lives. The primary responsibility of any incumbent group is to guarantee order to its population, and the terrorist will attempt to disorient the population by demonstrating that the incumbent's structure cannot give adequate support." Thomas Perry Thorton, "Terror As A Weapon of Political Agitation," in *Internal War: Problems and Approaches*, Harry Eckstein, ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 83.
  - xlii. This argument is also supported by RAND studies. See Stephen T. Hosmer, *Viet Cong Repression and Its Implications For The Future*, R-475/1-ARPA -- A Report prepared for the Advanced Research Projects Agency (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation, 1970), 7-8.
  - xliii. Andrews, *The Village War*, 20-21.
  - xliv. Cf. William Colby, "William E. Colby on Vietnam, Interview I." Recorded interview by Ted Gittinger (June 2, 1981), I, 7-8, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Oral History Program, University of Texas at Austin.
  - xlv. Edward Geary Lansdale's observations about what faced the communists correspond to the Colby analysis. "Paradoxically, the Communist campaign of terrorism started just as life in the countryside was beginning to show great promise for the people on the land. It wasn't only that the armies had departed from the former battlegrounds in the rice paddies, letting farmlands be tilled in peace; there were, as well, a multitude of new efforts being made to improve the whole agrarian economy of Vietnam. Each time that I visited President Diem in his office, I would find him deep in the study of some new program, often of vast dimensions." Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 354.
  - xlvi. William Colby, "William E. Colby on Vietnam, Interview I." Recorded interview by Ted Gittinger, June 2, 1981, pp. 1,7-9, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Oral History Program, University of Texas at Austin.
  - xlvi. Warner, *The Last Confucian*, 146.
  - xlvi. Duncanson, 266.
  - xlix. John Osborne, "The Tough Miracle Man of Vietnam: Diem, America's Newly Arrived Visitor, has Roused his Country and Routed the Reds," *Life* (May 13, 1957), 175.
  - i. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy, 1941-1966*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967), 16.
  - ii. Osborne, *op. cit.*, 168.
  - iii. Duncanson, *op. cit.*, 267.
  - iii. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *Rebellion Against My-Diem, Evolution of the War - Origins of the Insurgency, 1954 - 1960 in United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967*, IV. A., 5. Tab 2., Book 2 of 12, 34.
  - iv. Duncanson, *op. cit.*, 267.
  - iv. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, *Rebellion Against My-Diem, Evolution of the War - Origins of the Insurgency, 1954 - 1960 in United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967*, IV. A., 5. Tab 2., Book 2 of 12, 39.
  - vi. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Brigadier-General Edward Geary Lansdale, "Memorandum For The Secretary of Defense, Deputy Secretary of Defense", (January 17, 1961), *U.S. Perceptions of the Insurgency, 1954 - 1960, Evolution of the War - Origins of the Insurgency, 1954 - 1960*, in *United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945 -1967*, IV. A. 5. Tab 4. Book 2 of 12, 67, 69, and 73.
  - vii. Douglas Pike told this writer that, for a supposed tyrant, Diem was loathe to act like one even when, perhaps, it would have been better for all concerned if he had been a good deal tougher (see Pike's work on Diem in *Friendly Tyrants*).
  - viii. William Colby summed up the effect of the Caravellistes on Diem and Nhu in the following excerpt from his memoirs: "Diem and Nhu contemptuously rejected the petition, remarking on the plush surroundings of the Caravelle Hotel in which this group of Saigon politicians had gathered, and on their lack of contact with the rural areas where the real battle against both the Communists and underdevelopment were underway." William Colby (and Peter Forbath), *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 159.
  - lix. William Colby, "William E. Colby on Vietnam, Interview I." Recorded interview by Ted Gittinger, June 2, 1981. The Lyndon Baines Johnson Library Oral History Program (Transcript copies available from the LBJ Library Oral History Program, University of Texas at Austin), 11.
  - ix. These measures included, *inter alia*, the following: press censorship, detention without trial, implementation of the agrovilles, and Can Lao Party suzerainty over the army. Duncanson, *op. cit.*, 267.
  - lxi. Shaplen, "A Reporter In Vietnam: Diem," *The New Yorker* (22 September 1962), 125.
  - lxii. Colby, *Honorable Men*, 159.
  - lxiii. George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 65.
  - lxiv. The standard anti-Diem position is best related in the following excerpt from Herring's work: "The Diem government might have survived its authoritarianism had it pursued enlightened policies, but its inattention to the needs of the people and its ruthless suppression of dissent stirred a rising discontent which eventually brought its downfall. Diem's policies toward the villages -- traditionally the backbone of Vietnamese society -- demonstrated a singular lack of concern and near-callous irresponsibility." *Ibid.*, 64-65.
  - lxv. William Colby, "William E. Colby Oral History, Interview I." Recorded interview by Ted Gittinger, June 2, 1981, 13-14, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Oral History Program, University of Texas at Austin.
  - lxvi. "One of the actualities was the development of the trans-Bassac region, the land between the Bassac branch of the Mekong River and the Gulf of Thailand. The first phase called for settling over a hundred thousand people in new model farm communities in the Cai Sab area and draining the low-lying land by constructing 125 miles of navigable canals. Model villages and canals were constructed mostly by hand labor....The settlements were planned to sandwich a community of refugees from the North between similar communities of farmers from the South, alternating northerners and southerners throughout the region in a cultural melting pot that hopefully would give each equal opportunity."
  - lxvii. Diem also was full of enthusiasm for new crops. Under his guidance, floating rice was grown in huge experimental plots along the Vaico River where seasonal flooding turned the low-lands into vast bogs, and communities of northern refugees located in foothills of the Vietnam cordillera were urged to grow kenaf, whose fiber could be woven into bags for sugar....Wolf Ladejinsky, the American land reform expert, had left his position with the U.S. government at the time, and Diem immediately employed him. The two men became close friends in 1956, and Ladejinsky was given a house next to the presidential palace and joined Diem at breakfast nearly every morning. Thus Diem's daily routine began with these breakfast sessions, discussing the

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implementation of the land reform measures drafted by Ladejinsky and issued as decrees by Diem, as well as the myriad problems of the whole range of agricultural projects afoot. Both men shared the dream of making an Eden of Vietnam, with bounty for all its inhabitants and with ample foods for other nations in the Pacific basin." Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 354–356.

lxviii. Bernard B. Fall, *Last Reflections On A War: Bernard B. Fall's Last Comments on Vietnam*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1967), 198–199.

lxix. "Unfortunately, Lansdale and the Americans did not prevent their new protégé from committing a massive and egregious error in 1956, when he prohibited the traditional and deeply cherished village elections and instead appointed as village chiefs fellow Catholic refugees from the North. This was a blunder which even the French and the Japanese had not committed during their terms as occupiers of Vietnam. It was a cause of massive discontent among the rural population of South Vietnam." Larry E. Cable, *Conflict of Myths: The Development of American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and the Vietnam War*, (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 185.

lxx. Fall, *Last Reflections On A War*, 198–199.

lxxi. Lansdale, *In The Midst of Wars*, 346.

lxxii. *Ibid.*, 345.

lxxiii. See Fall, *Last Reflections On A War*, 198.

lxxiv. Robert Thompson, however, did not ignore what Diem said or did in this context, and he supported the Vietnamese President in his attempts to purge Communist control from the villages. Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 78–79.

lxxv. Colby, *Honorable Men*, 159–160.

lxxvi. These debates, concerned with which force was best suited to counter-insurgency warfare, are addressed later in this work.

lxxvii. *Ibid.*, 159–160.

lxxviii. *Ibid.*

lxxix. *Ibid.*, 161–170.

lxxx. *Ibid.*

lxxxi. Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 51.

lxxxii. Colby, *Honorable Men*, 161–170.

lxxxiii. Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*, 68.

