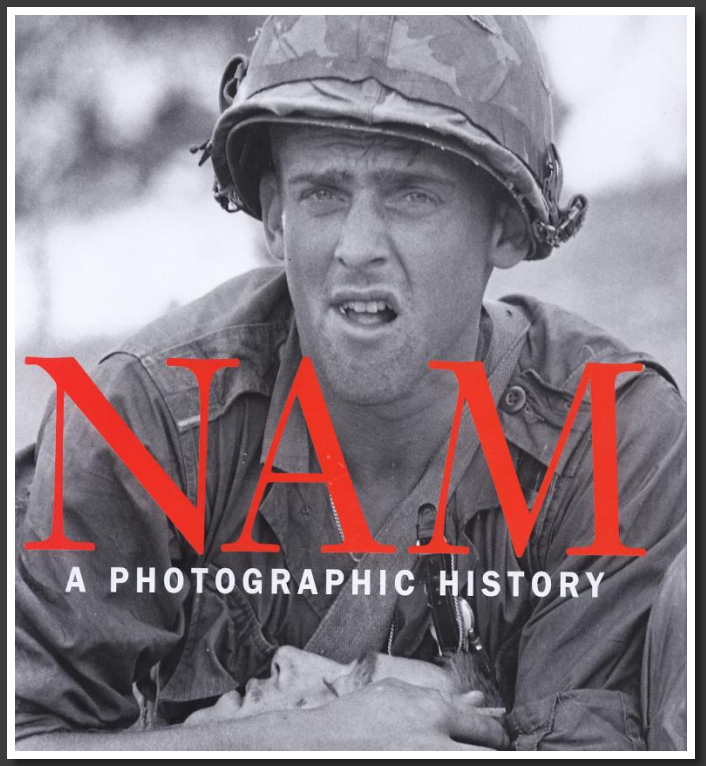

VIETNAM: WAR AND PEACE

America's Most Controversial Conflict
Unit III: North versus South: 1956-1963

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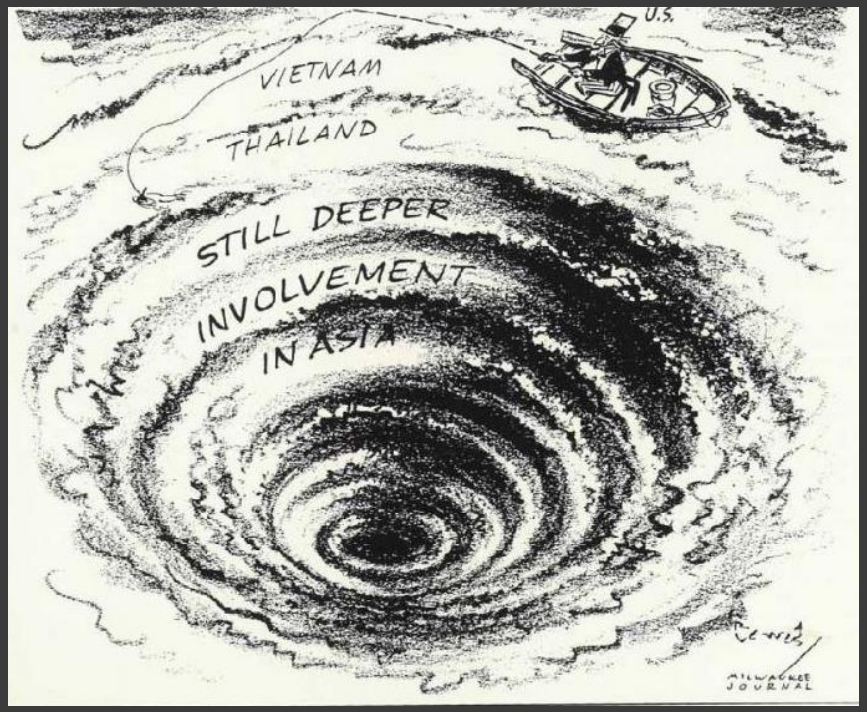

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

In what ways did the United States gradually increase its commitment to wage war in Vietnam?

The Vietnam War began as an native independence war of the *Vietminh* against French colonial rule.

The United States funded the failed French effort to keep control of Vietnam. When the French left, the U.S. took over.

Cold War geopolitics gave SE Asia strategic significance in the minds of American policy-makers.

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The Geneva Conference 1954

U.S. President Eisenhower claims progress at Geneva, but covertly supports South Vietnam.

France and China representatives celebrate agreement.

North Vietnam representative signs agreement

Officially: split Vietnam at the 17th parallel, giving Ho Chi Minh official authority in the north, and Ngo Dinh Diem control of the south.

Established a cease fire.

Agreed: Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia would be free of foreign interference.

Understood: Elections to reunify Vietnam to be held in 1956.

Neither South Vietnam nor the United States signed the agreement.

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Following the model of the Korean War, the U.S. divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel in 1954.

Pro-communist North led by Ho Chi Minh.

Pro-democracy South led by several puppet leaders funded by the United States.

The U.S. promised to support free and fair elections to unify Vietnam in 1956, but when it became obvious that Ho Chi Minh would win, the U.S. decided not to hold the elections.

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ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

Why did the United States support South Vietnam's refusal to hold nationwide elections in 1956?

"The loss of South Vietnam would set in motion a crumbling process that could, as it progressed, have grave consequences for us and for freedom."—Eisenhower, 1955

It was obvious that Ho Chi Minh would win the national vote in 1956. Therefore, the western powers didn't bother holding an election.

South Vietnam's leader Ngo Dinh Diem was well aware that his national popularity was no match to the North Vietnam leader, Ho Chi Minh.

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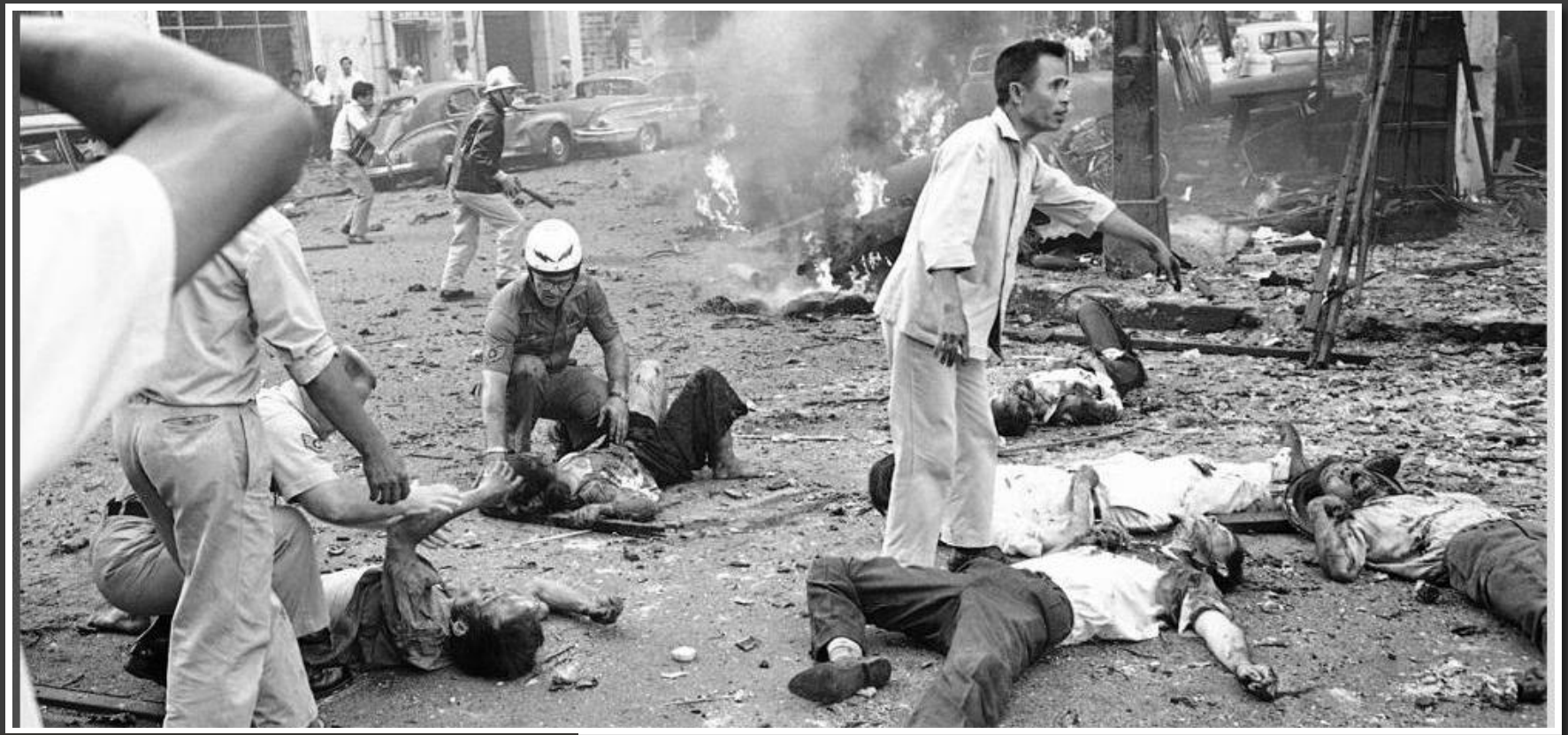

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

How did North Vietnam respond to the false promise of free elections?

In 1960, The ***Vietminh*** re-branded themselves as the *National Liberation Front (NLF).* The communist opposition, leadership and their southern supporters organized for war against Diem and the United States.

They used terror tactics in the cities against symbolic western targets.

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The NLF:

- Influenced by communist ideology, but not exclusive to non-communists
- Encouraged non-communists to join so long as they opposed Diem and wanted to reunify Vietnam
- Maintained a guerrilla army of recruits with mixed-gender units
- Approved the use of revolutionary violence
- Dubbed *"Vietcong"* by the U.S, a derogatory term mixing the words Vietnam Communist
- Used the peasantry as resource bases under cover of darkness.

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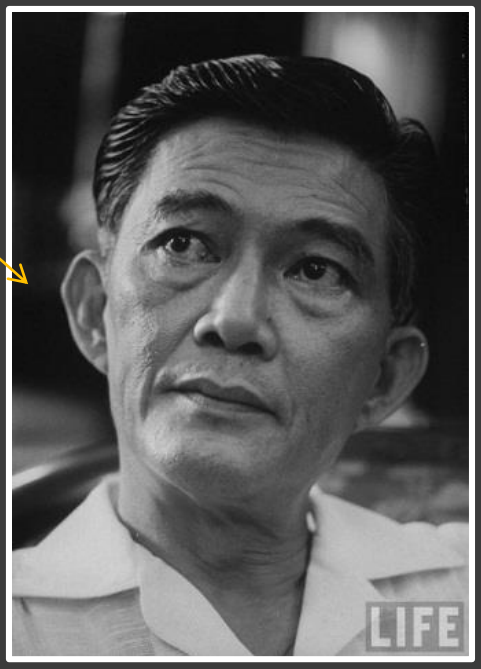
Ngo Dinh Diem knew his support was thin. Paranoid of losing power, Diem ruled with increased militarism, brutality and suppression of dissent.

He appointed his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu as Head of Secret Police.



The Diem brothers enforced Law 10/59: Repressive acts which made it legal to hold suspected communists in jail without formal charges.

Nhu and Diem often targeted Buddhist monasteries, claiming that the monks were hiding Vietcong soldiers.

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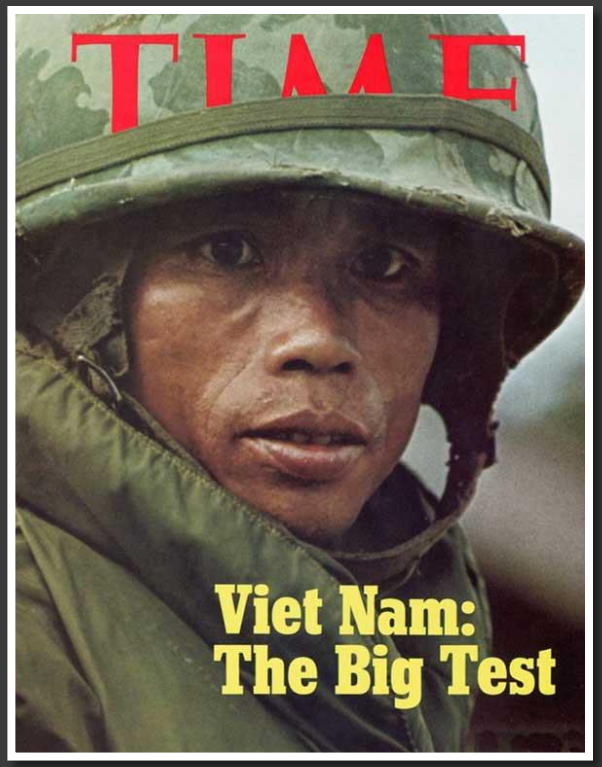
CIA covert operations and Diem's brutality encouraged NLF aggression against South Vietnam.



The United States responded to the NLF attacks and Diem's instability by increasing supplies, funds and military training to the South Vietnamese ARVN

Army Republic of Vietnam.

ARVN's dedication to the fight was sometimes questioned by the U.S.

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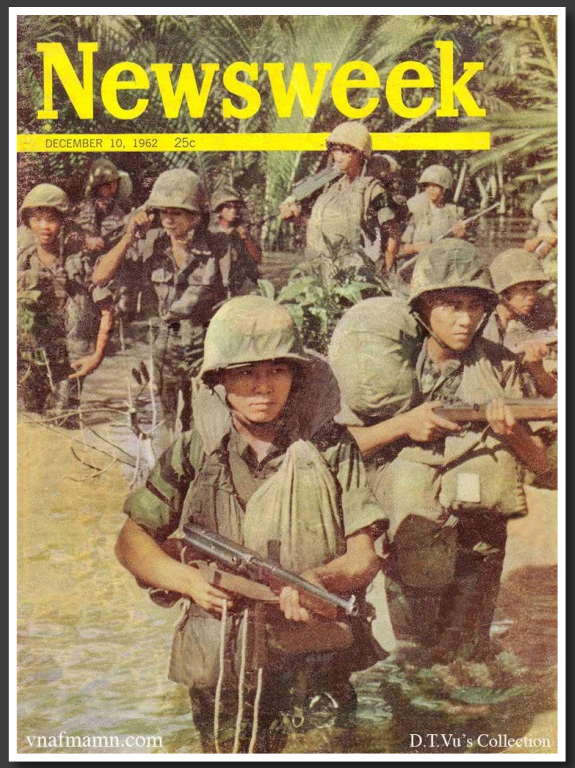
The United States was hopeful that with ample funding and support, ARVN and Diem could defeat the NLF.



An ARVN Ranger tenders a civilian wounded by Viet Cong attack in Tet Offensive 1968.

But the NLF – widely known as the *Vietcong* – were gaining territory and quiet popular support.

"Farmer by day, soldier by night" – neither the ARVN nor the U.S. could tell the difference between a peasant family and a Vietcong sympathizer.

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ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

How did the NLF / Vietcong soldiers mobilize the support of the peasantry?

By 1961, it was evident that the inept Diem regime was losing to the NLF.

The Vietcong were adept at moving supplies through Laos and Cambodia, a network that became known as the

Ho Chi Minh Trail

The NLF appealed to rice-paddy farmers' sense of nationalism, while also threatening violence if they didn't cooperate.

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ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

How did the Ho Chi Minh trail involve Laos and Cambodia in the Vietnam War?

The Ho Chi Minh Trail proved essential to the NLF success. Both Laos and Cambodia turned a blind-eye to the presence of Vietcong movement of troops and supplies through their jungles

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Aware of the Vietcong strategy, the CIA began training an insurgent army in the northern highlands of Vietnam: (CIDG)

Civilian Irregular Defense Groups

The *Montagnards* were trained to defend villages, intercept NLF supply lines and conduct warfare.

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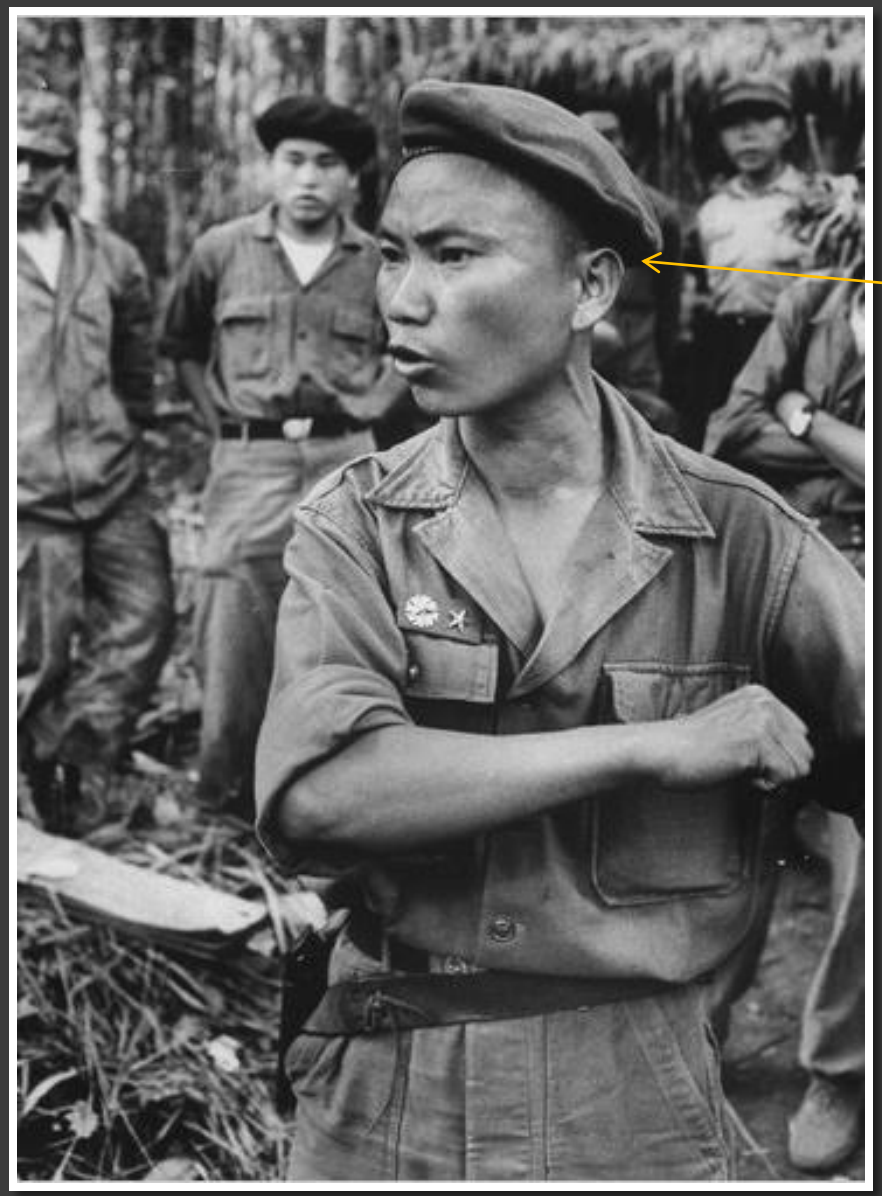

The U.S. also funded covert training of an anti-communist *Hmong* army in Laos.

Led by *Vang Pao*, the General of the Secret Army, the U.S. supplied Hmong soldiers with weapons and training to fight the *Pathet Laos* communists and the NLF on the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Eisenhower had committed millions of dollars to the Laos effort. He warned JFK before his inauguration that the program was on the brink of failure.

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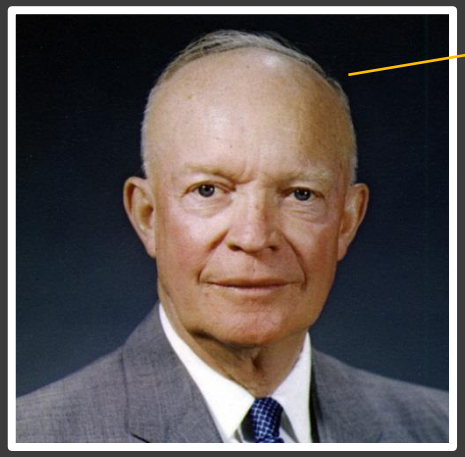
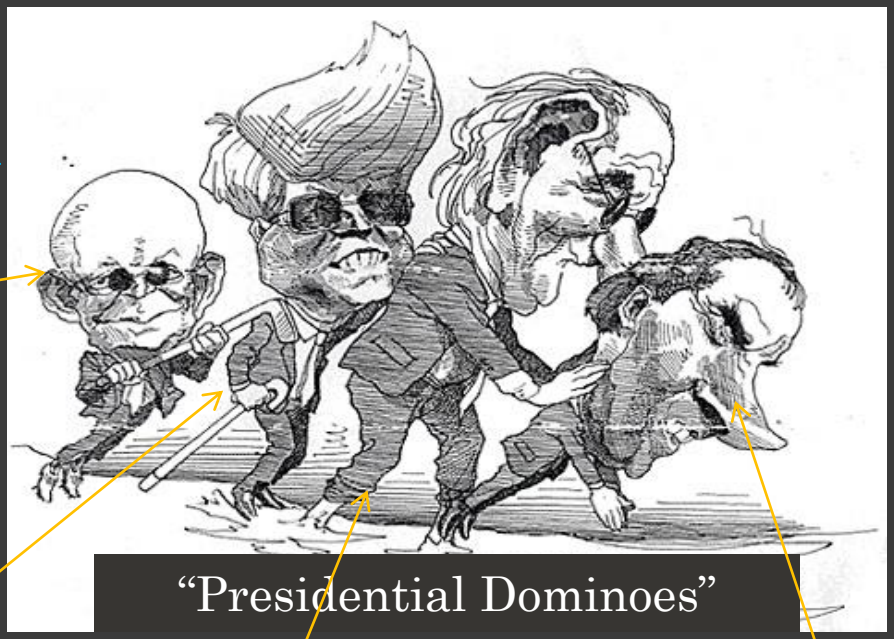
ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

How did U.S. policy towards Vietnam shift with changes in presidential administrations?



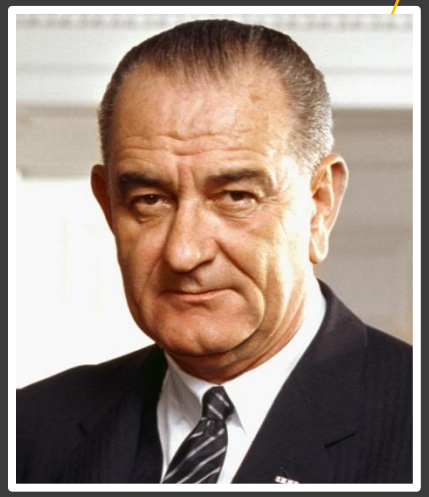
1954 Eisenhower favored covert operations



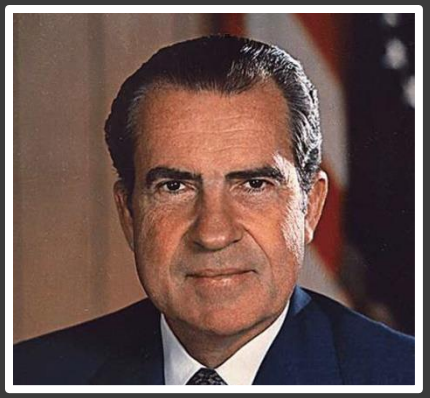
"Presidential Dominoes"

1961 JFK used overt ops with increased U.S. "advisors"

1965 Johnson deployed first ground troops



1969 Nixon reduced ground forces and expanded bombing to Cambodia + Laos



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John F. Kennedy was elected President in 1960 and inherited Eisenhower's Cold War foreign-policy challenges around the globe:

- Bay of Pigs, Cuba
- Berlin Wall
- Laos
- Vietnam

"The problems of the world cannot possibly be solved by skeptics or cynics whose horizons are limited by the obvious realities. We need men who can dream of things that never were."

– President John F. Kennedy

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JFK and *Nikita Khrushchev* of the USSR were opposing leaders in the *Cold War*.

In the rigid, anti-communist fever of domestic U.S. politics, JFK had to be tough against the Soviets, but also *pragmatic* about diplomatic alternatives to war.

"Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate."

--JFK 1961

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One of the youngest American Presidents in history, JFK faced pressure to prove himself.

Policy-makers were labeled either *"doves" or "hawks"* regarding their level of aggression in foreign affairs.

JFK's brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy

Vice President
Lyndon Baines Johnson

Chief of Staff
Chairman,
Gen. Maxwell Taylor

Secretary of Defense:
Robert S. McNamara

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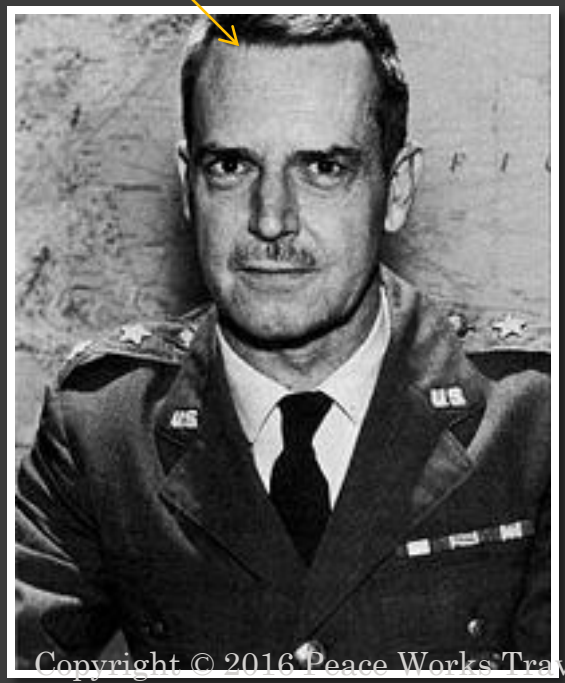
JFK's advisors were not unified on a course of action in Vietnam. Still, the *"December 1961 White Paper"* recommended escalating violence.

Dean Rusk, Sec of State, had strong doubts about U.S. role in Vietnam.

George Ball, Under Secretary of State: opposed escalation and Diem.

General Lansdale and McGeorge Bundy, national security advisor, supported escalation and Diem.



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Reluctant to put U.S. troops on the ground in Vietnam, JFK adopted a *hybrid plan* of covert tactics and expert assistance.

He deployed16,000 U.S. military "advisors" Special Forces and CIA to:

- Train ARVN in counter-insurgency warfare
- Harass the enemy supply lines through Laos and Cambodia
- Conduct targeted assassinations of Vietcong

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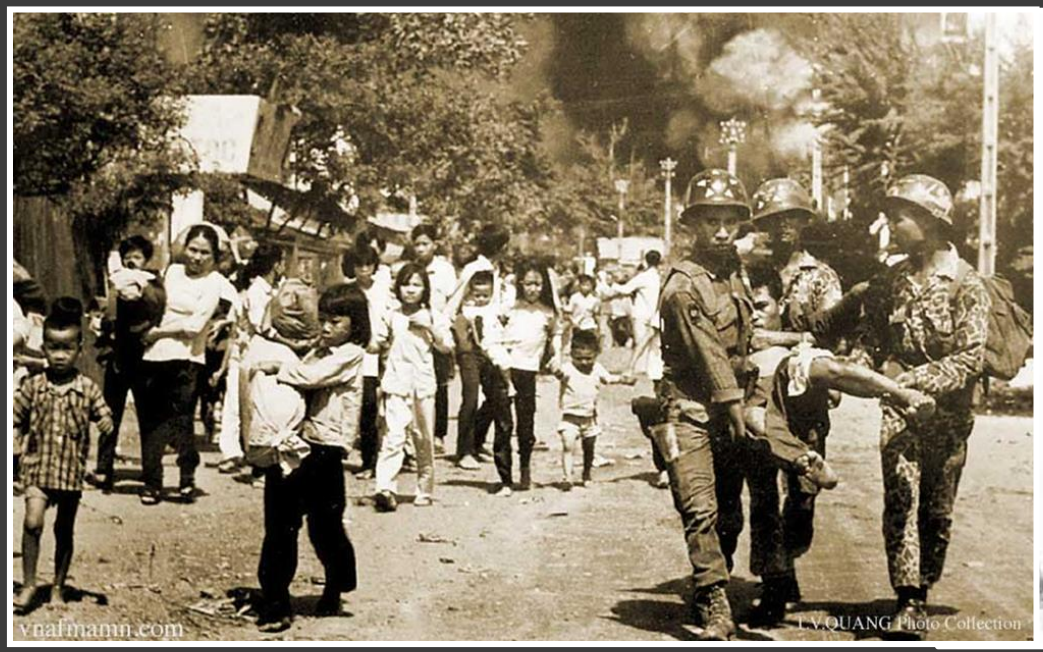
ARVN conducted a "Hearts and Minds" campaign to win the loyalty and cooperation of the peasantry. Specific actions included:

- Helping civilians wounded by Vietcong attacks
- Public works projects such as flood management
- Distributing food subsidies to the public
- Strategic Hamlets Program



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Strategic Hamlets 1962:

Man-made fortified villages designed to separate the peasants from the South Vietnamese *insurgents* and Vietcong soldiers traveling under cover of darkness from north to south.

The goal of the *strategic hamlet* program was to consolidate governmental authority in *pacified* areas and weed out local conspirators vital to the Vietcong efforts.

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ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

Why were the Strategic Hamlets considered a failure?

- Forced removal of the people from their ancestral lands and family graves
- People resented living behind barbed wire in “refugee” status
- Poorly-guarded Hamlets were infiltrated by Vietcong
- Hasty execution of Hamlets were supposed to prove S. Vietnamese military success to U.S and thereby maintain a robust funding flow
- Living conditions actually encouraged South Vietnamese youth to join the NLF and Vietcong (as pictured in a parade above).

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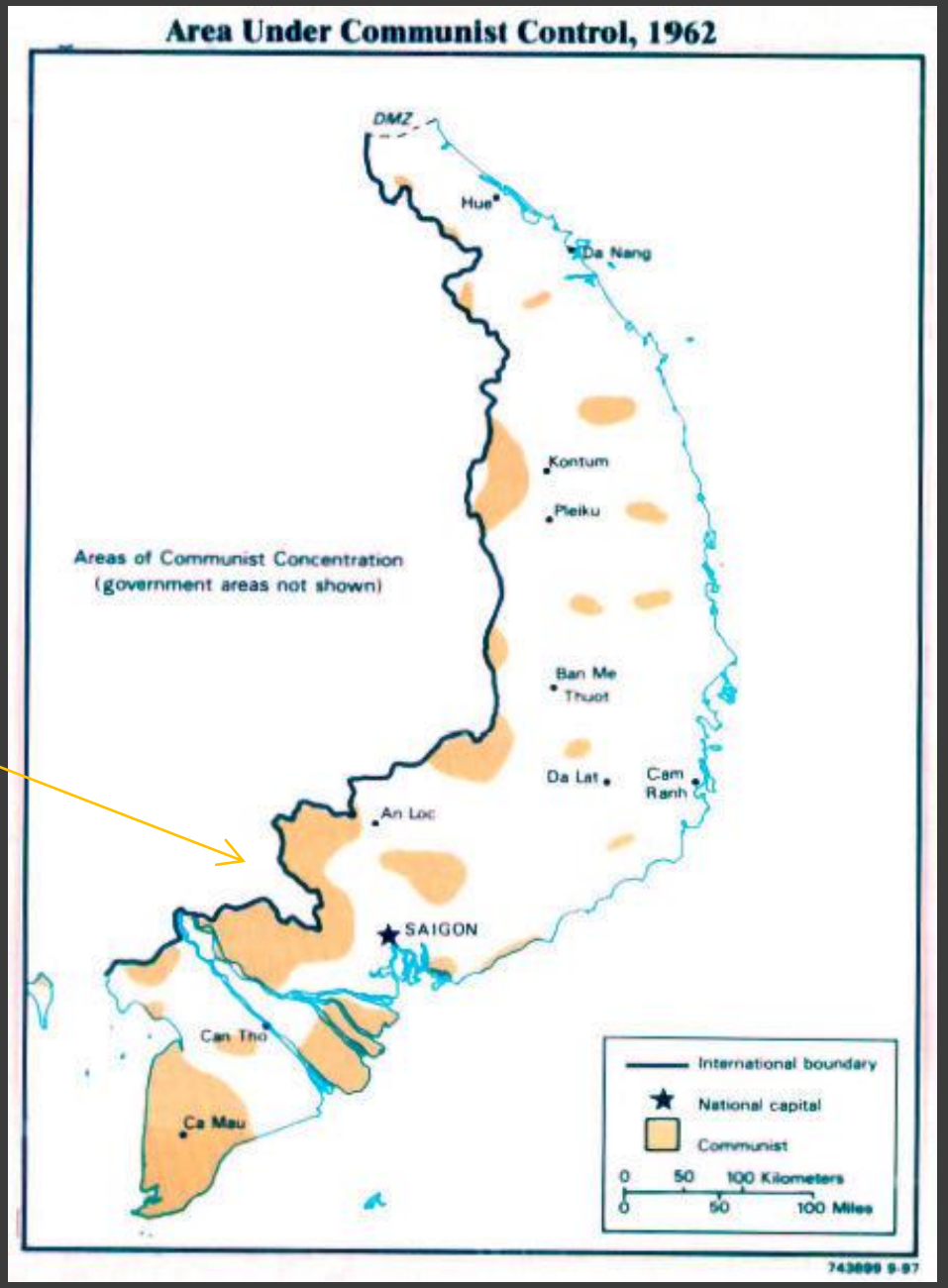
ESSENTIAL QUESTION:
In what ways were the Vietcong "winning" the war?

U.S. weaponry did not compensate for ARVNs poor leadership, weak tactics, and inexperience.

ARVN were defeated at the Mekong Delta village of Ap Bac which demonstrated both the Vietcong's skill and ARVN's weakness.

Ap Bac's significance was seen as bigger than just a single battle victory for the Vietcong.

Now victorious against ARVN units of equal strength in near-conventional battles, the Vietcong were moving into a more intense stage of revolutionary war.



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As the Vietcong / NLF gained more territory in the countryside, **Ngo Dinh Diem** and his brother, Head of Secret Police, **Ngo Dinh Nhu** increased cruelty and suppression of *dissent.*

Protests against Diem unified Buddhist monks, nuns, students, business owners and intellectuals.

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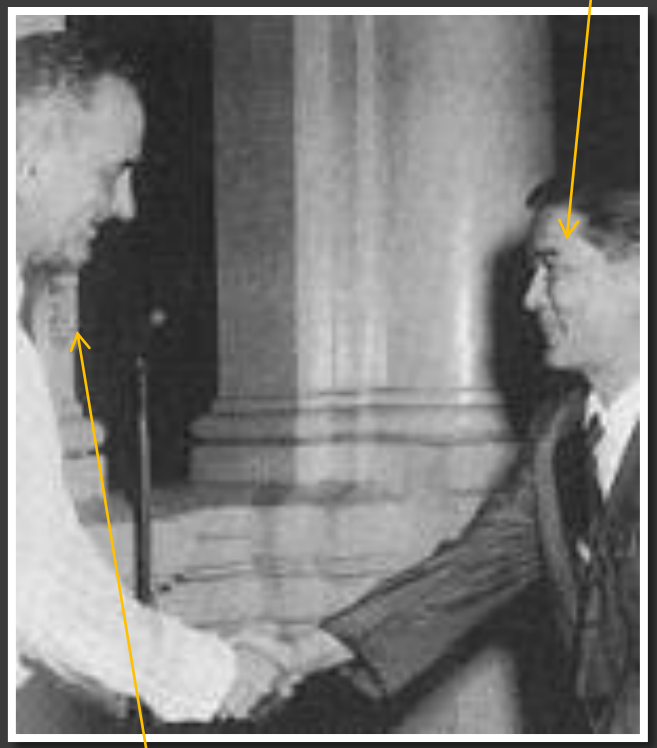
The U.S. urged Diem to behave, but questions persist about Nhu's cruel methods and Diem's inept leadership.



Vice President Johnson publicly calls Diem the "Churchill of Asia" but privately expresses doubts.

Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge warns Diem that the U.S. support for him is "not unlimited."

Sec of Defense Robert McNamara tells Diem that the U.S. is "displeased" with his regime.

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June 11, 1963 the monk **Thích Quảng Đức,** drove to a busy intersection in Saigon, and self-immolated in protest to the Ngo Dinh Diem regime.

The photograph, broadcast on front pages of international newspapers, created public outcry against the U.S. role in the Vietnam War.

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ESSENTIAL QUESTION:
In what ways did the Buddhist self-immolation impact U.S. policy towards Vietnam?

The photograph empowered North Vietnam to use international media and generate sympathy for their cause. It brought public focus on the puppet government the U.S. had claimed was "winning the war against communism in SE Asia"

Madame Nhu, the "first lady" and wife of Security Chief Ngo Dinh Nhu makes a bad situation worse, calling the protest a "Buddhist Barbeque" on live television:

"Let them all burn and we shall clap our hands!"

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After another raid on Buddhists in August 1963, the momentum of internal opposition includes plans for a *coup d' etat* against Diem.

Telegram known as Cable 243 sent to Ambassador Lodge in Vietnam says:

- The U.S would no longer tolerate Nhu in a position of power
- Lodge is authorized to order Diem to remove his brother Nhu
- If Diem refuses, the U.S. would seek "alternative leadership" in South Vietnam
- Lodge is authorized to empower ARVN officers to launch a coup against Diem, if he refuses to comply.

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In September 1963, JFK sends Robert McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor to Saigon on a 10 day trip to formally assess the situation in South Vietnam and warn Diem of U.S. concerns.

They report conflicting information to JFK

Diem says: "Vietnam will be a model democracy" in a few years. He had already ruled South Vietnam for a decade.

Credible reports from Vietnamese civilians, professors and military leaders gave evidence of torture, corruption, police brutality and chaos.

McGeorge Bundy says: "We were left with a lasting skepticism of the ability of any man, however honest, to interpret accurately what was going on."

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November 1, 1963:

U.S. officials are aware that a coup against Diem and Nhu is imminent. They give *tacit* approval and try to distance themselves from the event.

Ambassador Lodge tries to offer Diem safe exit from Vietnam: Diem refuses.

General Minh is responsible for the coup and deaths of Diem and Nhu.

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Three weeks after the Diem murders, President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:

What would JFK have done in Vietnam if he had lived?

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Historians interested in the question of Vietnam's alternative fate have looked for evidence of JFK's intent in correspondence, public statements and internal memos.

Two months before he was killed, JFK told CBS anchor Walter Cronkite:

"I don't think that unless a greater effort is made by the [S. Vietnamese] Government to win popular support that the war can be won out there. In the final analysis, it is their war. They are the ones who have to win it or lose it. We can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it—the people of Viet-Nam—against the Communists."

---President Kennedy, Sept 2, 1963

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Lyndon Baines Johnson is sworn in as Kennedy's successor, November 22, 1963

Within a year, the Johnson administration significantly expands the U.S. commitment to fighting the independence movement in Vietnam.

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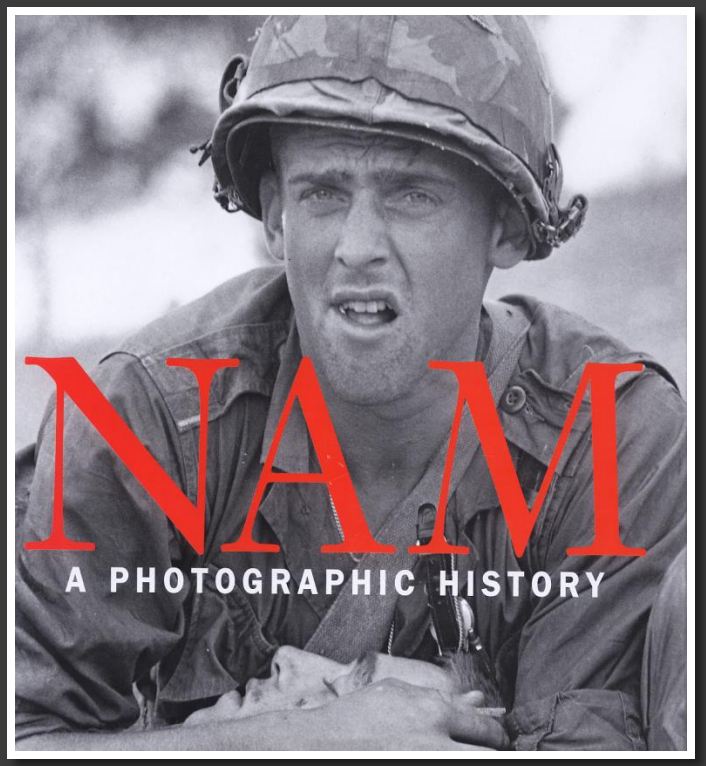

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